GOD'S UNIQUE PRIEST (*NYAMESOFOPREKO*):
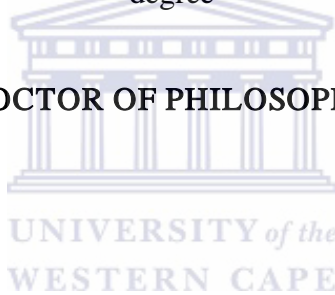
CHRISTOLOGY IN THE AKAN CONTEXT

By

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This study entails a constructive contribution towards a contemporary reinterpretation, within the Akan context, of the classic Christian notion of Christ's person and work as Mediator between God and humanity. Specifically, I endeavour to reinterpret aspects of the Christian confession of faith as formulated by the Council of Chalcedon (451) that, Jesus Christ is "truly God" (*vere Deus*) as well as "truly human" (*vere homo*). I build on the notion that the relationship between these two claims may also be understood in terms of the one "person" and the two "natures" of Jesus Christ. The work of Christ is reinterpreted from this perspective.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part, which covers the first four chapters, entail reviews of some of the dominant African Christologies – with particular reference to divine conqueror and ancestor Christologies. In these chapters, the adequacy of the mentioned Christologies is assessed with reference to the Nicene/Chalcedonian confessional definition concerning the person of Christ. The conclusion reached is that these Christologies do not adequately express the person of Christ as truly divine as well as truly human as defined by the first four ecumenical councils. As a result, these Christologies also express the work of Christ, particularly his atonement in a less adequate way.

In critical dialogue with the two Christological models mentioned above, the second part of the thesis (chapters 5-7), articulates, tests and develops a constructive proposal, for a Christology within the Akan context, based on the concept of "God's unique priest" (*Nyamesofopreko*). The research problem which is investigated in this research is formulated as follows:

> Can a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology overcome the weaknesses of ancestral Christology and divine spirit Christology in re-appropriating, within a contemporary Akan context, the classic Christian affirmation that the person and work of Jesus Christ may be understood in terms of acting as unique Mediator between God and humanity?

The following approach was employed to investigate the adequacy of a *Nyamesofopreko*

Christology:

In this Christology the following three themes were developed: a) the need for a mediator between God and humanity, b) the person of Christ as Mediator between God and humanity and c) mediation as the work of Christ. In the case of each of these three themes: a) the core tenets of the Christian faith were described briefly. b) This theme was then related to similar aspects of the traditional Akan culture, worldview and belief system. c) On this basis a constructive reinterpretation of such themes within the Akan context is offered. The strengths and weaknesses of such a reinterpretation were assessed based on of the criteria used to critique the divine conqueror Christology and ancestor Christology.

Before introducing the concept of "*okra*" and *afomusuyideɛ,* an exposition of the term *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique Priest) as a Christological designation was offered to articulate the need for a mediator between God and humankind. This is patterned along other Christological designations such as "Messiah", "Son of Man", and "Son of God". On the basis of the traditional Akan myth of *Onyame*'s self-withdrawal and the absence of a priesthood for *Onyame*, the observation was offered that, in traditional Akan religion and culture, no suitable mediator has been identified that could restore the relationship between *Onyame* and humanity.

This observation is followed by a constructive proposal on the need for such a mediator. The proposal is that the term *Nyamesofopreko* may be employed to portray Jesus Christ as God's unique priest, i.e. as One who, for the first time, could fulfill this mediating role since he is professed to be a person without sin. As God's unique priest, Jesus mediates between God and humankind following the alienation between God and humankind (interpreted in the traditional Akan context in terms of the myth of God's withdrawal).

The core of the proposal embedded in this thesis is summed up with the Akan concept of *okra.* This concept is loosely translated in English as "soul" but could be better rendered as *Logos* as its dynamic equivalent. This is a concept that implies the quality of a co-presence of time and eternity. Jesus' divinity is thus proposed on the basis of the notion of the *Okra* of *Onyame.* His humanity is described in terms of the *Okra* of *Onyame* becoming *teasefo* (human). His two natures in one person are conceptualised as

Nyamekrateasefo (*Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate).

The work of Christ is also conceptualised as *afomusuyideε.* The term is coined from the two Akan terms *afodeε* (sin sacrifice) and *musuyideε* (curse bearer) to express the Christian notion of the death of Jesus as a sin sacrifice as well as "scapegoat". My main contention is that the death of Jesus as a sacrifice may be interpreted closer as One who publicly "acknowledged" the sin of humankind" before God as a representative.

In the final step, the wider ecumenical significance of such a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology within the African context and for Christianity elsewhere in the world is briefly explored.

To sum up the proposal of this thesis: The person of Jesus is presented as being God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko*); he is the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. The purpose of this incarnation is that the *Okra* of *Onyame* through the person of God's unique priest becomes the *Afomusuyideε* (sin sacrifice and curse bearer) for humankind. This proposal rests on the foundation of faith in the triune God. This was conceptualised as *Nyamebaasafua,* that is, *Onyame Ntoro* (God the Father) *Onyame Okra* (God the Son) and *Onyame Sunsum Kronkron* (God the Holy Spirit).
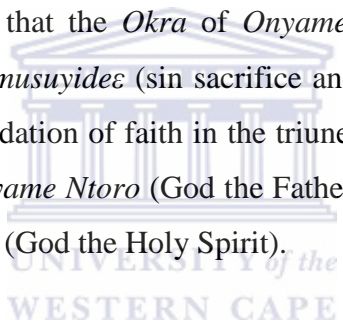
DECLARATION

I declare that **God's Unique Priest (*Nyamesofopreko*): Christology in the Akan context** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledge by complete references.

Full name: ROBERT OWUSU AGYARKO   Date:

Signed

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Acknowledgement

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study entails a constructive contribution towards a contemporary reinterpretation of the classic Christian notion of Christ's person and work as Mediator between God and humanity within the Akan context. I have offered a critique of two alternative forms of Christology which are dominant in the Akan context, namely a popular Christology in which Christ is portrayed as the "Divine conqueror of the African spirit world" and an elitist Christology in which Christ is portrayed as the "great ancestor". In this study I have proposed a Christology based on the concept of "God's unique priest" (*Nyamesofopreko)* in which the following three themes have been developed: a) the need for a mediator between God and humanity (given the reality of sin), b) the person of Jesus Christ as Mediator between God and humanity and c) mediation as the work of Christ. In each case the core tenets of the Christian faith are related to themes and myths in the traditional Akan culture, worldview and belief system in an attempt to offer a constructive reinterpretation of such themes.

1.2 Context and relevance of the study

1.2.1 Christianity in the context of Ghana

The context within which this study in Christology is situated is that of the introduction and growth of Christianity amongst the Akan people in Ghana and the ways in which it engaged with African traditional religion.[1] The Akan people live predominantly in the countries of Ghana and the lvory Coast. In Ghana they inhabit the southern and central half of this country. The Akan consist of several subgroups of which the Ashanti are numerically dominant. The Akan have a common socio-economic and cultural system and speak a common language. The Akan people represent over 53% of the current population of twenty million in Ghana.[2]

The first church in West Africa was planted in Ghana by the Western missionaries (Roman

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[1] See Williamson (1959) and Ellis (1887).

[2] For detailed discussions of Akan traditional culture see Busia (1951), Rattray (1956, 1959)), Opoku (1975) and Sarpong (1974). Also see Sarpong (1971, 1980, 1998), Gyekye (1998), Amponsah (1975), Amoah (1998) Nketia (1963), Anti (1978) and Parrinder (1961, 1969, 1970).

Catholics) around 1482. The Christianity transplanted in Ghana was in the form of a sterilised European institution, safely quarantined in "hygienic" enclaves along the coast (Sanneh 1983:20). From there the church in Ghana occasionally started to reach out to the indigenous population. As sections of the Akan population lived in the coastal region of Ghana, from early on they came into contact with Christianity.[3]

The early missionary activities remained restricted. From 1820 a new wave of Protestant missionaries led to the growth of Christianity amongst the Akan. The Basel Missions Society began its work in 1828. After a brief stay in Accra, they moved to the Akwapim area to work among the Akan groups. In 1835 the Wesleyan Methodist society (WMS) also started their activities in Ghana. The Methodist missions began their activities among the Akan (Fantes) in the coastal areas and later extended their work to other parts of Ghana (Clarke 1986:41-42, Sanneh 1983:119-126). Currently, up to 70% of the people of Ghana are considered to be Christians, including 56% Protestants and 14% Catholics.[4]

The phenomenal growth of the protestant missionary activities was at least partially the result of a general dissatisfaction amongst the Akan with the operations and perceived ineffectiveness of the *abosom* (lesser divinities) as compared to the effectiveness of Western forms of technology. The Akan people shifted their allegiance from the lesser divinities to the message of Christianity since they recognised the powerful potential of allegiance to Jesus Christ (who is portrayed as a miracle worker and Lord over all spirit powers). The missionaries did not fully comprehend the shift of power allegiance taking place. Nevertheless, since the missionaries heavily depended on African agents, the messages preached were either directed or interpreted to fit in the power encounter between the African traditional religion and Christianity.[5]

As Lamin Sanneh (1983) rightly asserts, the use of African local agents in the work of Western missions was indispensable. This was probably the major factor behind the growth of Christianity in West Africa during this period. Sanneh notes that the successful establishment of Christianity in Sierra Leone, against the background of centuries of failure, acted as a powerful stimulus for the extension of Christianity to other parts of Africa, particularly Ghana. The lesson from this period seems to be that there is no substitute for partnership with Africans in missionary work (also see Grau 1968:61).

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[3] See the following publications for more detailed work on early Christianity in Ghana: Bartels (1965), Sanneh (1983) and Clarke (1986). Also see, Walker (1976), Debrunner (1967), Jenkins (1905) and Southon (1935).

[4] See the Ghana Demographic Survey of 2004.

[5] Also see Anyanwu (1985) and Okorocha (1987).

Behind the role of local agents was the use of the mother tongue in which the Christian message was translated within the worldview of the Akan people. Such local agents received very limited theological training (which would have been within a Western orientation). Therefore they communicated the Christian message in a simplified form and in the conceptual framework provided by their own culture and worldview.

The role of African agents and the use of the mother tongue are significant for a reflection on the status of African religions in Christianity. Those who adapted and promoted the Christian faith in Akan communities themselves remained very close to sources of traditional religious vitality – even though they occasionally had to condemn traditional practices in order to please Western missionaries. Thus the spread of Christianity took place along familiar religious channels, in the process acquiring a strong dose of traditional religious resources. This quarantined Christianity of Western missionaries subsequently tried to filter out (Sanneh 1983:20).

By bringing the Christian gospel into Africa, the missionaries assumed that they were introducing a new concept to the Akan. However, for the African agents, the God which the missionaries proclaimed was simply identified with the Supreme Being traditionally known amongst the Akan.[6]
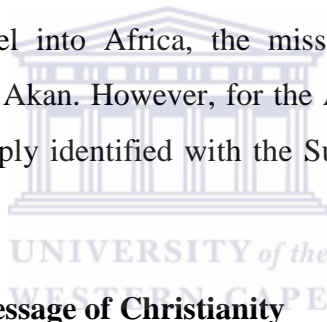
1.2.2 Jesus Christ as the core message of Christianity

The message of the Christian gospel brought by the missionaries to Ghana included several aspects which were easily recognised and assimilated within the traditional culture and worldview of the Akan. This entails the notions of the Supreme Being, the creation of the world and humanity, the alienation between humanity and the Supreme Being and the need for sacrifices to restore the relationship between the Supreme Being and human beings.[7]

However, the figure of Jesus Christ, which formed a core component of the gospel the missionaries preached, was not familiar to the traditional Akan. As more or less orthodox[8]

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[6] From the writings of African theologians about the Supreme Being, it is sufficient to conclude that this concept of deity is encountered all over Africa and that there is no debate with regard to the originality of the concept. More importantly, it is also clear that African theologians see the Supreme Being in Africa as none other than the God proclaimed by Christianity. See Adubofour (1987) and Fulljames (1994).

[7] Sanneh (1983:20) argues that Christianity as a universal religion has the task of introducing certain universal teachings about God which were lacking in traditional religions. However, he contends that missionary Christianity rather presented a universal God to be revered in an exclusive religion.

[8] In this research the term "orthodoxy" is used with reference only to those groups of Christians who seek to adhere to the decisions of the councils of Nicea (325/381) and Chalcedon (451). For the debates on "Orthodoxy" and "heretics", see Dunn (1977). Also see Bauer (1972) and Bultmann (1952).

Christians, the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ amongst the Western missionaries was shaped by the Councils of Nicea (325/381) and of Chalcedon (451). The message that the missionaries proclaimed, portrayed Jesus as a being who is fully human as well as fully divine and it maintained that Jesus died "for us and our salvation".[9]

This message created confusion in the mind of its Akan recipients. The oneness of the Supreme Being is assumed within the Akan worldview, while the concept of divine assembly is foreign to it.[10] It was therefore difficult for the Akan to comprehend that Jesus could be regarded as the Supreme Being or as being one with Supreme Being. From the very beginning this raised questions about the status and the identity of Jesus Christ, especially within the context of Akan Christianity.[11]

In terms of the traditional Akan worldview, it would be possible to attribute divinity to Jesus by regarding him as one of the "lesser divinities" (*abosom*). For the Akan, divinity does not necessarily refer to the Supreme Being only, but could also apply to the lesser divinities. The *abosom* are regarded as creatures of the Supreme Being and are not in any sense in the same class or in competition with this Being.[12] However the missionaries demonised the lesser divinities and maintained the Nicene notion that Jesus is "of one being with the Father". In light of this Akan Christians could not easily accept the notion that the person of Jesus Christ could be categorised amongst the lesser divinities.

This created further confusion in the mind of Christians amongst the Akan. This confusion has led to many (conflicting) interpretations of the significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ, not only in the Ghanaian/Akan context but also in the wider African one. It is therefore not surprising that Christology remains one of the core themes in contemporary African Christian theologies.

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[9] For detailed discussions of the decisions of the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, see Kasper (1976:230-269), Wells (1984:85-125), Stevenson (1966), Peterson (1995) and Grau (1990).

[10] Danquah (1968) in *Akan Doctrine of God* suggests that *Onyankonpon* emerged to be the Supreme Being out of the struggle with other deities. However, such a notion of divine assembly is foreign to the Akan worldview, as Ryan (1980) rightly argued.

[11] See the following publications for detailed work on the Akan concept of Supreme Being, the lesser divinities, ancestors and other spirit beings: Rattray (1956, 1959), Sawyerr (1986), Opoku, (1975), Sarpong (1974, 2001).

[12] See in this regard Sarpong (2002:96-97).

1.3 Demarcation: Various perspectives on Christology

1.3.1 The person and work of Christ: Christ as Mediator

In Christological discourse it has been customary to focus on two main themes, namely the person and the work of Christ. These themes are, of course, closely related.

Discourse on the person of Christ follows from the titles attributed to Jesus Christ in the biblical texts (*Messiah,*[13] *Kurios,*[14] *Son of Man,*[15] *Son of God,*[16] etc). The early history of Christianity was characterised by fierce disputes on the person of Christ. The affirmation of the ecumenical Council of Nicea (325) was that Jesus Christ is both "fully human" and "fully divine". This had countered a number of "heresies" in which either the divinity of Jesus (see *subordianism, Arianism*)[17] or the humanity of Christ (see *docetism*[18]/*Ebionism*[19]) was under-played or denied. This affirmation became highly influential in the subsequent Christian tradition but begged further questions about the relationship between the humanity and the divinity of Christ. This was addressed at the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) which produced the formula that Christ has one "person" but two natures.[20] This formula did not prevent further Christological disputes which followed from the terminology employed, as well as the relationship between the two "natures" of Jesus Christ which could either fuse the two natures (see *monophysitism*)[21] or undermine the one or the other (see *Apollinarianism*)[22]

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[13] On "Messiah" or "Christ", see Klauser (1980), Marshall (1976:85-96), Martin (1964), Moule (1977:31-35), Cullmann (1963:111-136), Grundmann (493-580), Fuller (1979) Klein (1978) and Pannenberg (1977).

[14] On "Kurios" or "Lord" see Well (1984:74-77), Sarbourin (1984:19-20), Marshall (1976 97-110), Moule (1977:35-46), Cullmann (1963:195-236), and Pannenberg (1977: 365-397).

[15] On "Son of man" see Kasper (1976:197-229), Wells (1984:77-81), Moule (1977:10-22), Cullmann (1955:137-193), Marshall (1976:63-82), Pannenberg (1977) and Dunn (1980:65-97).

[16] On "Son of God" see Hengel (1975), Kasper (1976:163-196), O'Collins (1983:170-200), Marshall (1976) Wells (1984:70-71), Moule (1977:22-31) Cullmann (1955:270-290), Pannenberg (1977:334-337), Dunn (1980:12-64) and Brunner (1942:285-377).

[17] A central concept of Arianism is the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God. Jesus is ultimately regarded as a "lesser divinity". See Erickson (1985:695-702) William (1983) Stead (1978) and Spoerl (1994).

[18] Docetism takes its name from the Greek verb which means "to seem or appear". Its central thesis is that Jesus only *seemed* to be human. God could not really have become material, since all matter is evil, and he is perfectly pure and holy. Like the Ebionites, the docetists had difficulty with the idea of the virgin birth. See Erickson (1985:712). See chapter 6 of this thesis for a detailed explanation.

[19] The Ebionites deny the deity of Jesus. They reject the virgin birth, maintaining that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary in normal fashion. Jesus was, according to the Ebionites, an ordinary man possessing unusual (but not superhuman or supernatural) gifts of righteousness and wisdom. He was the predestined Messiah, although in a rather natural or human sense.

[20] For the discussions of the Chalcedon affirmation of Jesus' two natures, see Erickson (1991, 1997) and Wells (1984). For alternative views, see Cupitt (1979:21-29).

[21] Monophysitism (from the Greek word *monos* meaning "one" and *physis* "nature") maintains the Christological position that Christ has only one fused nature as opposed to the Chalcedonian position which

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or create division within the one "person" of Jesus Christ (see *Nestorianism*).[23]

Historically, it has been customary to categorise the work of Christ in terms of the three "offices" of prophet, priest, and king.[24] Another way of exploring the work of Jesus Christ is to distinguish between the state of his humiliation and of exaltation. Each of these categories of Jesus are related to core Christological symbols. This pertains to the state of humiliation, incarnation,[25] suffering, the cross and descent into hell on the one hand and, on the other hand the state of exaltation, resurrection, ascension, sitting at the right hand of the Father and the expectation of the ("second") coming of Christ (*parousia*).

The work of Jesus Christ is captured in the Nicene Creed with the formula that Christ died "for us and our salvation". The nature of such salvation and the way in which this is established through the incarnation, cross[26] and resurrection[27] of Christ are traditionally discussed within the framework of the doctrine of atonement. The basic meaning of "atonement" (at-one-ment)[28] is to restore the relationship between God and humans. In the history of Christian doctrine a number of influential theories on the doctrine of atonement have emerged. Erickson (1985) identifies the following five theories in this regard: a) the Socinian theory: the atonement as an example of dedicated life, b) the moral influence theory – the atonement as a demonstration of God's love, c) the governmental theory – the atonement as a demonstration of divine justice, d) the ransom theory: the atonement as a

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holds that Christ has two natures, one divine and one human. See Marshall (1982).

[22] Apollinarianism, like docetism, denied the reality of Jesus' humanity. However, Appollinarianism contends that Jesus took on genuine humanity, but not human nature as a whole. Therefore, Jesus although human, was different from other human beings, for he lacked something which all humans have (a human will). The Appollinarian doctrine was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381. For further discussions on this issue, see Wells (1984:105). See chapter 6 of this thesis for a detailed explanation.

[23] Nestorius a patriarch of Constantinople was accused of adoptionism (maintaining the notion that the man Jesus became divine at some point in his life after birth, probably at his baptism). See Wells (1984:106-108), and Erickson (1985:726-727)

[24] While some of the church fathers spoke of the offices of Christ, it was Calvin who gave special attention to this concept. However, some scholars contend that the expression "offices" with reference to Christ's work sounds abstract and theoretical, see Berkouwer (1965:58-59). Berkouwer therefore deems it more appropriate to speak of a "threefold office" and of three aspects of one office. Erickson (1985:763) also refers to the work of Christ as three functions of Christ, namely revealing, ruling and reconciling.

[25] On the theme of incarnation, see Marshall (1982), Barr (1988), Brown (1974) Anderson (1978), Petersen (1995: 109-134) Barrett (1978), Hick (1977) and Goulder (1979).

[26] Throughout the course of Christian history this has been associated above all with the death of Jesus. However, Hooker (1994) contends that the saving work of Christ is just as often associated with his resurrection. Thus one should be wary of restricting New Testament views about the atoning work of Christ to discussions of the meaning of Jesus' death alone.

[27] The resurrection of Jesus is seen as the most decisive point of Christology. See Pannenberg (1977:53-108), also see Jon Sobrino's (1978) review of different interpretations of the resurrection of Jesus.

[28] On atonement see these publications for detailed discussions: Ezech (2003), Brunner (1942) and Erickson (1983).

victory over the forces of sin and evil and e) the satisfaction theory: the atonement as compensation to the Father.[29]

One Christological motif seems to bring discourse on the person and the work of Christ together in one formula. This is the portrayal of Christ as Mediator of the broken covenant between God and humanity. According to this motif, Jesus Christ is a suitable mediator between God and man precisely because he is "truly divine" as well as "truly human". Accordingly, the work of Christ may be understood primarily in terms of mediation or reconciliation[30] (see the discussion on mediation under 1.3.4 below).

In this thesis I have focused on the above mentioned core Christological motif in order to explore a reinterpretation of the person and work of Jesus Christ within the Akan context.

1.3.2 Christology in the African context

John Mbiti (1967) noted in an early article that there are no ideas about Christology in African Christian theology. A few years later, Edward Fashole-Luke also remarked that there were no sign that African theologians were wrestling with Christological ideas (Fashole-Luke 1976:159-176). In 1977, ten years after Mbiti's statement, Kofi Appiah-Kubi of Ghana also observed that very little literature on African Christology was available.[31] However, twenty years after Mbiti's statement, Charles Nyamiti (1989) could report that: "Christology is the subject which has been most developed in today's African theology." There is no doubt that the situation has changed drastically over the last two decades.

The proliferation of contributions on Christology has also led to the emergence of different forms of African Christology. These Christologies correspond to two of the dominant schools of contemporary African Christian theology, namely liberation[32] and inculturation theologies. Inculturation theology is perhaps the most common and extensively developed theological approach in Africa. Most of the current African Christologies belong to this group (Mugambi 1989, 1997, Nyamiti 1991 and Sarpong 2002). In this thesis, while incorporating some aspects of liberation theology, I have largely followed such an inculturation approach to African Christian theology with regard to Christ as Mediator.

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[29] See also the influential analysis by Gustav Aulén (1931).

[30] Emil Brunner (1942) regards mediation as the central doctrine of the Christian faith. For further discussions, see Kasper (1976:230-274), Badcock (1992) and Torrance (1983).

[31] Aylward Shorter in 1982 could still speak of the failure to produce a convincing African Christology.

[32] African feminist Christology falls in this group. See Amoah and Oduyoye (1988:35-46) and Oduyoye (1986). For feminist Christology in general, see Johnson (1990, 1997) and Fiorenza (2000).

A careful examination of the procedures employed in African Christologies reveals two approaches toward the subject. Firstly, there are those who, in constructing an African Christology, start from the biblical witnesses concerning Jesus Christ and then identify those Christological themes which would be relevant within a particular cultural context. Secondly, there are those who take the cultural context as their point of departure for constructing an African Christology (Nyamti 1991).

Several surveys on African Christologies have already been published. It has become a major task to keep track of such new developments. There is also an increase in survey articles on African Christologies; see Nyamiti (1989, 1991:3-23, 1994:62-77) and Stinton (1970). Amongst contemporary African theologians who have engaged in the task of doing Christology from within an African context one may mention the contributions by Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike (1991), A.T. Sanon, Bujo Benezet (1992, 1998) Cece Kolie (1991), Charles Nyamiti (1984, 1996), Douglas W. Waruta (1991), Enyi Ben Udoh (1988), Efoe Julien Penoukou (1982:374-92; 1991), Francios Kabasèlè (1991), John Mbiti (1967), Jesse Mugambi (1998) Jean- March Ela (1986), John M.Waliggo (1991), Zablon Nthamburi (1991) and many others. Within the Ghanaian context, contributions to an African Christology have come from Abraham Akrong (1992:119-26), John Pobee (1979), Kwame Bediako (1990), Kofi Appiah-Kubi (1977:51-65), Peter Kwasi Sarpong (1998) and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1986).

In the African discourse on Christology a number of images and titles for Jesus have emerged. These include, amongst others, descriptions of Jesus Christ as *ancestor* (Akrong 1992, Bediako 1995, Muzorewa 1988, Nyamiti 1984, Pobee 1979, Penoukou 1991, Sarpong 1998),[33] chief (Pobee 1979, Cece Kolie 1991), *divine conqueror* (Appiah-Kubi 1977, Bediako 1995, Mbiti 1973), *elder* (Shorter 1978:65-71), healer (Shorter 1982, Cece Kolie 1984), *master of initiation* (Sanon 1982), *elder brother* (Kabasele 1991), *liberator* (Ela 1986, 1988), *guest* (Udoh 1988) and *priest* (Waruta 1991, Wairimu 1997).

In this thesis the proposals that Jesus Christ may be described as a divine conqueror and, alternatively, as an ancestor, are discussed in more detail. In response to these proposals, I have offered a constructive contribution within the discourse on African Christology. My

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[33]   Sarpong deals specifically with the Christology of the Ashanti (the dominant group of the Akan). This is crucial to this thesis, as I will also interpret my data from the Ashanti perspective (Sarpong 1998: 25-27; 31-33; 43:46; 47:51; 97-102; 141-159). This does not mean that there are any significant differences between the Ashantis and the other Akan groups. Nevertheless, when such contentions arise, my basic perspective is that of the Ashanti, to which I belong.

proposal is that Jesus Christ may be seen to be "God's unique priest" (*Nyamesofopreko)*. This proposal will seek to retain some continuity with the Christian tradition of Christological reflection (with specific reference to the Christological decisions of Nicea and Chalcedon). At the same time, it will seek to be relevant within the Akan context, allowing for a critique and innovation of the Christian faith, but also a challenge to the traditional Akan culture and worldview.

1.3.3 Christology in the Ghanaian context

In light of the above brief survey of developments in the history of Christian doctrine and of contemporary African discourse on Christology, the wider problem which this research will address may be formulated as follows:

> What is the most adequate model for a contemporary re-appropriation, within the Akan context, of the classic Christian affirmation that Jesus Christ is Mediator between God and humanity?

In response to this question, one may identify especially two Christological models which are dominant and influential in contemporary Christian discourse within the Akan context. Firstly, there is a popular form of Christology in which Christ is portrayed as the divine conqueror of the African spirit world. Secondly, there is, especially amongst professional theologians, an elitist form of Christology in which Christ is portrayed as the great ancestor.

a) Jesus as divine conqueror in the African spirit world

According to the Akan worldview, the dominant spirit beings are *Onyame* (the Supreme Being), *abosom* (the lesser divinities) and *nsamanfo* (ancestors). Conceivably, if Jesus is not readily accepted amongst the Akan as *Onyame* (the Supreme Being), it logically follows that the other possibilities are either the status of *obosom*[34] or an ancestor, if one maintains that Jesus is more than a human being. The concepts of Jesus as a lesser divine being who conquers the African spirit world and as the great ancestor, therefore appears to reflect images which end any possibility for an incarnational Christology.

Within the wider African scene, Jesus is seen especially as a divine spirit who reigns supreme

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[34] Technically speaking, Christology pertaining to "divine conqueror in African spirit world" would put Jesus in the category of *abosom* (lesser divinities) where it is assumed that Jesus is the most powerful amongst them, and that he conquered them through his death and resurrection. Otherwise, where would Jesus fit in to be the conqueror of the spirit world? The Ancestral Christology also poses Jesus in the image of the African ancestors.

over every spiritual ruler and authority. This understanding of Christ arises from Africans' keen awareness of spiritual powers which threaten the harmony and the interests of living beings in the world. Jesus is deemed to be victorious over forces in the spiritual realm. This notion responds to the need for a powerful protector against such forces and powers.

This view of Christ suggests a deep appreciation of the traditional African world, which exerts such a powerful influence on the ways in which Africans understand and experience the Christian message. Nevertheless, some African theologians consider this view of Christ as inadequate (Mbiti 1973:397-414, also see Bediako 2000:8).

Especially two weaknesses are related to this form of Christology which one might mention here. Firstly, this view does not account for the humanity of Jesus. Secondly, it does not offer an interpretation of the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus is taken to belong essentially to the more powerful realm of divine beings in the spiritual realm. (See chapter 3 for a detailed analysis on this).

b) Ancestral Christology

Of the various images of Jesus Christ emerging in African Christology, the image of ancestor seems to be dominant. More attention has been given to ancestorhood as a way of "Africanising" Jesus than to almost any other image.[35] The category of ancestor is of particular interest because it focuses not only on one aspect of Jesus' work, but also on the person of Christ. The traditions venerating (or "worshipping") ancestors in Africa are strong and widespread throughout the African continent. However, when the category of "ancestor" is applied to Jesus, it needs to be qualified. Jesus is not just one of our ancestors, but the Ancestor par excellence, humanity's unique ancestor.

African theologians have depicted or qualified Christ's ancestorship in varied ways. For example, for Efoe Penoukou writing within the context of the Ewe-Mina of Togo, Christ is ancestre-joto (source of life). For Benezet Bujo of Congo, Jesus Christ is the proto-ancestor. Charles Nyamti, of Tanzania, has written more than most on the topic of Christ as ancestor. For him Jesus Christ is both our brother and our ancestor, or better put: our brother-ancestor. For Francois Kabasèlè, also of the Congo, Jesus Christ is an elder brother- ancestor. Writing within the context of the Akan society in Ghana, John Pobee, presents Jesus as *Nana*, "the Great and Greatest Ancestor.

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[35]   J.B. Danquah (1968), writing from the Akan context, was the first person to refer to God as an ancestor. Also see, Danquah (1928, 1938 and 1954).

Such an ancestral Christology has, both culturally and theologically, some important deficiencies[36]with regard to the status and role of ancestors amongst the Akan. For the Akan, ancestors remain human spirits. The Akan do not elevate their ancestors to the status of God or of lesser divinity. Moreover, amongst the Akan, the idea of ancestors acting as the intermediaries between the Supreme Being and humankind is not authentic. Theologically, the image of Christ as ancestor downplays the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Jesus since this could not apply to any other ancestors. This image also conflicts with the doctrine of Trinity since the ancestors are not divine or worshipped together with the Supreme Being. The image of Jesus as ancestor also does not offer an account of the divinity of Jesus Christ. (See chapter 5 for a more detailed analysis).

1.3.4 A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology

In critical dialogue with the two Christological models discussed above, I am proposing in this thesis a Christology based on the concept of "God's unique priest" (*Nyamesofopreko*). Such a notion would be both doctrinally orthodox and genuinely relevant within the Akan context, culture and worldview. In this Christology the following three themes will be developed: a) the need for a mediator between God and humanity, b) the person of Christ as Mediator between God and humanity and c) mediation as the work of Christ.

a) The need for a mediator between God and humanity

Mediation in its broadest sense may be defined as the act of intervening between parties at variance with each other for the purpose of reconciling them. It could also imply intervention between parties not necessarily hostile to each other for the purpose of leading them into an agreement, contract or covenant. Though the term mediator is very rare in the Bible, the theme of mediation is of great significance in the biblical texts and also in Christian theology.

In the letters of Paul the need for a mediator arises out of the reality of sin. Sin interrupts the harmonious relationship between God and humankind. From it results a state of mutual alienation. On the one hand, humankind exists in a state of enmity with God (Romans 5:10; 8:7; Colossians 1:21). On the other hand, God expresses righteous wrath in relation to the sinner (Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5: 6). Hence, there is a need for reconciliation, a removal of God's displeasure against the sinner as well as of the sinner's hostility to God. Such necessary reconciliation would require the work of a mediator.

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[36] Perhaps the strongest criticism against ancestor Christology so far has come from AyIward Shorter (1969, 1982 and 1983).

In this thesis, I have sought to re-appropriate this Christian concept with reference to the somewhat similar Akan myth of the Supreme Being's withdrawal. According to this myth, it is said that the Supreme Being *(Onyame)* used to live with human beings in a primal state of peace. He then withdrew, far, away from the world of humankind. Amongst the Akan of Ghana, it was the pestle of the old woman[37] pounding *fufu*[38] which caused God to move upwards. The implications of this myth as understood by the average Akan is that from then on distance developed between the Supreme Being and human beings due to human sin.

Such a need for a mediator was demonstrated in failed attempts to establish priesthood for *Onyame* (see Rattray 1923:142). Such failures resulted from the Akan concept of *Onyame* as a perfect Being since, according to the Akan, a priest must fully obey the rules and codes of conduct of his/her deity to the point of death. God's priest should therefore be sinless but human beings do not have the ability to meet such a standard. This is expressed in the Akan maxim *bone bata onipa ho* (sin is part and parcel of human beings' life). The myth of God's withdrawal and the resulting broken relationship between *Onyame* and human beings therefore necessitates a mediator between *Onyame* and human beings.

In this thesis I have coined the term *Nyamesofopreko* by combining three Akan terms, namely *Nyame* (Supreme Being), *sofo* (priest/pastor) and *preko* (unique).[39] With regard to the coining my suggestion is that the message of Jesus Christ responds to this need for a mediator between the Supreme Being and human beings and furthermore that Jesus Christ is indeed unique in this regard (see below). This proposal is based on the following considerations:

- The myth of God's withdrawal and the resulting broken relationship between *Onyame* and human beings necessitate an intermediary between *Onyame* and human beings.

- Although there are examples of a priesthood for the (lesser) divinities, no such priesthood has yet been established that could fulfil such a mediating role between *Onyame* and human beings.

- According to the Akan, the previous attempts to establish a priesthood for *Onyame* has failed since *Onyame,* as a perfect Being, would require from priests to be sinless and since no human priests are able to meet such a standard.[40]

- There are also no other, non-human mediators available since the *abosom* (the lesser

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[37] Virtually all discussions in terms of the matrilineal system amongst the Akan, begin with elderly women. They are considered as the appellate head of the family, fountain of wisdom. Yet they are also considered witty and crafty.

[38] Pounded cassava and plantain meal; a local dish.

[39] See chapter 5 of this thesis for a more detailed analysis on this.

[40] Rattray (1956:142) has shown (with photos) that there was a temple and priest particularly dedicated to *Onyame.*

divinities) and the ancestors have traditionally not acted as intermediaries between *Onyame* and human beings.

b) The person of Christ as a Mediator between God and humanity

In the discussion above it was noted that the mainline Christian tradition has maintained that Jesus Christ is a suitable mediator between God and humanity precisely because he is "truly divine" as well as "truly human". The humanity of Christ is crucial in order to demonstrate the solidarity of Jesus with human beings, while the divinity of Jesus enables him to establish the required reconciliation between God and humanity. In Christian discourse both the humanity and the divinity of Christ are traditionally captured in the doctrine of the incarnation that implies the Logos who became flesh.[41] How can these classic Christian affirmations and the doctrine of the incarnation be re-appropriated within an Akan context?

Within the traditional Akan worldview, culture and religion, the role of mediators is well-established. Various groups of human beings, including women, elders, linguists, chiefs, medicine persons, diviners and traditional priests are called to fulfil such a mediating role within the context of family and clan life. In addition, the lesser divinities play an important role to mediate in conflict between human beings and their ancestors. Furthermore, the ancestors,[42] dwarfs,[43] and others spirits[44] also help to mediate between the physical and the spirit world. However, as I observed above, there are no suitable mediators between the Supreme Being and human beings.

The notion of Jesus Christ as *Nyamesofopreko* suggests that Christ can indeed play a unique role as Mediator in this regard. From the Christians' point of view amongst the Akan, this is indeed a novel element introduced through the Christian gospel which is proclaimed amongst the Akan. However, this begs the question how the status of Jesus Christ should be understood within an Akan context. How can both Christ's divinity and humanity be affirmed at the same time?

In reinterpreting the doctrine of the incarnation within the Akan context, I will draw on

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[41]   See Erickson 1991.

[42]   The ancestors are the illustrious members of the family who have passed away previously. See chapter 4 for a detailed analysis.

[43]   Some other spirits who are said to assume personalities are the *Mmoatia* or "little people". *Mmoatia* are not wholly evil, for they contain a creative aspect (Rattray 1959:26, Opoku 1975:78, Bannerman-Richter 1987).

[44]   Akan traditional religion recognises and accepts the existence of spirits who may use material objects as temporary residence and manifest their presence and action through natural objects and phenomena. Some of these spirits imply witchcraft, and spirits which reside in tress (Idowu 1973:173; also see Sarpong 2002:96-97, Bannerman-Richter 1982 and Gehman 1987).

traditional Akan anthropology in which human beings are regarded as a composition of *okra* (soul/bearer of destiny), *sunsum* (spirit/personality), *ntoro* (fatherhood-deity) and *mogya* (blood) (Sarpong 2002:90-93, Gyekye 1978, Opoku 1975 and Rattray 1959:153-155). According to Akan anthropology all human beings receive *okra* and *sunsum* from the Supreme Being, while the *ntoro* is derived from the biological father and the *mogya* from the biological mother. If this anthropology is taken as a point of departure, how should the Christian message of the conception of Jesus Christ through Holy Spirit in Mary be understood? In this thesis I have investigated and offered a reinterpretation of the incarnation which suggests that Jesus received his *okra* and *sunsum* from God the Father, his *mogya* from Mary[45] and his *ntoro* from God the Father through the Holy Spirit. On this basis the divine as well as human nature of Jesus Christ may be affirmed, while the one person of Jesus Christ may be understood in terms of the way in which these four elements are combined in each person. In terms of this anthropology the sinlessness of Jesus may be understood on the basis of his divine *ntoro*. The miracles and the resurrection of Jesus Christ may be understood in terms of his "heavy" *sunsum* (strong spirit) which enables him to overcome evil forces, including death.

c) Mediation as the work of Christ

Mediation is a prominent soteriological concept in the biblical roots and the subsequent history of the Christian tradition. As noted above, in the Christian tradition Jesus Christ is portrayed as Mediator of the broken covenant between God and humanity. Accordingly, the work of Christ may be understood primarily in terms of mediation or reconciliation. In discourse on the doctrine of atonement, various soteriological images are employed to explain the way in which Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection have established the possibility of reconciliation between God and humanity. The images include the following: offering a sacrifice for irreparable harm that was done, as well as a go-between within the context of interpersonal conflict (e.g. between marriage partners, parents and children, family feuds, employers and employees).[46] This also entails the focus on the intercessory role of an advocate acting on behalf of others, a vicarious representation and suffering or exorcising evil

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[45] Perhaps, it is logically incoherent to assert the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and at same time reject the doctrine of his virgin birth. The underlying presupposition is the same. Logically, the two stand together and fall together. However, whereas Pannenberg (1977:141-149) accepts the resurrection as factual, he dismisses the virgin birth as a legend. Nonetheless, the Akan anthropology offers a possibility to re-appropriate the orthodox doctrine of full humanity, full divinity, virgin birth, sinlessness and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[46] See Der (1980), Awolalu (1977), Morris (1965, 1983), Stevenson (2004) and DeGruchy (2002).

from within society (e.g. "the goat for Azazel"). It is not possible to explore the significance of each of these soteriological metaphors here in any further detail.

Traditional Akan culture and religion contain rough equivalents for many of these soteriological images. For example: In the Akan history, four Akan Chiefs intentionally gave themselves up, at different occasions, to be killed on behalf of Ashanti nation (the dominant group of the Akan people). They offered themselves for ritual purposes to gain victory in the war against their enemies. One of these chiefs, Nana Dikopim I chief of Edwoso, offered himself to be butchered to death and his body distributed to the vultures. In the true spirit of sacrifice, none of the four chiefs pleaded for any personal benefits. However, each one requested that after his death, nobody from his home- town should be killed as a sacrifice in any form. This may serve as an example of vicarious representation within the Akan history (Sarpong 1998:149).

Although, the vicarious sacrifices in Akan history have some similarities with the vicarious death of Jesus, there are some differences. Most notably, the four chiefs died for their nation, the people they loved, and not for their enemies. In fact their death was aimed at saving their own people from their enemies. In the case of Jesus, he died not only for those he loved but also for those who treated him as an enemy.

In this constructive contribution towards a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology, I have explored this image of vicarious representation further. I will seek to show that the examples of vicarious sacrifice in Akan history present a mere shadow of better things to come, which has been fulfilled in Jesus, God's unique priest.

1.3.5 Statement of the research problem

On the basis of this discussion, the research problem which will be addressed in this thesis may be formulated as follows:

> Can a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology overcome the weaknesses of ancestral Christology and divine conqueror Christology in re-appropriating, within a contemporary Akan context, the classic Christian affirmation that the person and work of Jesus Christ may be understood in terms of acting as unique Mediator between God and humanity?

The concepts employed in this statement of the research problem have been introduced in the discussion above and will be explored in further detail in the various chapters of this thesis.

One further aspect of this research problem needs to be discussed here though, namely the relative adequacy of such Christologies. On what basis can the adequacy of one form of Christology be compared to that of others?

The notion of relative adequacy indicates that adequacy is an elusive concept in theological reflection. There is a need to guard against claims to full adequacy, final truth claims, fundamental positions, fixed formulas and exposition of the "right doctrine" (orthodoxy). Theological reflection will always remain an ongoing and necessarily incomplete attempt to articulate, describe and explain the content and the significance of the Christian faith. On the other hand, there is a need to guard against relativism in the selfsame theological reflection. It is possible to identify relatively more and relatively less adequate interpretations of the Christian faith. This begs the question as to what criteria may be identified in assessing such relative adequacy. Although such criteria remain subject to further debate, they at least indicate some items on the agenda for theological discourse on this matter.

Three such criteria will guide this research. In the first place, contemporary theological reflection needs to demonstrate its continuity with the biblical witnesses and the subsequent Christian tradition. No single expression of the Christian faith may be regarded as normative for all subsequent theological reflections. Nevertheless there is at least a need to demonstrate in what ways new reinterpretations may be regarded as appropriate innovations of the Christian tradition. For the purposes of this thesis, the classic Christological affirmations of the ecumenical councils of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451) will serve as continuous reference points. The question is therefore whether a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology can do justice to both the humanity as well as the divinity of Jesus Christ and can explain the relationship between these coherently.

In the second place, contemporary theological discourse needs to demonstrate its contextual relevance in the local but ever-changing context within which it is situated. This does not imply that theological reflection cannot and should not engage critically with contextual consideration. One may argue that the introduction or (adoption) of concepts (in this case Christological ones) into a new context (Akan culture) will inevitably lead to the adaptation of both concepts and context. Nevertheless, the leitmotif of African Christian theologies has been the need to express the content and significance of the Christian faith in indigenous rather than in foreign (colonial) categories. It has to engage with a particular culture, its thought forms and contextual needs. The articulation of such a local theology (see Schreiter 1985, Sarpong 2002, Mugambi 1998, Nyamiti 1991, Bediako 1992, Ukpong 1884) does not

preclude its catholicity and ecumenicity, that is, the need for others to recognize it as an authentic expression of the Christian faith.

In the third place all theological discourse needs to be assessed in terms of its internal coherence, clarity, intelligibility and plausibility. The task of this research will therefore be to articulate and assess the relative adequacy of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology within the Akan context on the basis of these three criteria.

1.4 Strengths and weaknesses of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology

It would be premature to give an account of the strengths and weaknesses of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology here. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to identify some of these possible strengths and weaknesses provisionally. This may serve as a preliminary "working hypothesis" to guide the discussion in the rest of this thesis.

One of the obvious strengths of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology is that it draws on various aspects of the Akan mythology, history, culture and worldview. It adheres for example to the myth of God's withdrawal, the need for a mediator between the Supreme Being and human beings, the unavailability of a suitable mediator in this regard, and Akan views on anthropology. It could therefore be readily understood within an Akan context, not only by Christians but also by traditionalists, Muslims and others. Another strength is that the Akan anthropology and the conception of God may offer a way of affirming both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. The focus on the concept of a mediator is both appropriate within Akan history and in the Christian tradition, with specific reference to the doctrine of atonement and the themes of reconciliation, the ministry of intercession and the vicarious representation of Jesus Christ.

There are a number of theological questions which may be raised with reference to a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology though. While this form of Christology may be able to offer an account of the incarnation, sinlessness and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is less evident that it may do justice to the traditional Christological themes of the *parousia*, the final judgment of Jesus Christ and the Christian notion of hell. There is no analogy to such themes in the Akan worldview.

The task of this research will therefore be to articulate a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology and to test and develop its relative adequacy on the basis of these considerations.

1.5 Research procedures

In this study, the adequacy of the constructive proposal of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology was tested and developed.

The thesis is divided into two main sections. The first section which covers the first four chapters, entails reviews of some of the dominant African Christologies – with particular reference to divine conqueror and ancestor Christologies. In these chapters, I assessed the adequacy of the Christologies mentioned with reference to the Nicene/Chalcedon definition concerning the person of Christ. The conclusion of my critique was that these Christologies do not express the person of Christ adequately as truly divine and truly human as defined by the first four ecumenical councils. As a result, these Christologies also express the work of Christ, particularly his atonement, less adequately.

The first step taken to analyse these Christologies was to offer a survey of the emergence of African Christologies, starting from an early article by Mbiti in 1967 and including a number of more recent contributions. My main focus was on the Christological images in terms of which Jesus Christ is described as ancestor, chief, divine conqueror, elder, healer, master of initiation, elder brother, liberator and priest.

In the second step of the thesis I described, analysed and critiqued the two dominant Christological theories in the Ghanaian context, namely where Jesus is portrayed as a divine conqueror in the African spirit world and as an ancestor. The strengths and weaknesses of these two Christologies were highlighted.

In critical dialogue with the two Christological models discussed above, the following approach was employed to investigate the adequacy of *Nyamesofopreko* Christology: a) In the case of each of these three themes, the core tenets of the Christian faith were described briefly. b) This theme was then related to similar aspects of the traditional Akan culture, worldview and belief system. c) On this basis a constructive reinterpretation of such themes was offered. d) The strengths and weaknesses of such a reinterpretation were assessed on the basis of the criteria used to critique the divine conqueror Christology and ancestor Christology.

In the final step, I briefly explored the wider ecumenical significance of such a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology within the African context and for Christianity elsewhere in the world.

CHAPTER 2

A brief survey of African Christologies

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a review of the dominant Christological images which have emerged within the context of recent African Christian theologies. The purpose of such a review is not to provide a comprehensive discussion of the complex discourse on an African Christology. It is rather to offer a brief description of some of the dominant images with reference to which Christological debates in the Akan context have to be understood. My focus is on the Christological images whereby Jesus Christ is described as healer, master of initiation, linguist, chief and priest.[1] The strengths and the weaknesses of these Christologies are assessed in terms of their continuity with the Christological decisions of the ecumenical councils of Nicea and Chalcedon on the person and work of Christ.

This chapter has four sections. The emergence of African Christologies as the result of an ongoing process of contextualization is briefly discussed in section 2.2. Liberation Christology is discussed in section 2.3. Section 2.4 deals with African inculturation Christology. Section 2.5 offers some conclusions with regard to the argument of the chapter.

2.2 African Christologies and the process of contextualization

Every Christological inquirer has a particular concern and poses questions which are largely informed by the inquirer's context. For the African, these concerns and questions must be informed and shaped by African worldviews and thought forms based on Africa's religious-cultural, socio-political and economic realities. In the African context Christology must not only be able to respond to general human concerns over alienation and reconciliation. It should also respond to each particular African context.

In response to Jesus' question: "Who do you say I am" in Matthew 16:15, Africans cannot simply imitate Peter, but have to say who Christ Jesus is from the African perspective. Certainly, this question cannot be answered adequately without knowledge of African culture and accompanying religious experiences. Usually various elements of African traditional religion and culture, such as the ancestors, chieftaincy, sacrifices, healing, views on humanity,

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[1]   Two forms of African Christology, namely where Christ is seen as either a "Divine conqueror" or a "proto-ancestor" will receive special attention in chapters three and four respectively.

the concept of the family and so forth, are employed to construct an African Christology (Martey 1993:79).

The emphasis on contextualisation in African Christological discourse has led to the emergence of different forms of African Christology. One may identify especially two main types of African Christology, namely liberation Christology and inculturation Christology. African women's Christology may be regarded as a distinct type of Christology, but is often included under the rubric of liberation Christologies.[2]

The variety of African Christologies may be regarded as the legitimate result of the process of contextualisation since African theologians have at particular times addressed pertinent issues in different African contexts. Nevertheless, it has been rightly pointed out that the future task of theologians in Africa will be to develop a synthesis between liberation and inculturation approaches to Christology.[3] The reason is that theologians have to respond to political and socio-economic realities as well as to religious and cultural ones (Martey 1993:81). It is within such discourse on African Christologies that this contribution towards a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology is situated.

2.3 Liberation Christology

This section entails African liberation Christologies and African Women's Liberation Christology.

2.3.1 African liberation Christologies

The liberation approach to Christology, as seen in the writings of Jean-Marc Ela, Engelbert Mveng, Laurenti Magesa and others, approach African economic and political struggles from a theological perspective. Within this approach Jesus is portrayed not only as the oppressed one whose life reflects the life of the oppressed and marginalized black Africans, but also the One who would liberate them from their suffering and oppression (Ela 1986, Mveng 1974, Magesa 1976:79-92).

There are three forms of such an African liberation Christology. The first is generally known

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[2]   One may find that inculturationists reside mainly in Anglophone Africa and that liberationists originate mainly from Francophone Africa. Inculturation theology is perhaps the most common and most developed theological approach in the African context. Most contributions to African Christology belong to this group.

[3]   Martey (1993:81), citing the works of liberationist Jean-Marc Ela and of inculturationist Gabriel Setiloane, points out that although there are indications that the conflict between these two approaches to African Christology has reduced remarkably, the tension between the two approaches is not yet settled.

as South African black theology and historically responded mainly to issues of race within the context of apartheid [4] (Boesak 2004).

The second form is simply called African liberation Christology, found especially in independent sub-Saharan Africa and is closer to Latin American liberation theology. This theological approach is broader than the one of South African black theology, for the theme of liberation here is integrated within the wider African cultural background (Nyamiti 1991:13).

The third form is African women's Christology which focus on the emancipation of women. Central to the Christological reflection of African women theologians is the experience of women in a patriarchal society and male-dominated churches (Martey 1994:82). Stress is placed on structures in African societies that oppress women and that marginalise the role that Jesus Christ plays in liberating African women.

(a) The image of Christ as Liberator

The earliest African theologians writing about liberation theology were Jean-Marc Ela and Eboussi Boulaga. The Tanzanian theologian Laurenti Magesa wrote on liberation and the church and published *Christ as Liberator* as early as 1976. Apart from the obvious Africanisation of their message, the emphasis on liberation from poverty and the role of the poor is very much akin to Latin American liberation theology. A stronger emphasis is placed on the importance of critical thinking in Latin American liberation theology – an element not always emphasised by other African theologians. There is, however, in addition to the emphasis on economic liberation, an increasing tendency on the part of African theologians to speak of liberation from all oppressive forces, including cultural ones. This is particularly seen in the work of Ela (1986:39-53).

In his 1985 survey article "Current state of biblical studies in Africa" Onwu cites the article by Mpolo (1983) on "Jesus Christ – Word of life". In this article Mpolo argues that the ministry of Jesus clearly indicates his commitment to liberate the oppressed from every form of oppression.

Onwu also points out that in several studies an increasing number of African theologians are speaking of Jesus as Liberator from all oppressive forces, bringing deliverance from sin, sickness, poverty, and evil forces. He cites the work of Mbiti (1975), Sawyerr (1972) and Enang (1979). One may also add the contribution of Appiah-Kubi (1979). His reference to

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[4]   African liberation Christologies typically draw on the contributions from North American black theology and Latin American liberation theology.

Mbiti is interesting because it is Mbiti who has been most explicitly critical of liberation theology, citing it for insufficient biblical grounding (Mbiti 1978).

The strengths of the image of Jesus as Liberator lies in the notion of God's "preferential option" for the poor – which the Gospel of Luke, for example, clearly demonstrates. Added to that, the need within the African context for a liberator as an antidote for the feared spiritual forces and all forms of oppression cannot be over-emphasised. However, the image of Jesus as typically portrayed in African liberation Christology is merely that of a charismatic leader or lesser divinity. The advocates of this image have not in any way shown how such a liberator can be fully human and fully divine – as the Nicene definition confesses.

(b) The image of Christ as healer

In the African context the image of Jesus as healer seems to have been proposed first by the Congolese writer Buana Kibongi. In English literature it has recently been taken up by Aylward Shorter and in French Literature by Cece Kolie (Moloney 2004:505-515). In describing Christ as healer, Shorter uses the West African word *Nganga* – which might be translated as "witch doctor", "medicine man" or "medium".

Shorter (1988) points to healing as a central feature of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore he believes that the African traditional interest in healing requires a Christology based on Christ's healing function. Shorter then compares the Galilean healers (whose techniques Jesus adopted) with the African traditional medicine men and women.

Shorter discovers similarities between these traditions in that both practised a holistic form of healing in which physical, psycho-emotional, moral-spiritual, social and environmental dimensions of health come into play. According to Shorter, both traditions also tend to confuse the dimensions of wholeness or sickness. For example, there was a common belief that sickness is a direct punishment for personal sin.

He also notes that belief in sorcery was common in the Mediterranean world of Christ's time, as it is in the African world today. Jesus employed traditional techniques of healing, but warns his followers against dappling in magic. Jesus followed an integral approach to healing, but also taught that suffering has a salvific power, as manifested through his death on the cross.

In another development, the Guinean Roman Catholic Priest, Cece Kolie, offers critical comments of the image of a healer. Kolie (1992:128-150) begins his reflections on the

possibility of conferring on Jesus the title of healer with the polemical statement "that it might be easier for African theologians to present Jesus as the great Master of initiation, or as the Ancestor par excellence, or the Chief of chiefs, and so on." He notes that to proclaim Jesus as the great Healer calls for a great deal of "explaining to the millions who starve in Sub-Sahara Africa, to victims of injustice and corruption and the polyparasitic afflicted of the tropical and equatorial forest" (Kolie 1992:128).

Kolie (1992:128-132) cites the socio-economic and political realities in Africa and at the same time looks towards the Crucified One. Kolie bases his contention on two points: Firstly, Jesus Christ is the healer because the healings contained a central element in his ministry (Kolie 1992:129). Secondly, Jesus Christ is a healer because through his own suffering he is present in human suffering. Kolie (1992:128-132) also points out that healing looms large in some African Indigenous Churches, Pentecostal churches and Charismatic churches (Kolie1992:128-132). He maintains that, amongst Africans, health is the predominant concern over employment or family life (Kolie 1992:132).

Assessing the proposals of Shorter and Kolie, it is clear that the title "healer" has considerable support in the Bible and in the African context. However, the image of Jesus as healer is by itself inadequate to construct a contextually applicable doctrine of the person and the work of Christ. The reason is that both Shorter and Kolie did not show how healers in the African context could be taken to be fully human as well as fully divine.

2.3.2 African Women's Liberation Christology

In African theological discourse, men have dominated the field of written theology and they hardly take women's life experience into account (Nasimiyi-Wasike 1998:128). In her article "An African Woman's Christ", Mercy Oduyoye asks whether there is such an issue as "women's Christology," since "Christology is the church's word about Christ" and the church is dominated by men. As a way of showing her concern, she indicates that her contribution to African Christological discourse is not in terms of what the African church says about Christ but, instead, what one African woman wishes the church could say about Christ (Oduyoye 1988:35, see also Martey 1994:69).

However, with women's voices being heard in theology, Christological discourse in Africa has taken on a new a dimension. African Christological construction no longer merely entails the use of African titles to fit New Testament concepts or the juxtaposition of African traditional symbols with biblical images. Now the following issues come under scrutiny:

structures in African societies that oppress women and marginalise people and Christ's part in liberating not only African men but also women.

Most African women theologians now posed Christ in opposition to all cultural systems that dehumanise and oppress them. It is not surprising, therefore, that some African female theologians make women's experience per se the point of departure for Christology. For example, Therese Souga (1988:25) writes: "We need a Christology that takes into account the situation of women in the African world. Christology cannot be formulated without taking into account women and their place in church and society in Africa." Souga (1988) contends that Jesus bears "a message of liberation for every human being", especially for those who are socially the most disadvantaged. She contends a basic solidarity between Jesus and African women who are the most marginalised people within society. Souga however laments that the church in Africa maintains "certain negative kinds of behaviour" towards women. According to her, the theological question about the role of women and the Christological question posed in Mark 8:29 cannot be separated.

Tappa (1988:31-33) also challenges male supremacy in the African churches. She reminds African male theologians that the sexist is not so different from the racist, for the same principle makes it possible for someone to profess Christianity while keeping women in a lower position than men. She notes that as long as African male Christians discriminate against women in the churches, they have no moral obligation to demand liberation for blacks in South Africa. In the same sense the principle of apartheid is preached when women are told they are not worthy to be ordained into the ministry of the church of Christ.

Oduyoye (1984:4) also contends that Jesus is the One who liberates women from the burden of disease and ostracism from a society. For Bonita Bennet of South Africa, Jesus did not only refrain from belittling women; He actually stood up amongst his contemporaries to defend women actively (Bennet 1987:172). Nasimiyi-Wasike (1998:126) also reminds male counterparts that in the Bible we do not find Christ distinguishing between women and men as children of God.

Drawing from the writings of African women theologians, one may note that African women theologians by and large see Jesus as the Liberator who offers total liberation, embracing every aspect of life. Central to their Christological reflection is the experience of women in the patriarchal society and male-dominated churches (Martey 1994:82). To these theologians, one cannot separate physical liberation from the spiritual kind, for the spiritual encompasses

the physical. For African women theologians, Jesus stands with African women today, as he did with the Jewish women of his time.

The emergence of African women's Christology "from the underside", to use the term of Ekeya (1988:17), has indeed questioned the authenticity and relevance of the Christologies of male theologians. Nonetheless, one area where African women do affirm the Christologies of their male counterparts is in the use of titles that are conferred on Jesus – titles such as "Healer", "Saviour", "Lord", "Christus Victor", and above all, "Liberator".

It is interesting to note that, while accepting a liberation approach to Christology, most women reject a cultural approach because they hold African traditional culture partly responsible for the contemporary structures of oppression (Nasimiyi-Wasike 1998:124).

The interpretations African women render to some of these titles go beyond those of men. For instance, the "Christus Victor" type plays a crucial role in the Christologies of male theologians such as Emmanuel Milingo and John Mbiti, portraying the work of Christ in terms of a victory over Satan and evil spiritual forces in the world. To African women, Christ's victory in this regard also extends to the evils of male-dominated society.

Moreover, the title of *okyeame* (linguist) that Pobee ascribes to Jesus is reinterpreted by Amoah and Oduyoye to include women – whereas for Pobee, *okyeame* can be nothing else but male. Nevertheless, within the Akan system of rule, the *okyeame* can be either man or woman (Martey 1994:78-88).

According to Martey (1994:83), the title given prominence in all African women's Christology is that of Jesus as "Liberator" – the one who liberates women from dehumanising customs, taboos and traditions. Yet, some feminists are of the mind that all these attempts are not enough.

Assessing African women's liberation Christologies, one may notice some discontinuities, yet they share some continuities with the mainline liberation Christologies. The African women's Christology focus on the emancipation of women. Central to the Christological reflection of African women theologians is the experience of women in patriarchal society and male-dominated churches. The focus is placed on structures in African societies that oppress women and that tend to marginalise the role that Jesus Christ plays in liberating African women. While accepting the liberation approach to Christology, most women reject the cultural approach because they see African traditional culture as partly responsible for contemporary structures of oppression (Oduyoye 1988, Tappa 1988, Souga 1988, Nasimiyi-

Wasike 1998).

Nevertheless, both African women's Christology and the mainline liberation Christological methods focus primarily on the role or functions of Christ as Liberator and healer. Indeed such images have a basis in the Scriptures and are relevant within the African context. However, these images only present the role and activities of Jesus without showing how Christ can be said to share the same nature with God. In this respect, such an approach seems inadequate to construct the doctrine of Christ as a whole in light of Christianity Nicene and Chalcedon confessed.

2.4 Inculturation Christology

The inculturation approach to Christology takes Africa's pre-Christian and pre-Muslim religious experience seriously. In this model, the traditional African worldview and culture serves as a point of departure. Jesus' presence in Africa today, the proponents of inculturation Christology argue, cannot be acknowledged without Africa's past religious knowledge and experience (Idowu 1965:75).[5]

The responses that both the Jewish public and Jesus' disciples gave to the Christological question Jesus posed in Mark 8:29 indicate a certain tendency. People's previous religious experience and knowledge in confessing the reality of Jesus Christ are inevitable – all originated from their Jewish heritage.

In this regard, Ukpong (1984:30) contends that the theologian's task in the inculturation process consists of re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural context. The inculturation model therefore seeks to integrate the Christian faith with African cultural life and thought forms, as shown in the works of Mbiti, Sawyerr (1996), Idowu (1965), Dickson (1984) Fashole-Luke (1974) and others. Inculturation occurs when Christians express their faith in the symbols and images of their respective cultures.

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[5] The term "inculturation" emerged from Roman Catholic debate in the 1970's. This was a means of expressing some of the insights of the Second Vatican Council, notably that evangelisation is to be understood in terms of change in communities as well as in individuals and that an ongoing interaction between the Christian message and particular cultures is needed. Shorter contends that inculturation has to begin with *acculturation,* the already embedded, and then to be followed by a *separation* which allows appropriate development within the new culture (Shorter 1988). Schineller (1990) also defines inculturation as "the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes principles that animate, direct and unify the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation." This is the preferred definition that Sarpong (2002:32) put forward in his African theological reflections. Also see Mugambi (2004), Parratt (1995) and Conradie & Fredericks (2004).

A careful examination of the procedures employed in African inculturation Christologies reveals two ways of approaching the subject. Firstly, there are those who, in constructing Christology, start from the biblical witnesses of Jesus Christ and then identify those Christological themes which would be relevant within a particular cultural context. Secondly some researchers take the cultural context as point of departure for constructing an African Christology (Nyamti 1991). Below are five examples of such Christologies.

2.4.1 The image of Christ as the "Master of initiation"

In traditional African communities, initiation is held whenever a member of society undergoes an important change in status within the life of the group. Initiation dramatises through symbolical practises how important status changes are in the eyes of society. The acquisition of a new status calls for the successful adoption of a new set of roles by the one who is moving into the new phase of life. At the same time the society adjusts to culturally significant changes in people's lives. The formal dramatisation of these changes in the "ritual of status change" may be psychologically beneficial to those who are accepting roles that they have not practised before. It could be of help to other members of society as well who must also adopt new ways of relating to these people. Initiation helps to maintain stability and order within such a society.

Four public symbolic rituals are commonly celebrated in Africa, perhaps throughout the world. These initiation rituals are: a) naming ceremonies, which confer human status on the new members of society and proclaim the parenthood as their caretakers; b) puberty celebrations, which confer adult status; c) marriage, which legitimises new sexual, economic, and child raising obligations; and d) funerals, which proclaim the loss of human status and opens a new door into the spirit world for the deceased.

In addition to these commonly known initiation rituals, numerous other initiation rituals are performed in Africa and also around the world. These rituals serve as criteria to admit people into secret societies. It may be noted here that many of these initiation rituals – both the conventional ones and the non-conventional ones – may or may not be compatible with Christian beliefs and values.

One such example is the initiation relating to male same-sex intercourse as found among the Etoro in New Guinea. The Etoro community is a group of 400 people who subsist by hunting and horticulture in the Trans-Fly region. The Etoro believe that boys cannot produce semen on their own. To grow into men and eventually give "life force" to their children, boys must

acquire semen orally from older men. From the age of 10 years until adulthood, boys are thus inseminated by older men (Kottak 2004:558).[6] Such a ritual is classified under the type of initiation rituals of which Jesus is said to be "master" of the group.

Indeed, in this diverse cultural context of "initiation rituals" some African theologians propose that Jesus is the leader, the master of the team who sees to the performances of such rites. Here we will discuss the well known and the most developed proposal by Anselm Sanon.[7]

Jesus as "Master of initiation" is the theme of the Christology developed by Sanon. His Christology begins with a detailed explanation of African initiation rituals. Sanon notes that initiation accompanies various stages of life: birth, growth, puberty and marriage. Initiation involves two main elements: passage from a lower condition to a higher status with new rights and, with that, responsibilities and introduction into community membership (Sanon 1992:94-96).

Sanon also points out that initiation involves various rites and other conditions such as separation from one's own community to a separate locality, various instructions (usually accompanied by initiation secrecy), ordeals, prayers, and rituals (of purification, sacrifice), imposition of a new name, use of symbols, death and resurrection being symbolically manifested.

He reinterprets African initiation rituals in relation to the mystery of Christ. With regard to the New Testament teaching, he interprets the various stages in Christ's life in light of the African sense of initiation (Sanon 1992:92-99). He notes that Christ's life followed a gradual movement towards the goal of perfection (Hebrews 2:10; 7:28; 5:9). Sanon also points out that Jesus was initiated according to Jewish tradition at birth, when he was circumcised, when he received his name, and when he was presented in the temple – so as to enter ritually into his Jewish family and community (Sanon 1992:94).

Jesus' act of remaining in the temple when he was twelve years old is interpreted in terms of initiation. These activities involved separation from his family, receiving instructions from Jewish rabbis, and instructing his father and mother (as initiates are to instruct others).

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[6] Once every third year, a group of Etoro boys around the age of 20 are formally initiated into manhood. They go to a secluded mountain lodge, where they are visited and inseminated – homosexually – by several older men.

[7] Anselm Sanon is the Catholic bishop in Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta). See his article: *Jesus, Master of Initiation* (1991:85-102).

Likewise, the washing of feet by the Jesus at the Last Supper is seen as an initiation gesture: Jesus, the Master of initiation initiates his disciples, instructs them ritually to follow in his footsteps.

Sanon (1992:96) indicates other initiation rituals linked with the life of Jesus: his messianic secret (Mark 1:44; 3:12), his use of symbols and signs (parables), his solidarity (Christ's initiation involved us), a cross (initiation tree), the church (place of initiation), time of grace (sacraments) initiation.

Sanon 1992:94) remarks that Christ was himself initiated into the tradition of his people by being named, circumcised, and presented in the Temple. Christ was initiated into the fullness of God's plan by being brought to the perfection spoken of in Hebrew 2:10, 5:9 and 7:28. This happened to him especially through his death and resurrection. These acts can be understood as a kind of initiation ordeal through which one is transported into a higher mode of existence. Sanon contends that Christ's initiation process has more than an exemplary significance: Christ's initiation is truly the cause of our being initiated into a whole new mode of existence. Christ is the one who leads us into the fullness of life.

For Sanon, just as in the initiation process symbols are used as vehicles of the highest values of the community, so does Christ lead us on through symbols – especially the sacraments (Sanon 1992:96-97). In this regard, Sanon contends that the master of initiation occupies a mediating role within the human community. He acts as an intermediary between the human and the spirit powers.

The value of Sanon's proposal is that it helps to reinterpret Christ's mediating role between God and humankind. The weakness of the model lies in the reality that, for many Africans today, initiation is no longer a practised ritual. Another weakness is that the master of ceremony sometimes excludes the sick and the weak from society. It happens in certain societies that the master of initiation even kills the weak members of that community. This is what Kolie (1992:132) terms as the "cult of life". Nonetheless, Jesus is known to be more inclined to the poor and the weak, and even today he is present in their suffering. In addition He is the provider of life (John 10:10).

The image of a master of initiation is based on human being identity. Sanon has not in any way though shown how such a cult leader can be fully human and fully divine – as Nicene Christianity would maintain it to be.

2.4.2 The image of Christ as the linguist (*okyeame)*

In most African societies the idea and work of a mediator or intermediary implies routine. Among the Akan of Ghana, the king or the chief does not generally speak directly to the people, neither do the people normally approach the king or chief directly except through the linguist. The linguist receives and transmits the message from the king to the people and vice versa.

In the Akan court the linguist (*okyeame)*[8] is a highly important personality. He remains close to the chief, relaying his requests and pronouncements to others and even sometimes acting for him in his absence. This institution has become part of the social order. Thus, amongst the Akan, the *okyeame* is not just a speech intermediary. He is envoy, counsellor, consultant, protocol officer, as well as ritual officiant responsible for libation prayers. Whether Akan or not, it is clear that the royal spokesperson, wherever he has been found in Ghana, is the chief's close confidant and the most reliable among the chief's council of elders. Amongst the Ashanti (the dominant group in the Akan), the *okyeame* is the royal spokesperson and prosecutor in court. In the Akan system of rule, the *okyeame* can be either male or female. Certainly, such a rich background makes the image of a linguist as mediator meaningful as a Christological image applicable to the Akan context (Yankah 1995:25).

Drawing from such a background, Pobee (1979:92-98) suggests that Jesus could be seen as *okyeame* amongst the Akan. However, it has been argued that considering Jesus as *okyeame* sends the wrong signals about who Jesus is. The argument is that the *okyeame* rules on behalf of the chief. Therefore if Jesus is to be named as *okyeame,* the misunderstanding could easily arise that the chiefs are higher than Jesus, because *okyeame* directly falls under a chief. Besides, the impression could also be created that Jesus derives his authority from the chiefs and that they have provided Jesus' authority. Certainly, that would also raise the chiefs above Jesus and make him subject to them within the Akan social context.

However, whereas the argument is valid in some sense, it may not be conclusive to render the

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[8]   The term "linguist" may not be adequate to translate the Akan word *okyeame*. However, its connection may be due to the need and usage of a bilingual interpreter between colonial representatives and the local states. The interpreter and *okyeame,* both master over language and both agents of verbal mediation, could be mistaken for one another, as indeed they have been in the literature on *okyeame*. The mistaken application of the word "linguist" to the royal spokesperson in West Africa could be traced to this crisis of identity. In this respect Yankah (1995) analysed the lexical meaning of linguist and compared it to the role of *okyeame* in Akan. He contends that the term *okyeame* simply resists a precise translation of the English term linguist. In order to avoid being entangled within a detailed discussion of this issue, which lies outside the scope of this thesis, I will follow the general translation of *okyeame* as "linguist". For an excellent and detailed discussion of this issue, see Yankah (1995:25-26).

image of *okyeame* "useless". One can rightly refer to Jesus as *Onyamekyeame* (God's linguist) without creating any impression that God's linguist is lower than a chief. Nonetheless, if one is to use the Christological title *Okyeame* consistently as a Christological image, one cannot, in addition, promote the idea of Jesus as chief, except if this is inferred through analogy. In this sense the relationship between Jesus and God is thus analogous to the relationship between the linguist and the chief.

Remarkably, the image of *okyeame* in the Akan context does not go beyond human beings. Those who advocate such an image have therefore not in any way shown how *okyeame* could be seen as fully divine.

2.4.4 The image of Christ as a chief

Amongst the Akan, the chiefs occupy a mediating role within the human community as role models and leading figures. As supreme political heads, the chiefs at the same time have religious functions; they mediate between the living and the ancestors, as seen in libation rituals (Asante 2006). Although the chiefs are not first-hand recipients of divine instruction from the spirit beings, they are partly executors of it, by pouring libation and offer sacrifices to the ancestors. Thus, the chiefs' functions are partly priestly in nature; they therefore double up as priests. Nevertheless, the Akan do not regard their chiefs as deities; they are not even deified after death.

For Sarpong (1978), a chief is expected to be the judge, legislator, religious leader, as well as head of the community. The chief should be the one who does not break his oath and who saves his people in battle. The chief should be humble, be above blame, and should, amongst other qualities, be ready to offer sacrificial services for the common good of the community. Sarpong contends that these are the qualities that Jesus puts forward in a "superhuman" way in his personality.

Pobee (1979) believes that Christ possessed all the qualities of a good chief. According to Pobee, Christ is the greatest chief or the *Nana.*[9] As such, Christ has power and authority to judge, reward, and punish. But as God-man, he is superior to all chiefs and all spiritual beings.

However, Pobee notes the differences between Christ's functions as a chief which include not only sharing in the struggle for liberation but also suffering with the weak. Pobee therefore

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[9] The Akan word for chief and king is *Nana,* literally translated as grandfather or grandmother. Ancestors are also addressed as *nananom.*

warns that the chief analogy can be dangerous as it leads to a *theologia gloriae* – which lacks a *theologia crucis*[10] (1979:97).

Pobee further notes that the office of an African chief is bound up with worldly power, the claim of wealth and prestige. A distance is built between the chief and the community. And this distance is difficult to overcome. Sometimes, the members of the community find a hearing only through mediators. . By contrast, Jesus calls for a radical change of position as relayed in Mark 10:43 (Pobee 1979:78).

For some other African theologians such as Bediako (1984:19), the image of chief sends the wrong signals about who Jesus is. Bediako contends that Jesus cannot be reckoned as a chief, because the chief rules on behalf of the ancestors. If Jesus is thus to be named as chief, the misunderstanding could easily arise that the ancestors have given Jesus this authority.

Bediako (1984:19) argues that considering Jesus as chief would raise the ancestors above Jesus and make him subject to them. Bediako maintains that, if one is to use the Christological title "'ancestor" consistently, one cannot, in addition, promote the idea of Jesus as chief.

Harry Sawyerr also rejects the image of chief for a number of reasons. To Sawyerr, chiefs have lost their positive power and influence. Chiefship per se does not imply unquestioned supreme rule. Chiefs have never been readily accessible to the ordinary clan member. They had to be approached through various middle-persons. Chiefs generally live in walled settlements and are therefore not exposed to the ordinary contacts of their subjects (Sawyerr 1968:72).

In relating the image of Chief to the person of Christ, the problem that one encounters is Christ's divinity. According to Nicene Christology, Christ is truly human as well as truly God. However, as stated earlier, the Akan do not regard their chiefs as divine beings, not even after death. Granted that there is a possibility of elevating chiefs to the status of divine beings, we will in that case encounter the heresy of adoptionism; there was a time when the chiefs were merely human and became divine later. Moreover, since the concept of "divine assembly" is foreign to the Akan worldview, the presumed "divine chiefs" will inevitably have the status of lesser divinities.

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[10]   Pobee notes that the chief analogy denotes authority and power derived from other ways than the way of suffering and humanity (Luke 24:46 ff).

2.4.5 The image of Christ as a priest

The institution of the priesthood is a highly respected office in traditional West African societies. This institution is open to both men and women. Each candidate usually receives "a call" to the priesthood before embarking on a period of training. In certain societies the office of priesthood is hereditary. Nevertheless, the vocation must be authenticated. This takes place when the candidate is possessed by the particular deity whom he or she as priest or priestess will serve. Possession indicates a call as well as confirmation of the candidacy. The priest's authority therefore does not emanate from either herself/himself or from any other human being. It is derived from the metaphysical world (Opoku 1978:74).

The training of the priests and priestesses is elaborate. During that period each trainee must make a complete break with their family relations. The training includes instructions in the laws, taboos, dances, songs and idiosyncrasies of the lesser divinities as well as about general priestly duties. In addition, the trainee has to acquire knowledge of medicine: herbs, roots and traditional African methods of psychiatry. The trainees also learn as part of their preparation for their vocation, the customs, traditions and history of their society. Priests/priestesses are therefore popular repositories of communal knowledge and traditions (Opoku 1978:75).

The primary function of priests amongst the Akan is mediation. Priests mediate not only between the devotees and the lesser divinity and the ancestors, but also between human beings. This image of priest therefore makes the mediator role of Christ meaningful within the Akan context.

The priests are believed to have power over evil spirits and to set human beings free from the yoke of evil. They appear to act as prophets or visionaries. It is generally believed that these priests have the ability to unfold a secret or, when they go into ecstasy, to foretell the future accurately.

In addition to the religious role, the priests also play a part in the political, social and economic spheres. In some places, priests may double as chiefs. Their blessings are also solicited in almost all socio-economic undertakings. They are undoubtedly the most powerful, influential and complex figures in Akan society.

As spiritual leaders of the entire community, a certain standard of moral and social behaviour is expected of priests. Although some priests may fall short of this standard, many others maintain the high traditions of their office and are honest, trustworthy and devoted to their calling.

With respect to this background, some African theologians suggest that Jesus could be referred to as a priest. Amongst those who have made such suggestions are: Pobee (1979), Bediako (2000), Waruta, (1989) and Wairimu (1997). In this section, I will present only the proposals of Waruta and Bediako.

Waruta (1989:43) notes two main sources from the New Testament as the basis of viewing Jesus as a priest. Waruta contends that the use of sacrificial language in Paul's writings and the presentation of Christ as the High Priest in Hebrews conform to one of the most basic aspects of the early Church's understanding of Jesus. Accordingly, as a priest, Jesus intermediates between human beings and God to provide the essential link between humankind and God.

Comparing the role of Jesus as priest to the roles of the traditional African priests, Waruta (1989:48-49) observes some similarities. He argues that the priests in African traditional religions are seen as the mediums through which the life-giving power of God is conveyed to human beings. He notes that in the African communities, the priests preside over religious rituals, lead the people in worship, and solemnise ceremonies pertaining to the rites of passage. The priests are considered masters of traditional wisdom, rituals and ceremonies. More than anything, they are deemed the living symbols of religious life of the African community. People go to them with the hope that their fears and sufferings will be alleviated. They take the lead in the communal sacrifice when the intervention of spirit meets the needs of the community.

Waruta (1989:52) also contends that through the priest divine power is employed for the purpose of bettering the human condition, thus providing liberation to the people. The traditional priests serve as officiating ministers of these rituals. They mediate in order to establish the bond between the people and the spirit beings: the Supreme Being, the lesser divinities and the ancestors, and between the people themselves.

Waruta (1989: 50-52) links the functions of priests to the role of prophet and the king. He then remarks that the priests in African religion also play the roles of prophet and king. A priest may also at times be a chief, or act as a chief since some priests double as chiefs. Likewise, a chief or ruler in Africa plays a priestly part on behalf of his people. He does it on the basis of his position as the intermediary between the people and the ancestors and the lesser divinities.[11]

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[11]   Amongst the Swazi in Southern Africa, the king is both ritual and political head of his people.

Waruta (1989:41) points out that the need for Jesus to be understood in the threefold office of prophet, priest and king is not uniquely African. Such a recognition may be traced back to the church Father Eusebius of Caesarea. Waruta notes that in the Scriptures, as well as in the writings of the Fathers, sometimes the office of prophet is combined with that of priest, especially when emphasis was placed on understanding Jesus as the "Revealer of God".

In another development, Bediako (2000:27) confers the image of priest on Jesus. With the image of Jesus as High Priest, Bediako elaborates on the reason why Jesus is a perfect mediator. Bediako notes that the Jews could not possibly accept Jesus as High Priest, because he did not belong to the right tribe. In the same sense the Akan find it difficult to accept someone outside the tribe as an ancestor (Bediako 2000:27).

However, Bediako notes that the writer of the book of Hebrews elaborates a line of argument that opens up the possibility for someone outside the tribe of Levi to exercise a priestly function. Building on the analogy of Melchizedek from Hebrews, Bediako concludes that the functions of Jesus as universal priest and his nature as true God and true human being, has placed Jesus' priesthood in a different category – universal as against particular priest. That makes Jesus' accomplishment significant for each human being in every human context and in all human cultures.

Assessing the image of priest, one can discern the possibility of combining inculturation Christology with liberation Christology. The image of priest serves as a traditional symbol that embodies the African traditional religion and culture. Certainly, the institution of priesthood and the chieftaincy are the two main custodians of African traditional religion and culture. In addition to this vital role, these two institutions also serve as symbols of liberation of the oppressed from oppression by both spiritual and material forces. This is particularly the case when the chief and the priest join hands and engage in war to liberate their community from the external aggressors and oppressors. Added to this, the priest also stands as the liberator of the oppressed from the "evil spiritual forces" that many Africans fear so much.

Moreover, the advocates of a priestly image have also rightly pointed to the mediatory part priests played in the African traditional religion and Christianity. All these functions relatively enhance the image of the priest.

However, there is a pertinent question we still need to pose: On what grounds can mortal priests in Africa be said to be fully human and fully divine? The writer of the book of Hebrews ingeniously drew an analogy from the personhood of Melchizedek.

2.5 Assessment and conclusion

I do not intend here to offer a detailed study of African Christologies or a detailed exposition of any particular Christology. Rather, it is a discussion of whether African Christologies have been able to remain true to the Nicene confession concerning the person and work of Christ. In order to offer a fair assessment, I have selected some key Christologies, but have made no attempt to survey all the available African Christologies.

In keeping with this, my focus has been on the Christological images in terms of which Jesus Christ is described as "Liberator", "Healer", "Master of initiation", "Linguist", "Chief", and "Priest". I noted that there are two main Christological directions in the African Christological discourses, namely liberation and inculturation Christology. The first two of the images discussed in this chapter resort under liberation Christologies which place the emphasis on African political and socio-economic problems. The other five images resort under inculturation Christologies which stress a traditional African religion, culture and worldview. These Christological images are assessed from a Nicene/Chalcedonian perspective.

Observably, there are at least three ways in which African theologians usually construct a Christology.

2.5.1 Jesus as functional Liberator

Firstly, there is an approach where Jesus is seen in functional terms as a liberator without any reference to his divinity, though divinity is not necessarily excluded.

This approach is primarily based on the role or functions that Christ fulfills. In this sense, Christ is an ideal person whose life should be imitated, or is taken to be a liberator who liberates human beings from all kinds of oppression. The oppression could pertain to structural evils that dehumanise people, or culture and traditions that enslave underlings or even to perceive evil spirits that deceive and torment people. Such an approach to Christology responds to the need felt by Africans for a powerful protector against all forms of oppression and what they perceive as evil spirits that oppose human beings.

Obviously, such images are derived from Scripture and were prominent in the ministry of Jesus. It is also important to note that such images are very appropriate within the African context, given the state of oppression and suffering on the African continent. However, such an approach seems badly inadequate to express the person of Christ as truly human as well as truly God as affirmed by the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon.

Indeed, the work of Christ may be seen as liberating humankind from all forms of oppressions, yet Christ's person and practice amount to more than that. One hardly constructs an adequate Christology just on some aspect of the role or functions that Jesus played. For example, if one should follow Christ because he is healer, liberator or a mere moral example, such an approach also serves as basis for people to follow other spiritual leaders with similar "charisma". The intention here is not to say that the approach focusing on the function or role model is "wrong". Rather, it cannot account for the "being" of Christ which is essential for the right picture of Christ's person and salvific work.

One may argue that African Christianity, at least in theory, represents largely a pro-Nicene form of piety. However, if the images that portray Jesus as merely a human being are to become dominant, African Christianity will eventually run the risk of undermining the distinctiveness of Nicene Christianity which has its core foundation on the divinity of Christ. To those who adhere to the Nicene definition of the person of Christ, Christianity is unique basically because of the Christian claim that Jesus is not merely human but also truly God. Thus, if the dominant images that claim to re-interpret Jesus on behalf of the African, depict the Lord as merely human, what doctrinal impression will that create for a later doctrinal development of African Christianity? If this trend is not reversed, here obviously lies an impending Christological problem for African Christianity.

2.5.2 Jesus as human mediator

The second approach poses Jesus as human mediator between God and humankind. The images of master of initiation, linguist, chief, and priest, are usually used in this regard. However, these images are known to represent only human beings. Nonetheless, this approach shows some developments along the line of the functional divinity of Christ as found in the work of Pobee (1979:81-98).

However, the problem with the approach focusing on functional divinity is that it tends to depict Jesus as the highest embodiment of God ever found in any human being. This essentially reduces Christ's existence to the status of merely a human being. There are several forms of functional Christology, but basic to all these forms is that they contrast the functional divinity of Jesus against his essential divinity. Nevertheless, the Nicene-Chalcedon confessional definition of the person of Christ entails that Jesus is "of the same nature with God".

It is very important to note the following insight. To reduce Jesus to merely a human being or

to reduce Christ's divinity to only the function of God is to deprive Christ's sacrifice of its infinite merit. For a mere human being cannot atone for the sins of humankind. Moreover, a mere human being does not deserve worship. It is in this respect that Pelikan (1971:173) noted that, amid all the varieties of Christian response to the Gnostic systems, the Fathers were sure that the Redeemer did not belong to some lower order of divine reality, but was himself God.

Remarkably, the Father Athanasius in his argument against bishop Arius also noted that viewing Jesus as lesser than God undermined the Christian idea of redemption in Christ. He explained that, only if the Mediator was Himself divine, could humankind hope to re-establish fellowship with God (see Kelly 1978:233). In the same vein, he argues that if Jesus is not God, it is then inappropriate to practice the established liturgical customs of baptising others in the name of the Son as well as that of the Father, and to address prayers to the Son. Thus, from the perspective of Nicene Christianity, one must follow Christ because he is unique; fully divine and fully human and is the only mediator between God and humankind.

2.5.3 Jesus as reconfigured ancestor

The third approach implies an attempt to reconfigure a human being into a divine one in order to express both Jesus' humanity and divinity. Here we become aware of some sensitivity to the doctrinal importance as a complement to appropriating the proposal to the African context. Examples are found in some approaches in ancestor Christology. In such proposals, the humanity of Jesus is accepted as axiomatic – it is the divinity which must be demonstrated. There is no African Christological development along these lines which has done justice to the divinity of Christ in accordance with the Nicene confessional definition. Such attempts either run the risk of adoptionism or Arianism. If one starts from a finite being and elevates the image to the status of divinity, one inevitably runs the risk of adoptionism. Alternatively, if one poses an already existing divine being, one may also either import the image of a lesser divinity – Arainism or run the risk of modalism, by viewing the Supreme Being in terms of a Christological image. (I will return to this later in more detail in chapters 3, 4 and 6 of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

Divine conqueror Christology: A critique

3.1 Introduction

The concept of Jesus as "divine conqueror" of the African spirit world reflects the most popular and dominant type of Christology in Africa. This view of Christ responds to the need felt by Africans for a powerful protector against what they perceive as evil spirits that oppose human beings. This chapter entails a description, analysis and critique of divine conqueror Christology in the Ghanaian context, namely where Jesus is portrayed as a divine conqueror in the African spirit world. In this chapter I argue that this type of Christology does not express the true humanity, true divinity and the atoning work of Christ adequately (see also Mbiti 1973:397-414, Bediako 2000: 8).

An analysis of this form of Christology will be placed within the context of the debates in African theology on the relationship between the Supreme Being of African traditional theology and the God proclaimed by Christianity, as well as the status and role of the lesser divinities as intermediaries between God and human beings. In section 3.2 I discuss the notion of "Jesus as divine conqueror" in African Christian theology. In sections 3.3 and 3.4 I discuss the image of divine conqueror within the context of Akan traditional religion on the one hand and the Nicene confessional affirmation of the person and the work of Christ on the other. Section 3.5 focuses on the strengths and the weaknesses of the divine conqueror Christology. A conclusion on this is presented in section 3.6.

3.2 Jesus as "Divine conqueror" in African Christian theology

In this section I do not intend to present a detailed study of African Christologies. Still less, it is not an exposition of any particular African Christology that deals with the notion of divine conqueror. Instead, I will discuss briefly some of the key components of divine conqueror Christology and assess its strengths and weaknesses in light of the Nicene and Chalcedonian affirmation of the person and work of Christ. The issues discussed here include Jesus as "Christus Victor" over the African spirit world, Jesus as mighty Saviour of humankind, Jesus the conqueror of territorial spirits over Africa, and Jesus as the great *orisha* (lesser divinity) – who has overcome all the other spirit beings.

3.2.1 The notion and the form of divine conqueror Christology

What I term as "divine conqueror Christology" is not any particular well defined theory where one can readily point to exponents who propagate it. Like African traditional religion, divine conqueror Christology is a functional form of African Christology. This view of Christ responds to the need felt by Africans for a powerful protector against what they perceive as evil spirits that work against human beings. It is an attempt from the traditional African perspective to give meaning to Christianity within the African context. This view of Christ operates throughout sub-Saharan Africa where African traditional religion and Christianity interact.

This notion of Christ as the divine conqueror implies an African Christian understanding in which Jesus is often portrayed as a divine spirit who stands supreme over every spiritual ruler and authority. Such an understanding of Christ arises from the African perception that there are spiritual powers at work in the world which threaten the harmony and the interests of human beings. According to this type of Christology, Jesus is seen to be victorious over such forces in the spiritual realm.

Divine conqueror Christology shares the ethos of liberation Christology. But unlike other liberation Christologies – which usually approach Christology "from below" – the divine conqueror Christology starts "from above". The reason being that in this view, Jesus as divine conqueror is not identified with his earthly ministry. Jesus is merely viewed as a divine being acting in the transcendent realm. As I will argue below, this form of Christology raises important questions with regard to where Jesus fits in as the "divine conqueror" amongst the African divinities.

3.2.2 John Mbiti: Jesus as "Christus Victor" within the African spirit world

John Mbiti was the first African theologian to observe that the dominant and the most popular form of Christology prevailing amongst African Christians is the view of Jesus as the divine conqueror of the African spirit world. In keeping with this observation, he draws from the traditional Christological image of "Christus Victor" and applies it to the African context. Mbiti notes that within the African Independent Churches African Christian faith is better seen than in the mainline denominations[1] (Mbiti 1972: 51).

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[1] The distinctions between "independent" and "historical" churches are now less meaningful than they once were when Mbiti posed his questions. Presently, with the advent of African church leaders occupying leadership positions once held by Western missionaries, the mission churches to a large extent have also succumbed to the influence of the traditional worldview (Bediako 1983:96).

The major point Mbiti makes in his study is that Jesus is seen above all else as the *Christus Victor* (Christ supreme over every spiritual rule and authority). Mbiti points out that this understanding of Christ arises from the keen perception by Africans that there are forces and powers at work in the world which threaten the interests of people and their social harmony. Such a perception creates the need for a saviour. In this respect, viewing Jesus as victorious over the spiritual realm and particularly over evil forces, answers the need for a powerful protector against these forces and powers.

Another important point that Mbiti makes is that, for African Christians, the term "our saviour" is readily interchangeable for God and Jesus, and sometimes even the Holy Spirit. In a saving capacity, Jesus mediates and is able to do all things, to save in all situations, to protect against all enemies, and is ready to intervene whenever those who believe may call upon him. Mbiti particularly notes that in the African context Jesus is our Saviour because He is almighty.[2] Jesus is thus seen and approached as saviour in all spheres of African life.

However, Mbiti criticises Christology regarding the divine spirit as having serious defects. He particularly points to the fact that the humanity of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross are considerably less emphasised.

3.2.3 Larbi and Asamoah-Gyadu: Christ the *agyenkwa* (saviour)

The Akan (Twi) Bible translates "saviour" as *agyenkwa.* Amongst the Akan, *agyenkwa* is the one who saves and preserves one's life. Whether used with reference to a deity or a human being, the term saviour conveys the same meaning – deliverance. For example, where someone's timely intervention prevented a catastrophe or something unfavourable from happening, that person could be said to have become *agyenkwa* in that particular instance.

In the Akan context, Asamoah-Gyadu and Larbi respectively have made an analysis of Akan Christian identification of Jesus as the *agenkwa*. In Larbi's analysis of the cognate term *nkwagye* (salvation), he notes that the term is made up of two words: *nkwa* and *gye*. *Nkwa* means life, vitality, health and happiness. *Gye* has several meanings, but when used in the salvific sense it denotes "rescue, retake, recapture, redeem, ransom, buy out of servitude; to release, to free, to deliver, to liberate, and to save" (Larbi 2006: 6).

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[2]   Mbiti advises that the church in Africa needs to re-examine its methods of evangelisation, taking into consideration the traditional African worldview. As Mbiti rightly noted, the grip that such perceived spiritual powers wield is so strong that it exercises a powerful influence on the ways in which Africans understand and experience the Christian message.

The *agyenkwa* is a powerful being; otherwise he cannot rescue and protect one from the powerful malevolent spirit beings: the *abayifo* (witches) and *adutofo* (sorcerers). The *agyenkwa* saves from danger and all perilous conditions also (see Onyina 1995). He does not only save but also offers *banbo* (security). The term *agyenkwa* and its cognates convey concrete realities.

Larbi (2006:5) also points out that the concept of *agyenkwa* (saviour) becomes more important in the Akan context because of its dualistic worldview. The Akan worldview is divided into "two inter-penetrating and inseparable, yet distinguishable, parts" namely, the world of spirits and that of humans. Amongst the Akan, there is a belief in the multiplicity of spirits within the universe. The idea of the cosmic struggle is strongly imbedded in the Akan understanding of the nature of the universe.

Within the world of human beings there are men and women who manipulate the spirit forces for evil purposes. These are the *akaberekyerefo* and *adutofo* (charmers, enchanters and sorcerers), and *abayifo* (witches). The activities of these forces are directed against human beings in order to prevent them from enjoying abundant life.

Amongst the Akan, the central focus of the religious exercises of every member is to harness power inherent in the spirit force for his or her own advantage. To be able to fulfil his or her aspirations in life, each member requires the "balance of power" in favour of the supplicant. This "tilting of cosmic power" for one's own benefit or for the benefit of one's community Larbi dubs as "maintaining the cosmological balance". The survival of human beings and their communities is in this way dependent upon the help given by superior powers. Therefore the way in which a human being relates to spirit forces is crucial to his or her ultimate well-being (Larbi 2006:3).

Abundant life can only become available to human beings through the various forms of mediation. The saviour who acts as mediator, both rescues from danger and continues to protect the "rescued one" from danger. Thereby he makes it possible for that one to experience *nkwa*, that is, life in all its fullness, which embodies prosperity (*ahonyade*) and peace (*asomdwei*).

In this instance the notion of Jesus as divine conqueror and saviour (*agyenkwa*) becomes meaningful to Akan Christians. Jesus as a divine conqueror answers the need for a saviour who rescues human beings from the threat of these malevolent spirits. Jesus therefore, provides a proper sanctuary for those seeking to resist the evil spirits. The dramatic nature of

some of the conversion testimonies of those who "convert" to Christianity explains not only why such old ways of life are seen as driven by supernatural powers, but also why believers are keen to invite potential converts to taste the superior might of Christ (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:135).

Observably, African Christians' understanding of Jesus as divine conqueror correlates with an African cosmology. Jesus as divine conqueror becomes relevant in the Ghanaian context where salvation connotes deliverance from evil and all misfortunes. As one becomes a Christian, it is believed that Satan is defeated by the divine conqueror; otherwise one could not have left the former master to Christ who is now the new master. This means that Christ has conquered the evil forces that dominate the believer's life (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:137).

3.2.4 The "blood of Jesus" as symbol of him being a divine conqueror

In another development, particularly amongst Christians in Ghana and Nigeria, much emphasis is placed on the "blood of Jesus" as symbolising victory over Satan and evil spirits. Here the blood is deemed to be powerful because Jesus is a powerful divine spirit.

The blood of Jesus is implied both in a passive and an active sense. It is used in a passive way to denote something which cleans sins and acts as protection. In Ghanaian Christianity, particularly amongst Pentecostals and charismatics, the blood of Jesus is used like a magic incantation to ward off evil spirits. It is common to hear someone praying at the dining table: "I put the blood of Jesus in this food," or someone embarking on a journey saying: "I cover myself with the blood of Jesus."

It is also used in the active sense as that which "emits fire" to consume the evil spirits. Others also usually say: "Yesu *Mogya nka wo anim*" (literally, "Jesus' blood be on your face"); in other words: "I suppress you by the blood of Jesus." The idea behind such usage is that, because Jesus is a more powerful divine being, he is seen to conquer all evil spirits. Ghanaian Christians by and large use the blood of Jesus more as an offensive force than in the sense of cleansing of sin. Here the blood is deemed to be powerful because Jesus is confessed as powerful. There is no strong link between the usage of the blood of Jesus and Jesus' redemptive atonement.

One may therefore argue that Christ the Victor stands at the centre of African theology. Jesus is our Saviour because He is almighty. Where the cross does come into focus, it appears as a place of glorification. As Mbiti (1968:78) has rightly noted, Africans do not explain the significance of the cross primarily as the sacrificial action of Christ. There is no direct link

with the mention of the blood of Jesus and atonement as the work of Christ. For many African Christians, the cross, in so far as it relates to the human life of Jesus, is not a sign of shame and humiliation, but a symbol of might and power.

3.2.5 Githii and Emeka: Jesus the conqueror of territorial spirits across Africa

In another scene of engagement between Christianity and African culture, the perceived threats of demonic oppression and Jesus' victory over demons are not restricted to individuals and families. Satanic forces are also believed to wield power over specific geographical areas. These perceived demonic forces are believed to be responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa and also for restraining people from becoming Christians. Indeed it is of particular interest to note that such perceived oppressive influence is believed to be observable in the *national economies* of various African countries. The socio-economic, moral and political problems in Africa are explained in terms of demonic activities.

The books by Peter Wagner, a former professor from Fuller Theological Seminary, have contributed immensely to the idea of "territorial spirit" in African Christianity. Some African theologians, particularly Githii (2007) of Kenya and Oshun (1998) of Nigeria, have drawn from this view. The principal biblical reference to the existence of such spirits is Daniel 10, where one may be left with the impression that demonic spirits influence the affairs of nations (Wagner 1991, 1992).

The suggestion is that countries stay poor not because of structural injustice or bad governance but because of a "spirit of poverty" visited upon that nation by demons. African countries are considered particularly vulnerable to the influence of demons and curses because of the performance of rites and rituals that are associated with traditional religion.

Many Christians, particularly Pentecostal and charismatic Christians, have subsequently called on the government of Ghana to abolish the traditional practice of pouring libation during state functions. Their argument is that such practices invite demons which in turn work against the economic system of the country. According to this view, Ghana's socio-economic difficulties could be reversed through some sort of national deliverance by using the name of Jesus who has overcome these territorial spirits (see Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:181).

This view is held not only at the popular level, but also by some academics who identify with certain strands of Pentecostal or charismatic belief. Thus, Nigerian theologian Chris Oshun argues that Nigeria's present difficulties, and those of African nations generally, could be explained in terms of the activities of evil powers. He thus strongly advocates what he calls a

"power approach" to resolve his country's socio-economic problems.

Oshun maintains that it is only by engaging "the powers and principalities" through the powers of the gospel, fasting and prayer that Nigeria may receive the needed healing (Oshun 1998:32-52). Such a view is not restricted to African Indigenous Churches, Pentecostal churches and charismatic churches whose mode of operation predisposes them to this view. Rather, the belief cuts across the fabric of African Christianity. Such an assertion gains weight when one considers the position of David Githii, the current moderator of the 18th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.[3] Githii's recently published book, *Exposing and Conquering Satanic Forces over Kenya* (2007) contains his treatise on how territorial spirits control the socio-economic and political arena of Kenya. In the preface, Githii states that:

> This book seeks to reveal to Kenyans how some of these satanic powers have held our nation captive. What is more, the book seeks to expose, in depth, the various areas that the devil has held captive; areas which, I believe are connected to satanic altars and practices that have long been upheld in the nation.

He also cautions: "Remember, whether you believe it or not, there is an ongoing war between the Kingdom of God (Light) and Satan (Darkness)." Githii particularly links such wars with symbols and images which he believes are tools for evil spirits. His supposition is that these symbols and images allow evil spirits access to control the area where they roam, thereby negatively affecting the economy of Kenya. He particularly points to some of these symbols and images in Kenya's Parliament House, which, he believes, do not only anger God but also prompt God to withhold His economic blessings. Githii contends that such symbols give access to territorial spirits to control Kenya and negatively affect its socio-economic and political situation. To Githii this is not merely an academic exercise; there are important practical issues to be dealt with. To show his commitment, he attacked some of these symbols and images in Kenya's Parliament House when he had the opportunity to offer a prayer at that site. He noted that:

> Twice in the past, while leading prayer within Parliament, I castigated these satanic symbols that have been erected within Parliament. This prayer stirred rest-lessness in a majority of the members of Parliament. Tension, apprehension and outright disgust [were] was apparent throughout my prayer. I soldiered on though the tension was near-tangible (Githii 2007:31-32).

Another leading exponent of this view in West Africa is the Nigerian charismatic lawyer Emeka Nwankpa who expounds such a view in his book *Redeeming the Land*. Nwankpa

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[3]   Githii holds a Doctorate in Missions from Fuller Theological Seminary.

interprets 1 John 5:19, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one," to mean that Satan has expanded his hold over the earth by deploying his principalities and powers in the world.[4] In so doing, Satan is supposed to have strengthened his hold over families, communities, cities and certain African Nations.

Nwankpa maintains that demons could have a tight grip on the affairs of nations as a result of defilement through idolatry and moral perversion. He contends that Africans have become economic migrants in other countries because of idolatry and moral perversion (Nwankpa 1994:9). Apparently such a view is not only in line with the Old Testament thought forms but also correlates with an African traditional understanding. According to this view the custodians of morality – God, the lesser divinities and the ancestors – would punish a society for breaching moral laws. Whether or not such a view is plausible in economic terms, falls outside the scope of this thesis.

3.2.6 Onaiyekan: Christ as the great *orisha* (lesser divinity)

African theological discourse conducts many discussions on the person and the work of Christ. However, the nature of the person of Jesus as understood in terms of an African worldview has not been clarified as yet. In his contribution to the debate, Onaiyekan has suggested that Jesus could be presented as the great and unique *orisha* (lesser divinity).

The cult of the lesser divinities represents a deeply rooted tradition in Africa; it has persisted up to modern times. Yoruba traditional religion is almost exclusively concerned with the cult of the lesser divinities named *orisha* (Onaiyekan 1991:22). On this basis Onaiyekan suggests that Jesus could be presented as the great and unique *orisha,* (lesser divinity*)* superior to all the others.

Onaiyekan notes that some of the *orisha* were once human beings and may therefore also be considered to be ancestors. But he insists that the cult of the *orisha* is basically regarded as that of lesser divinities. Thus, the cult of *orisha* should not be confused with a somewhat limited cult of paternal ancestors who are called *oriisun* (source), or, more generally, *babanla* (grandfathers).

The suggestion of Jesus as the greatest *orisha* rests on the idea of replacing the allegiance to the lesser divinities with an allegiance to Jesus. The argument behind such a proposal is that, when one accepts Jesus as *orisha* (the greatest of the lesser divinities), the attention paid to

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[4]   Here I partly draw on Asamoah-Gyadu's (2000:180) discussion concerning territorial spirits.

the lesser divinities becomes redundant and useless (Onaiyekan 1991:22-23). Such a proposal also allows Africans to maintain the concept of lesser divinities which matters most to them; yet no attention would be given to the individual lesser divinity. Onaiyekan admits that seeing Jesus as a lesser divinity has grave limitations. He nevertheless insists that since each image of Jesus paints only part of the picture, there are limits to all the various images of Christ which have been presented.

However, the problem is not whether an image is perfect or not. Instead, what is important is the relative adequacy of any suggested image. Undoubtedly, the image of *orisha* (lesser divinity) shows stark contrast with the Nicene definition of the person of Christ. I will return to this issue later in this thesis.

3.3 An analysis of the person and the work of Christ

3.3.1 Conceptual analysis of the person of Jesus as "Divine conqueror" in the Akan context

The Akan worldview recognises only two categories of spirit beings as divinities, namely *Onyame* and *abosom*. A distinction is made between *Onyame* who is regarded as the unique one, and the *abosom* who are also regarded as lesser divinities. It is believed that whereas the *abosom* share the divinity with *Onyame*, they are not in the same class or category. The *abosom* are believed to be created by *Onyame*, thus there is only one *Onyame* (Supreme Being) recognised by the Akan. Since divinity or deity does not necessarily denote God or gods in Akan thought-form, an examination of the cults of *Onyame* and the *abosom* will help to assess the nature of the person of "divine conqueror" as attributed to Jesus in the Akan context.[5]

In what follows, I will discuss whether or not Jesus could be categorised as being amongst the lesser divinities the Akan perceive of. I will also engage in a conceptual analysis on whether or not one can say that Jesus is *Onyame* (God).

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[5] I explored this theme in more detail in my M.Phil thesis, particularly chapters 2, 3 and 9. See Agyarko (2006).

a) Can Jesus be categorised as being amongst the *abosom*?[6]

In African Christianity, the Supreme Being is identified with the God that Christians proclaim, but how should African Christians view the lesser divinities? They are sometimes understood in terms of gods, other times even in terms of demons (fallen angels) and enemies of God. They are also sometimes interpreted as angels and ministers of God. In this section, we will first briefly consider the Akan divinity cult of the *abosom* (lesser divinities), assess their nature and explore whether Jesus being "truly God and truly divine" would fit into this category.

In the Akan society the *abosom* may be classified in two categories. There are the ancient tutelar divinities called *tete abosom.* They belong to the community and have been worshipped from time immemorial. These divinities are believed to be friendly towards the community. With reference to *tete abosom,* Sarpong suggests that the term *abosom* denotes that their habitat was formerly stones. This suggestion is based on the etymological meanings of the two words *abo* and *som.*[7] Similarly, Pobee gives the etymology and the breakdown of the term *abosom as:* "a", a prefix which makes a root plural; *bo*, a stone or rock; and *som*, to serve or worship. He therefore draws the conclusion that the term "*abosom*", quite literally, implies the worship of stones or rock.[8] Pobee however admits that lesser divinities do not always use stones or rocks as their abode; they also inhabit rivers and trees.[9] Moreover, such a meaning appears to be misleading as the Akan do not regard the shrines of *abosom* as being made entirely of stone.

The Akan distinguish between the habitat of the spirit and the spirit itself (Pobee 1979:46). The *abosom* require a temporary abode and a priest. The temporary abode may be a tree or

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[6] There is a whole pantheon of these *abosom*, for their number increases continually. Some acquire country-wide fame for a season and then pass into oblivion; while others, like the *Ntoa* lesser divinities of Nkoranza, Wenchi, and Techiman, or the *Tano*, have become lesser divinities within tribal bounds. Elaborate annual festivals are held in their honour. Of these lesser divinities, the most powerful are spirits of rivers.

[7] Some Christians entertain another suggestion that *abro* (useless*)* and *som* (worship) connote the meaning of *abosom.* Such a suggestion is just a negative expression by which Christians show their contempt and disregard for the *abosom.*

[8] The habitat of the *abosom,* according to traditional Akan culture, is not always stones or rocks. Particularly amongst the Ashantis (on whom Sarpong's and Pobee's studies are based) almost all the ancient and original *abosom* are water deities (lesser divinities). On that basis, Sarpong's and Pobee's suggestion does not bring the true meaning of *abosom* to the fore. Sarpong (1974:15) however admits that it is not easy to determine the precise nature of *abosom* (lesser divinities).

[9] Pobee (1979:46) advances another view, namely that the etymological association of the lesser divinities with a rock gives a hint of a stone that is usually put as security to support the shrine of the lesser divinities. Phil Bartle (2005:1), a Western sociologist and a former lecturer at the University of Cape Coast, supports this view.

river, or a rock; or a priest might prepare for the spirit a wooden image or mound of mud daubed with blood placed in a basin and kept in a temple.

Amongst the Akan the *tete abosom* mainly reside in water, that is, in rivers, lakes, or streams. The various forms of water are more or less perceived to contain power based on the spirit of the water that *Onyame* created directly (Rattray 1959:11-12, Opoku 1978:55).[10] The *abosom* (lesser divinities) will not always be present in this temporary abode which they enter at will when summoned by a priest.

It is generally believed that *abosom* have not originated as human beings.[11] They are distinct from the spirits of the dead though they may reside also in human beings. It is in addition generally believed that *abosom* (lesser divinities) were directly or indirectly created by *Onyame*, since nothing exists outside *Onyame* in terms of Akan life and thought (Rattray 1959:26). Thus, *abosom* are creatures of *Onyame* and are subordinate to Him, although they may use their enormous powers independently of Him. They may be male or female, but their influence is independent of their gender (also see Field 1940, 1961).

Sarpong (1974) and Pobee (1979) maintain that, traditionally, the lesser divinities were called *Nyame mma* ("children of the Supreme Being"). With this, these theologians propose an inter-mediary role of the *abosom* between *Onyame* and human beings. However, according to the Akan traditional thought form, it may mean nothing more than the idea that they were created by *Onyame*.

Another category of lesser divinities is relatively more recent in origin and was introduced from the outside into the Akan context. It is perhaps better to refer to them as "elevated fetish". These are physical objects or instruments used in the practice of magic and have been elevated to the status of lesser divinity. They are called *suman bosom* by the Akan. The *suman* may be in the form of beads, or medicine balls carried on strings or in a sheep's horn or a gourd. Some of them are no more than charms or talisman that could be regarded as impersonal forces acting in obedience to secret formulae and operations. A *suman* is believed

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[10]   Not every lesser divinity is benevolent to human beings. Some indeed are, but others are mischievous. They punish those who do not offer them the due worship and obedience. Sacrifices are made to them either to repay the benignity of the good ones or to avoid the malignity of the ill-disposed ones (Sarpong 1974: 17). This explains the two categories of *abosom*.

[11]   In some African societies such as amongst the Yoruba of Nigeria, some lesser divinities were originally ancestors. Likewise, in Greek and Mesopotamian societies some of the gods were demoted to become lesser divinities – as one of them emerges as Supreme Being and others were subsequently demoted. Some scholars have suggested that the same occurred in Judaism: when Yahweh became Supreme and other gods within the divine assembly ultimately became what we know today as angels.

to protect the wearer and guards him or her against harm, or assists him or her to gain personal ends, and functions effectively or not, according to the care rendered to it (Busia 1976:195).

This category of *abosom,* unlike the *tete abosom,* belongs to the individuals and operates in the interest of the owners who, for personal ends, may put these to beneficial or harmful use. The *abosom* are believed to hate and to kill witches (Rattray1959:9-12).

Amongst the Akan, it is believed that the power of *suman bosom* comes from the *mmoatia* (dwarfs), *sasabonsam* (evil spirits), *saman bofou* (fetish spirits) and *abayifo* (witches) and sometimes from plants and trees. Although *suman* may be part of *abosom, suman* and *abosom* are in themselves distinct. *Suman* (fetish) do not have traditional priests who serve them, although a traditional priest may usually have *suman* of his own. *Suman* are personal charms. They help the *osofo* (traditional priest) or the owner personally for protection. It is believed that *suman* also make the *tete bosom* more powerful (Rattray 1959:14, also see Agyarko 2006:17-19).

On the basis of the above analysis, it will be an over-generalisation to speak of all *abosom* as evil forces or spirits. The Akan actually do not see the *tete abosom* as evil forces as such. Instead, the Akan see them as community guides who may receive their powers from God (see Busia 1976:193, also Mbiti 1969:87). Rattray (1959: 23) rightly comments: "The main power, or the most important spirit in *abosom,* comes directly or indirectly from *Nyame,* the Supreme Being."

Nevertheless, the *suman bosom* can be justifiably identified with evil forces or spirits because the Akan themselves regard them as such. On this basis Sarpong suggests that we should identify the good *abosom* with the good angels and the evil *abosom* with evil angels (Sarpong 1996:43).

Notwithstanding such a traditional view, many Christians in Ghana do in fact regard the *abosom* (lesser divinities) as gods. Maintaining a cult for such *abosom* would therefore be at variance with the first commandment. However, strictly speaking, the *abosom* are not gods, neither do they rival God. The first commandment reads: I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you lived as slaves. You shall have no other gods, to rival me (Exodus 20:1-2). Contextually, the first commandment presupposes "spirit beings" that are perceived to be "gods" and thereby rival Yahweh. The sin against this commandment which we run the greatest risk of committing, is giving the glory and honour which are due to

God to any other god or creature.[12]

When the Bible mentions the gods of Babylon, Persia, and Greece, it is talking of beings whose worshippers thought and believed they were at least equal to the Jewish Yahweh. Hence God could say: Thou shall not serve any other god apart from me (Exodus 20:3). "Baal" and "Zeus" were competing with Yahweh. This is simply unthinkable in African Traditional Religion. *Onyame* has no competitors and the worshippers of *abosom* know and acknowledge this (Sarpong 2002:97).

 The *abosom* are neither the "gods" the author of the first commandment had in mind, nor spirit beings who in any way rival Yahweh, as already explained above. In this respect, it would be possible to attribute divinity to "lesser divinities" (*abosom*) yet not regard them as gods – in the sense of Ancient Near East and Middle-East. For the Akan, divinity does not necessarily refer to the Supreme Being only; it could also denote the lesser divinities.

Nonetheless, another related question needs to be asked here: are the *abosom* idols? Of course verse 3 of the same passage enjoins Yahweh's followers not to worship idols. Also in the New Testament, I Corinthians 11:8-11, Paul contends that making an offering to the idols is the same as making it to demons, and that comprises idolatry. This stand is explained by Paul's contention that all the gods of the Gentiles are demons.

According to Barrett (1973:237), Paul was convinced that the image used to represent idolatrous worship was a block of wood or stone and nothing more; it neither contains power to bless nor curse. He also points out that Paul at the same time believed in the reality of an unseen world, and that to him idolatry was not merely meaningless but positively evil.

Sifting through Barrett's analysis of the passage, one could still see that Barrett has evil spirits in mind. But as already explained, Akan *tete abosom* are not evil as such, at least in the conception of the traditional Akan. In keeping with this, one may still ask: How should the Akan Christian relate to *abosom?* Since we are still confronting the problem of *abosom* who are not evil yet constitute idols. Would the Akan Christian who dabbles in the cults of *abosom* run the risk of idolatry?

Taking the verses of Exodus 20:1-3 together, idolatry could be defined as the worship of idols (or images); the worship of the polytheistic gods by the use of idols (or images) and even as

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[12]   These commandments were written as rejoinders to the beliefs and practices of the polytheistic religions of the Ancient Near East. The Bible is clearly responding to the religions of Akkad, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. The spirit beings who are gods according to the understanding of people of the Ancient Near East were seen as rivals of Yahweh.

the use of idols in the worship of the Bible's monotheistic God. The word "idolatry" (from 'idol') comes from the Greek word *eidololatria*, which is a compound of *eidolon*, "image" or "figure", and *latria*, "worship". *Eidololatria* appears to be borrowed translation of the Hebrew phrase *avodat elilim* meaning worship of idols (Buchsel 1974:375-380).

Various terms, expressing scorn and disdain, are sometimes applied to the idols. Thus, idols are stigmatised as "non-God" (Deuteronomy 32:17, 21 Jeremiah 2:11), things of naught (Leviticus 41:29), "a lie" (Isaiah 44:20), and similar epithets. Idols are said to be made of gold, silver, wood, and stone, and are graven images. Being the products of human hand, idols are unable to speak, see, hear, smell, eat or feel. They are also powerless, either to injure or to be of some benefit. Idols were named according to their material or manner in which they were made. At first, the gods and their images were conceived of as identical; but in later times a distinction was drawn between the god and its image.

Temples, altars, and statues were erected to the gods. Prayers were offered to these gods (Exodus 20:5). They were invoked by name (1 Kings 18-19, 21), their names were praised (Joshua 23: 7), incense was burned in their honour (1 Kings 11:8), they were invoked by the taking of oaths, and sacrifices were immolated to them (Jeremiah 7:18). The victims even included human beings, such as the offering made to Moloch (Buchsel 1974:375-380).

From the above analysis, an Akan Christian may argue that the *abosom* are not the gods that the first commandment had in mind. However, looking at the biblical description of what constitutes an idol, it is obvious that the Akan *abosom* are idols. In this respect, one may agree with Barrett as he rightly argues that idol worship is evil primarily because it robbed the true God of the glory due to him alone. This type of worship is also evil because it meant that subjects are engaged in a spiritual act and are directing their worship towards something other than the one true God. Thus, to Barrett, the harmful effect of idol worship is related to the way in which worshippers commit themselves to evil through subordinate power. Therefore the argument, which is very strong amongst African theologians, that the *abosom* receive the worship on behalf of *Onyame* (God), would not suffice here. The reason is that, the first commandment categorically condemned the use of idols as means to worship God.

The question that now besets us is this: Can we categorise Jesus as being amongst the *abosom* (lesser divinities) as Onaiyekan for example suggested? In my opinion, the response to this question is an unequivocal denial. Such a view of Christ is sorely inadequate since it fails to do justice to the Nicene notion of Christ as truly God and "of one being" with the Father. The

abosom or *orisha* are at best lesser divinities. Such images do not adequately express the true divinity of Jesus. Besides, the cult of *abosom* clearly fits into the category of idols which the first commandment condemns.

In another discussion of the lesser divinities and angels, Sarpong (a Roman Catholic Archbishop in Kumasi), suggests that a belief in angels can replace belief in *abosom* (lesser divinities). Ezeanya (1969:425) concurs with this view. Indeed, of the so-called intermediary figures in pre-Christian Judaism, angels were also regarded as intermediaries. There was a clear enough concept of angelic leadership functioning as mediators between God and humankind. However, there was certainly no thought of angels becoming human in order to redeem humankind. Moreover, the consideration of Jesus as an angel was discouraged in the early church. The image of Jesus as an angel would also starkly contradict the Nicene understanding of the person of Christ as angels are neither in the class of God nor of human beings. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to view the *abosom* as angels in their own right. An exploration of this theme falls outside the scope of this thesis though.[13]

From this contextual analysis, I conclude that the status of Jesus as fully human and fully God would put Jesus beyond the status of *abosom*. However, if it is indeed inappropriate to categorise Jesus as being amongst the *abosom* (lesser divinities), would that necessarily imply that Jesus is on par with *Onyame* – since the Akan have only these two categories of divinities? This question is explored in the next section.

b) Can one say that Jesus is *Onyame* (God)?

In a symposium published in 1979, Don Cupitt (1979:31) set out to analyse the expression "Jesus is God", on the ground that Christians were often considered as people who believed that Jesus is God. He nevertheless adds that few theologians would accept that formula without qualification.

Sturch (1982:326), an evangelical scholar, readily affirmed that Cupitt is correct on this point. More importantly, while he agrees with Cupitt, he also disagrees with the implication that Cupitt had drawn from such statements – that Jesus is not in the class of God. Sturch also makes some valuable suggestions with regard to how one could view Jesus as truly human as well as truly God. This question is important to this study seeing that the Akan Bible translators have identified *Onyame* – the Akan notion of Supreme Being with the God Christians proclaimed.

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13   See Agyarko (2006:139-146).

Thus, in this section, my focus is to establish whether and in what form one can say, within the Akan context, that Jesus is *Onyame*. Amongst the Akan, *Onyame* is not just an abstract Supreme Being. It is clear that *Onyame* is not a compound name or a term used in any generic sense. It entails a personal name. It is a singular, and does not in any way denote a sense of a divine assembly. In the current usage, *Onyame* is identified with the God Christians proclaim, as seen in the Akan Bible translation. In this respect, a similar inquiry would help to assess the divinity of Jesus in the Akan context.[14]

These analyses will take three phases. Firstly, I will analyse the Akan traditional connotations attached to the name *Onyame*. This is to find out whether the concept of *Onyame* can readily be identified with the God Christians proclaim. Secondly, I will analyse the expression "Jesus is God" within the context of Christian (Nicene) affirmation of the person of Christ. Thirdly, I will assess how the analysis of the second phase – "Jesus is God" affects a similar statement: Jesus is *Onyame* – granted that *Onyame* is the God proclaimed by Christians.

Firstly, the concept of *Onyame* (God) as the creator of the world and human beings and the final authority in all matters, is original to the Akan traditional culture and religion. This idea is firmly entrenched in the religious beliefs of the Akan people and is fundamental to their religious systems (Opoku 1978:14, Sarpong 1974:13, Gyekye 1996:7).

The Akan have names for *Onyame* which are different from the names given to other spiritual beings they recognise. These special names express the idea of the uniqueness of *Onyame* (God) and reflect the attributes given to him (Opoku 1978:14, 1975). The concept which the Akan have of the Supreme Being may be gathered from the titles ascribed to him. He is, the Akan say, older than all the things that live on the wide, wide earth (*Asase tere, na Onyame ne Panin)*. He is *Onyankopon,* alone, the great one; *Bore-bore*, the first, the Creator of all things; *Otumfo,* the powerful One; *Odomankoma,* the eternal one. God is also personalised as one who acts amongst human beings. Thus, when evil befalls one who had acted in an evil way, it is said that God has punished him or her.

The name *Onyame* or *Onyankopon* is exclusively used for the Supreme Being. It is singular and does not in any sense express a divine assembly (Ryan 1980:162, Sarpong 1974:10). He is never represented in the form of images nor worshipped through them.[15] *Onyame* is also considered unique and different from all the other spirits or divinities. Thus the *obosom*

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[14]   Here I draw on Sturch's analysis (Sturch 1986).

[15]   The Akan also rarely dedicate temples and shrines to *Onyame*.

(lesser divinity) or *abosom* (lesser divinities) are never referred to as *Onyame* or *anyame;* neither has *Onyame* ever been placed in the category of the *abosom* (Sarpong 2002:97). On this basis Ryan rightly argues that it is wrong to place *Onyame* and *abosom* in the same class and refer to them as God and gods as if both have the same personality. Ryan rightly observes that there is no authentic dialect of the Akan language that yields an adequate equivalent of the Semitic and Greco-Roman pair called God and gods (Ryan 1980:164).[16]

To the Akan, *Onyame* is essentially a spirit, a being who is invisible to humankind but who is omnipresent. The invisible nature of God is usually expressed in concrete terms. Amongst the Akan, *Onyame* has never manifested himself physically in any form. There is no myth, story, or song that suggests this manifestation. The Akan only liken *Onyame* to the sky but do not identify God with it. The sky is seen as the abode of *Onyame*. The Akan also liken *Onyame* to the wind. As the Akan maxim says: "if you want to speak to God, talk to the wind." But they do not identify *Onyame* with this phenomenon.[17]

In this analysis, it is clear that *Onyame* consists of one indivisible essence in His essential being or constitutional nature. Thus, it can be concretely affirmed that according to the Akan concept, the unity of the person of *Onyame* is strongly affirmed.

Secondly, one has to view the Akan concept of God against the background of Old Testament ideas of God. That is in order to conclude that it may be justifiable to consider the Akan concept of *Onyame* and the Old Testament idea of God as similar. Nevertheless, as much as the concept of *Onyame* may correlate with the Old Testament idea of God, this monotheistic stance alone is not adequate to reinterpret the person of Christ according to the Nicene confessional formula.

As Hurtado has noted, the exclusive monotheism of ancient Judaism is the crucial religious context in which to view exponents' devotion to Christ in early Christianity. But, he cautions that one should not assume that this stance on monotheism was transferred into early

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[16]   Ryan further rightly argues that the recent translation of the Bible into Asante Twi, which translates the plural "elohim" of Psalm 82:6 as anyame, a neologism foisted on the traditional unique *Onyame* in the nineteenth century, is not correct. He contends that by so doing, the translators have over-dignified the divine antagonist of Yahweh in Israel and they have thereby underrated the Supreme Being in West Africa (Ryan 1980:164).

[17]   The idea of the original closeness of God is illustrated by the myth of *Onyame's* withdrawal. According to the belief, originally everyone had direct access to the Supreme Being. However, it is believed that such direct access was marred due to humankind's sin (represented by the old woman) against God. Nevertheless, there is another saying: "*Obi nkyere abofra Onyame*", which may mean either, "No-one shows a child the Supreme Being" (he knows it by instinct) or, "No-one shows the child the sky" (which is the abode of the Supreme Being).

Christian circles (Hurtado 2003:48). Notably, the Christian (Nicene) notion of God can better be described in terms of the confession of the "triune God". Therefore, the Christian notion of the triune God calls for a new perspective on the idea of God. It is very important for the Akan Christians to view *Onyame* (God) as the triune God, if one will identify the Akan concept of God with the God Christians proclaim. Otherwise, any Christological proposal from within the Akan context will degenerate into the heresy of modalism.

Secondly, based on this trinitarian Christian understanding of God, can one argue that Jesus is God? Sturch (1986:326) has rightly pointed out that the statement "Jesus is God" is nowhere to be found in the Bible itself, nor in any of the church's historic creeds, nor even in the confession of the Council of Chalcedon. Sturch further points out that even the most celebrated of all assertions of our Lord's divinity, the prologue to John's Gospel, does not make any statement of which "Jesus" is the direct subject; indeed, it does not use that name. This indirect approach to the assertion of Jesus' divinity is in fact typical of the New Testament testimony.

Jesus is Lord, yes, but that is perhaps more an acclamation than a theological statement with distinct theological implications. The blunt statement "Jesus is God" is avoided in the Scriptures. As noted above, even the great Christological definition of Chalcedon – perhaps one should say especially the definition of Chalcedon, with its careful accuracy – avoids this assertion. It is stated: "We teach men to acknowledge . . . our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete also in manhood, truly God and truly man."

In this regard a distinct question arises: Does the reason for this strange linguistic habit lie in a logical difficulty, or impossibility rooted in the details of the case? Is it as untrue to say "Jesus is God," as it would be to say that "Robert is God"? One may argue, if the doctrine is essential to the Christian faith, why is it that none of the biblical authors ever inserts the expression, and why so many later authors have avoided it. We therefore need to look carefully into the possibility that there may lie some sort of difficulty in the unqualified assertion that Jesus is God. The most obvious possibility is that there is some catch in the implementation of the word "is". There are, irritatingly, certain difficulties in claiming either that the "is" in "Jesus is God" pertains to one of identity or one of predication. If it is one of identity, the statement should be reversible.

In this respect, if someone willingly says "Jesus is God" we might well balk at the saying "God is Jesus". The confessional expression "God is Jesus" by itself suggests that there is no

more to God over and above the man Jesus, which is not the case.[18] Going by this, we may run the risk of the "heresy" of modalistic monarchianism.[19]

However, perhaps "God" is not a proper name after all.[20] Does not this make "God" a mere descriptive phrase, equivalent to (say) "the supreme being" or "the only proper object of worship"? This seems fair enough. Unfortunately, it turns out to raise the selfsame difficulty as approaching "God" as a proper name.[21]

That will enable us to use the word "God" as a predicate, undoubtedly, but only at the cost of saying "Jesus is *a* God". Then a polytheist might also accept this affirmation. For such a notion would fit well in the confessional construct of a divine assembly. However, that is not an option for those who adhere to Nicene Christianity, even those who subscribe to the monotheism.[22]

It seems, then, that the New Testament and the widespread tradition of later Christianity were right not to use the unqualified statement "Jesus is God". To do so lands one in serious logical and theological difficulties. In this respect, the statement that "Jesus is God", cannot be sustained. Yet such a linguistic barrier does not necessarily mean that one cannot see Jesus as God.

One cannot technically say that "Jesus is God". Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean that one cannot say that Jesus is fully God as well as fully human, at least within the conceptual framework of the confession of faith in the triune God. The former statement restricts one from identifying the person of Jesus with that of God. The contention here is that God is seen as a single entity – monotheistic. However, it may be argued that the Christian concept of God, strictly speaking, is rather trinitarian or communitarian.

Thirdly, applying this insight to the Akan context, how do we then answer the question: Can one say that Jesus is *Onyame?* Obviously, if one grants that the Akan word *Onyame* refers to the same God as the One proclaimed by Christians, then it would be logically inconsistent for Akan Christians also to say that "Jesus is *Onyame"*. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that one cannot affirm that Jesus is truly *Onyame* (God) as well as truly human, in the

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[18] This is the natural way to approach the "is" in the affirmation "Jesus is God".

[19] Or patripassionism – one God parading in different "masks".

[20] Elijah's challenge on Mount Carmel: "If the Lord is God, then follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."

[21] The definite article picks out a single being or object; and a being or object, like a proper name, cannot be predicated of anything, it can only be identical with it. Nor will it help to omit the definite article.

[22] A debate exists in Christian theology as to whether *monotheism* describes the Christian faith accurately. We can however not enter that debate seeing that it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Akan traditional context. That is, provided it can be proved that the idea of the triune God can be sustained within the Akan concept of *Onyame*. This leads us to another phase of the problem to assess whether the affirmation that Jesus is truly God as well as truly human can be sustained in terms of Akan concepts.

How then do Akan Christians approach the problem of the identity of the person of Jesus in the Akan context – seeing that Jesus could not be considered to be *obosom* (a lesser divinity) nor can one say that "Jesus is *Onyame"?* This problem becomes especially complex as the Akan recognise only two categories of divinities: the unique divinity of *Onyame* and the cult of *abosom* (the lesser divinities). Admittedly, this may not be an easy task. I will nevertheless offer some suggestions in this regard in chapter 6 of this thesis by making use of the Akan anthropology and conception of God.

c) Can the image of Divine conqueror adequately express the Nicene notion that Jesus Christ is "truly God"?

The emphasis of Christology adhering to the notion of the divine conqueror is on Jesus' divinity. He has overcome the spiritual realm because he is a powerful divine being. He is the Saviour because he is more powerful than all the evil spirits. In keeping with this, one may think that as it stands, the divinity of Jesus is adequately expressed in the divine conqueror Christology. However, that is not exactly the case. For the Akan, divinity does not necessarily refer to the Supreme Being (*Onyame*); it could also refer to the lesser divinities.

This calls for some clarification on the nature of Jesus' divinity as understood in the context of a divine conqueror Christology. The subtle difference here is that the Akan use the term *Onyame* which is identified with the God which Christians proclaimed only in singular sense, whereas the usage of divinity might apply to *Onyame* and *abosom* (the lesser divinities) and many others.

However, amongst the Akan (as already stated) the oneness of the Supreme Being is assumed, while the concept of divine assembly is foreign within the Akan worldview. It therefore requires that one establishes how Jesus could not only be regarded as "divine" but as "truly God". That is to say, Jesus could not be simply regarded as *Onyame* (the Supreme Being) or as being one with *Onyame* unless one shows that the form of Jesus could be described as "of one being with the Father". The divine conqueror Christology has not yet established this belief; thus it differs starkly from the Nicene definition of the person of Christ.

d) Can the Divine conqueror image adequately express the true humanity of Christ?

The humanity of Jesus is an aspect of New Testament Christology which is vital to any construct of Christology (Torrance 1981). However, as Jesus is taken to belong essentially to the more powerful context of divine beings in the spiritual realm, his humanity is not adequately expressed in the divine conqueror Christology. The general perception of Jesus as divine conqueror has no essential link with his historic humanity.

Amongst the Akan, it is believed that the *abosom* (lesser divinities) sometimes assume human form temporarily to carry out needed tasks. Likewise, some trees and certain animals also take on human form temporarily to participate in human affairs. Beyond merely assuming temporary human form, it is also believed that the *abosom* sometimes take on human form and live amongst human beings. In such instances they have passed through a normal human birth process but develop and die in an unusual manner; they never reach adulthood. Amongst the Akan, those who are labelled in such a category are not regarded as truly human beings. Moreover, the Akan do not accord the status of human being to all who undergo the human birth process. A new born baby is not regarded as fully human until the eighth day of its existence.

Ghanaian Christians usually place emphasis on the blood of Jesus which logically has a link with Jesus as a historical person. Yet, the focus is not on the humanity of Christ but on his divinity instead. It is not so much that Jesus becomes human in order to redeem humankind. But, as a powerful divine being, Jesus' blood is regarded as inherently powerful.[23] In the Ghanaian context, if one mentions the "blood of Jesus", it may relate to Jesus' divinity rather than his humanity. In this respect, there may be some uncertainty with respect to the status of Jesus' true humanity with regard to his work as divine Conqueror.

3.3.2 Comparative analysis on the work of Christ as divine conqueror in the Akan context

In this section, I will analyse the above topic under two headings: (a) does any spirit being (divinity) serve as mediator between God and humankind? And (b) can the divine conqueror image adequately express Christ's atoning work?

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[23] One can comprehend the Akan Christian usage of the "blood of Jesus" as a weapon against an evil spirit better if one understands the practices of collecting bath water from a religious cult leader. It is believed that, if someone is powerful, anything or anyone that comes into contact with that person becomes partly contaminated with the power he or she possesses. This is particularly observed amongst the members of the African Indigenous Churches.

a) Does any spirit being (divinity) serve as mediator between God and humankind?

Basic to all the theories of atonement lies the idea that Christ is the only trustworthy mediator between God and humankind. African theological discourse entertains an on-going debate on whether the lesser divinities (and also the ancestors) serve as the intermediaries between God and humankind. In this respect, the question we will explore here is whether the spirit beings are regarded as intermediaries between God and humankind – that may fit the role of Jesus as Mediator in this regard.

Some African theologians, including Sarpong (1974:19), Pobee (1979:65) Bediako (2000) and Mbiti, contend that the lesser divinities serve as intermediaries between God and humankind.[24] However, such a claim has not gone unchallenged by some other African theologians (Dickson 1984:52-53, Ukpong 1983:188).

According to this intermediary theory, the Supreme Being is such a great king that most of the time he may not be approached directly. He has delegated authority to the lesser divinities to deal with the relatively trivial affairs of human beings. Thus, the lesser divinities are assumed, in theory to operate as representatives of God. Moreover, God is also conceived of as retiring into heaven after creation, leaving the governing of the world in the hands of the lesser divinities (Pobee 1979:65, 188, Parrinder 1983, McVeigh 1974).

However, it could be argued that the intermediary theory is not an original concept of the Akan but a created one with a very weak basis in Akan thought and life (Dickson 1984:52-53, also see Ukpong 1983). In what follows, I will offer a discussion on the basis of this theory and the response to it.

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[24] Some African theologians, including Mbiti, Idowu and Pobee, hold that the lesser divinities serve as intermediaries between God and humankind. But these theologians believe that such intermediaries have no part to play in the Christian faith, because Christians shun them. It is assumed here that the traditional role of lesser divinities as intermediaries has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. In contrast to this view, Sarpong holds that, although Jesus is the only mediator between God and human beings, the functions of the lesser divinities are more likened to that of the angels. On that basis, the mediating role of Jesus Christ does not affect the intermediary role of the lesser divinities. In analysing the different positions regarding the intermediary role of the lesser divinities, one is likely to pose this question: If the lesser divinities are regarded as ministers in *Onyame's* government, when was their appointment terminated since *Onyame* (God) has been identified as the Christian God? There is no myth, story or proverb of the Akan to suggest the fall of the lesser divinities. In this respect, there may be a logical inconsistency here. That is if one is to maintain that the lesser divinities serve as intermediaries between *Onyame* and humankind but ceased to function as such within the context of Christianity. Obviously, the traditional Akan will get the impression that God is an enemy of his former minister in the Western society but a co-worker with the same ministers elsewhere. Based on this analysis, it seems that Sarpong's approach carries yet further internal consistency. However, the problem remains whether there are adequate theological grounds to reconfigure the lesser divinities as good and evil angels as Sarpong has proposed (see my MPhil thesis [Agyarko 2006, chapter 3] for a discussion in this regard). Also see Pobee (1979:65, 188), Idowu (1973) Mbiti (1970) and Turaki (1999).

(i) Arguments in support of the theory

Firstly, the concept of God in Akan traditional religion is associated with the myth of God withdrawing from human beings. According to this myth, it was the pestle of the woman pounding *fufu* (a local Akan dish), which finally drove God upward. The myth is quite explicit about God being remote from the world of human beings (Dickson 1984:52). This may support the view that *Onyame* (God) after the creation has retired into heaven, leaving the governing of the world in the hands of the lesser divinities.

Secondly, it is assumed that certain spirits, particularly the water spirits, are God's sons and the relationship between God and these lesser divinities is considered to be that of the sovereign and His/Her delegated ministers (Sarpong 1974:19, Pobee 1979). In this regard, Pobee maintains that the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanction for wellbeing and punishment for evil.

Thirdly, there is also an assumption that the *abosom* (lesser divinities) and the ancestors are *akyeame*, ("linguists" or spokespersons) between God and human beings (Idowu 1962:116, Gaba 1968, see Dickson 1984). According to Pobee, the Supreme Being is conceived of as a great paramount chief who is so important that he has to be approached through sub-chiefs and his official spokesperson called *okyeame,* who in public matters acts like the chief. He exercises royal authority, even if it is subordinate to that of the paramount chief.

In the Akan court, the linguist is a highly ranked personality. Being close to the chief, requests and pronouncements are passed through him to the chief. He sometimes even acts for the chief in the latter's absence. This could be applied to the relationship of God with the lesser divinities. Therefore the use of the expression "intermediary" may very well reflect the belief that God is the ultimate, and the lesser divinities serve as the intermediaries between God and human beings.

Fourthly, polytheism has been defined as a qualitative and not a quantitative concept. It is argued that polytheism is not "a belief in a plurality of gods but rather the lack of a unifying and transcending ultimate which determines its character". Applying such a definition within the context of African traditional religion would exonerate the African traditional religion from the charge of polytheism. For Idowu, since the lesser divinities are regarded as creatures of God, it can at least be said that some good works are credited to them, and that they are ministers of good works for human beings on behalf of God. For that matter, they are ministers of God, since, in African thought and life, all good works come from God (Idowu 1962: 62).

(ii) Arguments against the theory

In reaction to the intermediary theory, it could be argued that the story of God's self-withdrawal from human beings and the need to demonstrate His power, overstates the meaning of the myth. I argue that the myth of the closeness and the subsequent withdrawal of *Onyame* (Supreme Being) seeks to explain the gap between the earth as the dwelling place of humans, and the sky as God's abode.

It is common amongst the Akan to explain a valley as the abode or deserted dwelling of a certain river *obosom* (lesser divinity) who withdrew due to the misbehaviour of the people in the area towards "him" or "her". It is generally believed that such lesser divinities disguised themselves in some shape, usually that of a wretched person, to ask for water, but were subsequently denied. Thus, almost all of the valleys and dried up river beds relate a story of a departed river spirit who was defied by the people. With regard to such common stories about the withdrawal of the river spirits, can we not also argue that the withdrawal of "the God who has the sky as His abode" is based on something similar to the plight of the river spirits?

Nevertheless, from this myth, one may infer the existence of a broken relationship between God and humankind due to evil done to God. Indeed, such a marred relationship demands intermediaries between God and humankind. But for one to refer to the lesser divinities as such intermediaries would demand evidence from ritual practices or myth or extracts from any of the traditional sayings. However, such a theory has not yet been proved in ritual practice. Thus, the view that the lesser divinities serve as the intermediaries between God and humankind does not express the experiences and cultures of Africans.

Yet another issue undermines the theory. In ritual practice amongst the Akan, the lesser divinities do not function as the intermediaries between God and human beings but rather between the ancestors and human beings. Busia (1953:25-26) notes that the wishes of the ancestors are believed to be made known to the human community more often through the *abosom*. Sarpong (2002:96) also affirms that the lesser divinities are the spokespeople for the ancestors. Whereas the lesser divinities usually relay messages from the ancestors to human beings, they rarely, if ever, carry a message from *Onyame* (Supreme Being) to human beings.

Also, whereas the lesser divinities at times receive sacrifices on behalf of the ancestors, they rarely, if ever, receive sacrifices on behalf of *Onyame* (God). Amongst the Akan, as well as the Ibibio in Nigeria, the intermediary theory is not borne out by any aspect of their sacrificial system. For neither the sacrificial structure nor the sacrificial rituals and prayers imply that every sacrifice is aimed ultimately toward God. This can be said of most West African

peoples. What is evident is that sacrifices are always addressed to specific spiritual beings. If such intermediary function were always implied in every sacrifice to the lesser divinities, it would of course be unnecessary to address specific spiritual beings if sacrifices are ultimately offered to God (Ukpong 1983:180).

If all the sacrifices offered to the lesser divinities are ultimately meant for God, which sacrifices are then offered to evil spirits? Amongst the Akan and also Ibibio for example, such sacrifices are always treated with contempt and are intended to keep these spirits as bay. Amongst the Ibibio of Nigeria, items for such sacrifices are generally not fit for human consumption and there is generally no accompanying sacrificial meal. Thus, to infer that such sacrifices are ultimately intended for God is simply repugnant to the spirit of these people who would not want to offer contemptuous sacrifices to God. It must be accepted then that these sacrifices are meant for these spirits. And if evil spirits can demand and enjoy sacrifices meant for themselves, good spirits must likewise be considered capable of demanding and receiving sacrifices themselves (Ukpong 1982).

Moreover, amongst most West African peoples, God is regarded as supremely good and cannot be thought of as the author of evil. Amongst many African societies, calamities such as epidemics or famine are attributed to the lesser divinities. Therefore sacrifices are offered to these divinities to placate them. To say that such sacrifices are ultimately intended for God, would mean that God is considered the cause of that specific epidemic or calamity, and this is repugnant to these peoples' conception of God (Ukpong 1983:180).

Furthermore, in African (particularly Akan) thought and life, the lesser divinities are simply regarded as God's creatures. To advance a concept that the lesser divinities are "sons of God" as done in "Hellenism", is an idea totally foreign to African traditional religion.

Nevertheless, in some areas the Akan use the concept of "sonship". Firstly, there are those whose parents in a special situation (e.g. where they experience barrenness') solicit the service of certain *abosom* to help bear them a child. When the woman gives birth, the child will be considered to be the "son" or a child of the *abosom*. Secondly, all the seriously mentally and bodily deformed children are also seen as "sons" or children of the (river) "*abosom*" (*nnsuoba*). Thirdly, a popular story runs that river *Bia* and river *Tano* are first and second sons of God respectively.

However, in all three cases mentioned, there is amongst the Akan no authentic myth, proverb, or saying that denotes a sense of representation or intermediary role of the lesser divinities on

behalf of God. According to tradition *Onyame* is approached concurrently with the other lesser divinities without any sense of jealousy on the part of *Onyame.* As Elizabeth Amoah rightly points out, there is very little room for religious exclusivism amongst the Akan (Amoah 1998:3).

Remarkably, the idea that the lesser divinities serve as the intermediary between the Supreme Being and humankind was actually employed to exonerate African traditional religion from the charge of polytheism and idolatry. The charge of idolatry matters, and it is indeed considered a serious sin in Judaism and Christianity. However, such a problem does not exist in terms of Akan religious experience. Amongst the Akan, *Onyame* (unlike in the Judeo-Christian concept of Yahweh) is not a jealous God in any practical sense when it comes to relating to the lesser divinities. *Onyame* seems to rule concurrently with the lesser divinities, other spirits and the ancestors (without any sense of agency or representativeness, at least in practice). Therefore *Onyame* does not need to reduce the *abosom* to intermediaries to be the sole recipient of human worship.

Based on this analysis, some scholars point out that the idea of the lesser divinities acting as intermediaries does not originally form part of the Akan belief system. The most important concern was raised by p'Bitek (1970) in his book *African Religions in Western Scholarship*. He criticised Danquah, Mbiti and Idowu amongst others, on African religions in general and what he called the "Hellenisation" of African lesser divinities. He notes that these theologians are introducing Greek metaphysical constructs into African traditional religion. He rightly pointed out that such views were put forward by students of African religion and cannot be associated with traditional Africans (p'Bitek 1970).

In light of this analysis, I suggest that the concept of the intermediary role of the lesser divinities (and even that of the ancestors) is not based on a solid foundation in Akan thought and life. On that basis, there is no adequate theological ground to reconfigure the lesser divinities (even the ancestors) as intermediaries between God and humankind.[25]

b) Can the image of a divine conqueror express the atoning work of Christ adequately?

On the one hand, the understanding of the person of Jesus Christ shaped by the Council of Nicea (325/381) and Chalcedon (451) portrayed Jesus as being fully human as well as fully

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[25]   Nevertheless, the fact still remains that the lesser divinities were created by God but are not in the same category as God. They are also not regarded as enemies of God in Akan traditional belief.

divine. With respect to the work of Christ, the Council of Nicea maintained that Jesus died "for us and our salvation". Combining the two facets, the person of Christ and the work of Christ strongly suggest that the work of Christ can only be meaningfully interpreted in reference to the person of Christ – truly God and truly human.

It is necessary that Christ should be truly human to die on behalf of humankind; otherwise his example becomes meaningless. It is also necessary that Christ has to be fully God to redeem humankind; otherwise salvation becomes merely human enterprise (Malone 1983 also see Hultgren 1987). However, divine conqueror Christology does not adequately portray Christ as a truly human being. Neither does it portray Christ as truly God either. As such, it does not adequately express the atoning work of Christ. I will return to this in more detail in 3.4.2 below.

3.4 The strengths and weaknesses of divine conqueror Christology

3.4.1 The strengths of divine conqueror Christology

Firstly, the credibility of the divine conqueror view is that, it is closer to the African and biblical worldviews. The divine spirit Christology is akin to the *Christus Victor* Christology the early church proclaimed. As Aulén argues, its credibility lies therein that it is closer to the early Christian understanding of the atoning work of Christ. This does apply to the divine conqueror Christology as well (Aulén 1931).

Secondly, the notion of Jesus as divine conqueror has been a vital tool against idolatry in African Christianity. Many Africans have an excessive fear for perceived spirit beings. Due to that, the relationship between Africans and such beings has been moulded into contractual obligations. In such a relationship, many Africans are not only depending on these spirit beings but worship them as well. Thus the traditional Africans invoke and ask for direct assistance from the lesser divinities, ancestors and other spirit beings and offer returns of veneration and worship.[26] In the perspective of the divine conqueror Christology, Jesus is portrayed as one who has overcome these spirit beings – particularly the lesser divinities. Thus, for many African Christians, the attention to the lesser divinities becomes redundant

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[26] The general perception amongst African Christians, particularly Akan Christians is that, all the traditional spirit beings – lesser divinities, ancestors and the others – are evil spirits or demonic forces that Jesus had overcome through his death and resurrection. The logic here remains, if Jesus is the conqueror of all other spirits, then in some sense it becomes baseless to invoke other spirits to solicit their assistance. Such an understanding might account for the decline of some key practices of African traditional religion amongst African Christians.

and useless. This is not to say that all African Christians no longer contact these lesser divinities and the ancestors. The fact is rather that these spirits are not so much feared as it used to be.[27] Obviously, such relief came through the notion of the perceived divine conqueror in the person of Jesus.

Thirdly, this view of Christ (divine conqueror Christology) has also helped to accelerate the growth of Christianity in Africa. Without doubt, the most common way through which many people have joined the church in Africa is through what one may call a "problem-solving approach". On the one hand, the perceived evil spirits are presented as the sources of all ills – religious, socio-economic or political. On the other hand, Jesus is presented as the divine conqueror who has power over all such perceived evil spirits. For the African Christians the slogan "Jesus is the answer" is meaningful without the sequel question: "What then is the problem?" The reason being that the problem is obvious, for, according to that view, the spirit beings are the source of all problems. Divine conqueror Christology therefore equips African Christians with a functional Christology that aids and protects followers from perceived anti-life forces. Interestingly, even non-Christian Akan in times of trouble usually invoke the name of Jesus as weapon against evil forces.

Fourthly, this view of Christ has served as a message of hope for the African in their struggles against socio-economic hardships. In their engagements with Christ, African Christians see Jesus as Liberator fighting for their "holistic" welfare – religious, socio-political and economic.

Based on the above points, the divine conqueror Christology can be considered much closer to the traditional African worldview and culture. This view of Christ therefore has an advantage of relaying a relevant Christianity to Africa.

3.4.2 The weaknesses of divine spirit Christology

Notwithstanding these advantages, divine conqueror Christology has many weaknesses. Summarising the three main ones will suffice. Firstly, divine conqueror Christology does not express the humanity of Jesus adequately. Within the context of divine conqueror Christo-logy, Jesus is basically seen as a divine being with no relation to humans. However, unless

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[27] The classic example is the evangelistic activities of William Harris, a Liberian evangelist who worked in Liberia, Ivory Coast and Ghana in the early part of 19th century. It was typical of Harris to present Jesus as a divine conqueror who is not only more powerful than the lesser divinities but has actually conquered all the lesser divinities. In Harris' evangelistic activities, one of the distinctive marks of conversion is that the people not only abandoned their idols, but sent them to Harris to incinarate them (see Walker 1976 and Shank 1980).

Jesus is truly human, his sharing of our condition becomes a mere abstraction (Gunton 1996:10-55). This conceptual defect obstructs a Christian understanding of Christ's resurrection. The problem is that if Christ was not a material being, his death cannot be understood in the sense of a human one. Thus, Christ's resurrection may also not be understood as unique in terms of a human understanding of death and resurrection.

Secondly, in the context of divine conqueror Christology, Jesus could at best be presented as one of the lesser divinities. As the above analysis of Jesus' divinity according to the Akan shows, the general perception of Jesus as divine conqueror has no essential link with *Onyame* (God). Thus, the Nicene notion that Jesus is "truly God" is not expressed adequately in divine conqueror Christology. This defect obviously affects Christian worship because if Jesus is not truly God, worshipping him as a person in his own right would become idolatry.

Thirdly, Christ's atoning work on the cross is not expressed adequately within the construct of divine conqueror Christology (Mbiti 1973:397-414, also see Bediako 2000:8). The divine spirit Christology cannot express the true divinity and true humanity of Christ adequately. Therefore this has also affected the view of atonement logically constructed from divine conqueror Christology. According to the Nicene perspective, the primary framework within which to understand the salvation of humankind, is the notion that Christ is truly God as well as truly human. In the Nicene Creed, the statement of "he died for our sins" is tagged along with the statement of "truly God and truly human". The two statements are so intrinsically linked that the former cannot be interpreted contextually without implying the latter as the larger context. Otherwise, the Nicene understanding of humankind's salvation could not be expressed adequately. Logically it follows that the divine conqueror Christology does not adequately express the salvific work of Christ because it fails to express the person of Christ as truly human as well as truly God adequately.

3.5 Conclusion

Methodologically, divine conqueror Christology may be regarded as a form of liberation Christology. Usually, liberation Christologies start from the function of the historical Jesus or some liberative activities performed by Jesus. In this respect, Jesus becomes a liberator or the one who suffers with the oppressed. However, unlike the other liberation Christologies which usually approach Christology "from below", divine conqueror Christology takes its point of departure "from above".

On the one hand, liberation Christologies in many cases present Jesus as charismatic leader.

This view of Christ of course does not express the divinity of Jesus adequately, which is essential for the doctrine of the trinity and of the atoning work of Christ.

On the other hand, divine conqueror Christology primarily presents Jesus as a divine being. This view neither adequately does justice to the person and the work of Christ. The reason is that it fails to account for the humanity of Christ, thus generating a docetic Christology. Moreover, it is not adequate to point to Jesus as divine being; one should also indicate how such a divine being is "of one being" with *Onyame* (God). This indication – Jesus as truly God becomes necessary as the *abosom* (lesser divinities) are also regarded as divine, however, not in the same class as God.

The methodological problem of finding the middle way between the Christology "from below" and "from above" is directly associated with the affirmation of "truly God and truly human"[28] In this respect, the Christological method that might be able to address this two-fold problem, must be couched not only within the dynamic relations of time and eternity (Gunton 1997:158) but also within the contexts of finite beings and the triune God (Shults 1999:169). However, the divine conqueror Christology does not adhere to such criteria. The question is: Does ancestor Christology, which we will discuss in the next chapter, offer an adequate solution to this double dilemma?

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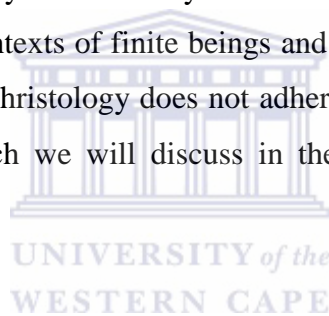
[28] There are ongoing debates in respect to the meaning of the terms Christology "from above" and "from below". It is not our intention to enter into these debates. For further readings see Gunton 1997: 10 -55.

CHAPTER 4

Ancestral Christology in the Akan context: A critique

4.1 Introduction

Observably, the most dominant aspect of African traditional religion is the ancestral cult. The notion of ancestors is so deeply embedded in African religious consciousness that the idea of Christ as ancestor seems to have arisen independently in the minds of different theologians in diverse sectors of the continent. Amongst the various images that have emerged in African Christological discourse, that of Christ as an ancestor seems to be the most distinctive and the most profound image. However, I argue here that the ancestor image within the Akan context (and also within the general African context) does not adequately express the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ as "truly God" as well as "truly human". As a result, the ancestor image does not express the atoning work of Christ adequately either. To elucidate my contention, I will use descriptive, analytical and comparative approaches. Thus, this chapter entails a critique of the ancestor Christology in an African, particularly in the Akan, context.

An analysis of this form of Christology will operate within the framework of debates in African theology. This comprises the relationship between the Supreme Being of African traditional theology and the God proclaimed by Christianity, as well as the status and role of the ancestors as intermediaries between God and human beings. Thus, section 4.2 begins with a description, analysis and critique of some notable ancestor Christologies in African Christian theology. Section 4.3 focuses on an analysis of the person of Jesus as an ancestor. As a sequel, section 4.4 focuses on an analysis of the work of Christ as an ancestor. Section 4.5 draws the argument together by highlighting the strengths and the weaknesses of such an ancestor Christology. Section 4.6 concludes the chapter by briefly elucidating the challenge of designing an appropriate Christological method in order to do justice to the actual content of any Christology, particularly as it applies to ancestor Christology.

4.2 Ancestor Christology in African Christian theology

In this section, I will discuss some of the notable ancestral Christologies in African Christian theologies. However, the section does not intend to present a detailed study of such Christologies, still less to be an exposition of any particular ancestor Christology. Instead, I

will briefly discuss some of the key components of African ancestor Christologies and assess their strengths and weaknesses in light of the Nicene and Chalcedonian confessional affirmations of the person and work of Christ. The major contributions discussed here include those by Bénézet Bujo, Charles Nyamiti, Francois Kabasèlè, John Pobee and Kwame Bediako.

4.2.1 Background of ancestral Christology

Joseph Boakye Danquah (1968), writing from within the Akan context, was the first person to refer to God as "the great ancestor". This suggestion was later affirmed by Harry Sawyerr (1986), a Sierra Leonian Anglican canon, theologian and educationist. Sawyerr discusses God as an ancestor from the context of the Akan of Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Mende of Sierra Leone. He contends that each of the three contexts supports the notion of God as the parent-ancestor of the human race. Approximately a year after Danquah's assertion, another suggestion came from a Nigerian Roman Catholic scholar, S.N. Ezeanya (1969:45), who proposed that African ancestors should be considered as Christian saints. This suggestion also has the ardent support from Peter Sarpong, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kumasi, Ghana.[1] Nonetheless there are some African theologians, who object to these proposals. Kwesi Dickson, a former presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Ghana, objects in the introduction of the second edition of Danquah's book to the idea of God as a parent-ancestor.

Kabasèlè (1991:125), a Roman Catholic parish priest and lecturer, does also object to the idea of reconfiguring the ancestors as saints.[2] He condemns the attempt to reconfigure the African ancestors in terms of the category of the saints. He argues that this seems to be too superficial an attempt to rehabilitate the African ancestors. He contends that the Bantu ancestors have no need to be painted over as saints to deserve our veneration. Just as they are, they may be regarded as the founders of our societies and reconcilers of human beings and should remain as such. Kabasèlè maintains that African Christians can reconcile the two without forcing the issue.

Considering the background of the personalities involved in these debates, it is obvious that

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[1]   Also see E. Fasholé-Luke's article: "Ancestor veneration and the communion of S*aints*".

[2]   Roman Catholics maintain that the saints serve in some sense as mediators between God and humankind. Correspondingly, African Catholics who also hold true to the notion that ancestors are intermediaries between God and humankind, show better internal coherency in their views. Both the ancestors and the saints have human origins. Unlike ancestral Christology, the reconfiguration of ancestors into saints, does not impose a sense of divinity on the ancestral image. Thus, if compared to ancestral Christology, the suggestion of ancestors as saints has more internal coherence.

this is not merely an academic exercise. Rather, these are issues which permeate the very fibre of African Christianity. Consequently, the outcome of these debates may ultimately have an impact on the direction of African Christianity, for better or for worse. Nonetheless, such proposals, particularly the notion of God as the "great ancestor", have prompted a new phase of theological discussion amongst African theologians. The notion of God as an ancestor has direct influence on the development of the idea of Christ as an ancestor. This is especially evident in Nyamiti's Christology.

The assumption behind Danquah's suggestion is that God may be seen as a revered departed human being who once lived on the earth and died – later to become a deity owing to his newly acquired status as "ancestor". Indeed, on this basis Danquah equated the worship of *Onyame* (God) to that of the ancestors. He also suggests that a "good" living chief, a representative of the ancestors, should be worshipped in place of God.[3]

In keeping with Danquah's suggestion of God as great ancestor, some African theologians suggest that Christ may be seen as an ancestor. However, in most proposals, Jesus does not only feature as *one* of the ancestors. Instead, he has been depicted or qualified as an ancestor in varied ways – he is *the* ancestor par excellence or a unique ancestor.

4.2.2 Bénézet Bujo:[4] Jesus Christ the proto-ancestor

Bénézet Bujo focuses his Christological reflection on African ancestral beliefs and practices. He explores different perspectives on African ancestor worship and on that basis refers to Christ as an ancestor.[5] From this background Bujo reflects on the mystery of Christ with the aim of grounding his African ethics firmly in an ancestor Christology (Bujo 1992, 1995).

Bujo (1992:297) designates Jesus Christ as the proto-ancestor. This is meant to emphasise Christ's uniqueness in distinction from the African ancestors.[6] He views Christ as a proto-ancestor – the unique ancestor, the source of life and the highest model of an ancestor.

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[3]   Danquah's proposal might have primarily a political rather than a religious motif.

[4]   Bénézet Bujo was born in 1940 in Drodro, Bunia in Zaire. For several years (1978-1989) Bujo held a chair in Moral Theology in the Theological Faculty in Kinshasa, Zaire. In 1989 he accepted a call to be Professor of Moral Theology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He is an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church.

[5]   Bujo believes that the idea of Christ as ancestor is more meaningful to the African than the terms *Logos or Kyrios*. It enables the African culture to be the source for incarnating Christianity. This, according to Bujo, demands a Christology "from below".

[6]   He also speaks of the need for a "cleansing" of culture. He is well aware of the "negative sides of pre-Christian religion – views, customs and usages – which are incompatible with the Christian message" Bujo (1992:297).

Through his incarnation Christ assumed human history in its entirety, including the legitimate aspirations of African ancestors. Bujo argues that Jesus did not only realise the authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors. He also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to a new completion.

Bujo maintains that the incarnation enables Christ to be unique and privileged amongst the other ancestors. Christ's encounter with African ancestors allows the ancestors to be the locus where human beings encounter the God of salvation. Thus, the future which the ancestors sought to guarantee is assured by Christ. This is the case seeing that our ancestors' experiences have been made efficacious in Jesus who was crucified and is risen.

Moreover, the notion of Christ as proto-ancestor provides, for Bujo, the foundation of a narrative ethic. Christ is the proto-source of life and model of human conduct. Bujo also contends that, in traditional religion, the good ancestors have already served as ethical examples or models; thus they continue to serve as models for Christians (Bujo 1992:301). Bujo believes that this Christocentric ethic confirms the positive elements in African culture such as hospitality, the family spirit and solicitude for parents. At the same time it corrects and completes African traditional and modern customs[7] (Bujo 1990).

According to Bujo, life flows from God through the ancestors to the living and this life is handed on by the living to the coming generations. To Bujo, if Jesus Christ is a proto-ancestor, a source of life and happiness, our task is to realise in our lives the memory of his passion, death and resurrection, making that saving event the criterion for judging all human conduct. He also contends that Christ as the proto-ancestor is the criterion for the church and for the African society (Bujo1998).

Sifting through Bujo's work, it is already evident that the neologism "proto-ancestor" signals discontinuity from the traditional ancestors. Bujo shows awareness to the problem of negating the traditional content pertaining to ancestors. Notably, he attempts to construct the features needed to transfer the title "ancestor" to Jesus Christ.

However, the pertinent question that remains to be asked is: On what grounds can Christ according to Nicene, who is said to be not only truly human but also truly God, be identified with the ancestors who are merely human spirits? It could be observed from Bujo's

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[7]   Bujo claims that there are good and bad ancestors. He argues that only the good ancestors can be considered for Christian veneration. Whereas these good ancestors are incorporated into the body of Christ, the evil ancestors are conquered through the death and the resurrection of Christ and are bound in chains. No one needs to fear them any longer.

Christology that his major concern is the ancestors' exemplary lives – which Christ has fulfilled in a more excellent way. As a moral theologian, Bujo's pressing interest lies in the formulation of a Negro African Christocentric morality. From such a perspective, Bujo's Christology is predisposed towards Jesus as an ideal human being who through his moral life has set a good example for all to follow.

Such a view is similar to the "moral influence" theory of atonement – one of the three main atonement theories (to be discussed in chapter 7 below). The strength of this Christology is that it serves as an important aspect of the saving work of Christ. However, it reduces the person of Christ to a mere human being, or at best a divinised person. Consequently, the work of Christ loses its objective value, and more importantly, salvation becomes the work of human beings. In this regard, Bujo's presentation of Christ as an ancestor cannot express the Nicene affirmation of Christ's person and work adequately.

4.2.3 Charles Nyamiti:[8] Jesus Christ, the brother-ancestor[9]

Nyamiti bases his Christological reflections mainly on an African understanding of ancestors. He takes his starting point in the beliefs and practices of the ancestral cult as found in many (though not all) African traditional societies. According to Nyamiti, ancestral relationships between the living and the dead, and sometimes between the Supreme Being and humanity on earth, comprise of the following elements: (a) kinship between the dead and the living; (b) superhuman status (usually acquired through death) comprising nearness to God, sacred powers, and other superhuman qualities; c) mediation between God and the earthly kin; d) exemplary behaviour in the community; e) the right or title to frequent sacred communication with the living kin through prayers and ritual offerings (Nyamiti 1984:16).

Nyamiti rightly observes that there is no uniform ancestor religion amongst African societies. Yet, he contends that "there are enough beliefs shared by most of these societies to enable one to affirm the presence of common ancestral beliefs in black Africa." On this basis, Nyamiti points out two elements which are characteristic of the African conception of an ancestor:

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[8] Nyamiti was born in 1931 at Ndala-Tabora, Tanzania to Catholic parents. After his ordination in 1962 he furthered his education in Louvain, Belgium. In 1968 he presented his doctorate thesis on "A comparison between Christian Initiation and the Initiation Rites of the African Masai, Kikuyu and Bemba peoples, with reference to Liturgical Adaptation". Nyamiti moved to Vienna to study ethnology and composition. He became Professor of Systematic Theology at the seminary in Kipalapala (1976-1981). In 1978 he was appointed as professor and later became head of the department of Dogmatic Theology at the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa (CHIEA) in Nairobi, Kenya. He also worked part-time as a community pastor.

[9] In this section I will rely especially on Nyamiti's book *Christ Our Ancestor* as it contains his main theory on ancestral Christology. For a review of Nyamiti's ancestral Christology see Muzorewa (1988:255-264).

first, the natural relationship between the ancestor and his/her earthly relatives; second, a supernatural or sacred status acquired by the ancestor through death (Nyamiti 1984:19-23).

He notes that natural relationships of kinship can be based on the following: a blood relationship with parents, and – more rarely – with brothers and sisters, or on the common membership of a clan, tribe, secret society, etc. In order to attain the supernatural or holy status of an "ancestor", the deceased must have led a morally unobjectionable life, so that one can do justice to this person's future role as a role model. As an ancestor he or she is a source and a store of the tribal tradition. If the people do not pay sufficient attention to the ancestors, unpleasant consequences may result. In keeping with this, Nyamiti contends that the ancestors function as the mediators between God and their earthly kinsfolk (Nyamiti 1984:21).

In his reinterpretation of ancestor veneration, Nyamiti distinguishes four types: (a) the traditional ancestors who take part in the Christian veneration of ancestors through incorporation into the body of Christ; (b) the saints in heaven and in purgatory who in light of their incorporation into the body of Christ, are brother-ancestors of the African Christians; (c) Jesus Christ, the brother-ancestor and (d) God himself, as the parent-ancestor of the human race (Nyamiti 1984:20-23).

Nyamiti notes that, as a rule, the natural relationship between the African ancestors and their earthly relatives is based on parenthood. However, as basis for his ancestor Christology he focuses on the sibling relationship. Although he concedes this relationship to be rare, he nevertheless considers Jesus Christ as brother-ancestor of human beings.

He contends that "a brother-ancestor is a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is a mediator to God, an archetype of behaviour, and with whom – thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death – he is entitled to have regular sacred communication." Nyamiti presumes a structural affinity in this relationship between the African brother-ancestor and his earthly relatives to that between Jesus Christ and the members of his earthly body.

Nyamiti further contends that Christ's brotherhood is revealed as the divine example of its African counterpart. The resulting difference is grounded in the unity of God and human beings in Jesus Christ and his mediation in salvation. Nyamiti also explains that the natural affinity through a common descent from Adam is transcended by Jesus Christ (Nyamiti 1984). Thus, the natural kinship characteristic of the African conception of ancestors is *de facto* transcended and disposed of at a higher level.

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Nyamiti notes that the ancestors acquired a *supernatural* or sacred status through death. He therefore claims that Christ's divinity corresponds with the attainment of the "supernatural" status of ancestors through death. Thus, the title "ancestor" to some degree becomes a synonym for divine sonship. In keeping with this belief, Nyamiti draws the conclusion that the ancestors are divine beings also. However, such conclusion does not necessarily follow from his premise.

The premise of the argument is that the ancestors are sacred. The conclusion is then drawn that the ancestors are divine beings. In between the premise and conclusion lies the assumption that all sacred entities are necessarily divine. However, this implies a strained argument and a logical fallacy. The reason being that, whereas Africans believe the ancestors to be sacred, these Africans rarely ascribe *divine status* to their ancestors. Amongst the Akan, ancestors are regarded as mere human spirits.

I do concede that in some rare instances, for example as found amongst the Yoruba of Nigeria, some ancestors are believed to become divinities, but they are then considered in the category of lesser divinities. Accordingly, if Christ obtained divine status along this path of ancestorhood, this would lead to a heresy comparable to Arianism.

In conclusion, Nyamiti wishes to avoid the pitfall of presenting Jesus as a mere human being. However, despite all his careful safeguards and his concern to maintain the Chalcedonian affirmation of Christ as truly human as well as truly God, it is difficult to see how Nyamiti's Christology avoids an outcome similar to that of "degree Christology" (in other words, the divinity of Jesus would not tend to be derived from the greatness of his life, character and teaching).

4.2.4 Francois Kabasèlè: Christ as ancestor and elder brother

Kabasèlè (1991:116-127) develops his Christology on the basis of the image of the Bantu ancestors. Amongst the Bantus, the ancestors constitute the highest link, after God, in the chain of beings. According to Kabasèlè, it was to the ancestors that God first communicated the divine "vital force." In their transition, the ancestors have become more powerful than human beings in their capacity to exert influence, to increase or to diminish the vital force of earthly beings. Thus, in their present state, the ancestors serve as the intermediaries between God and humankind (Kabasèlè 1991:117).

Kabasèlè (1991:118) notes that amongst the Bantus, not just anyone accedes to the rank of ancestor. To become an ancestor, it is not enough to become a deceased; one must have lived

well and must have led a virtuous life. Those who will be ancestors must have observed the laws; they must have incurred neither the guilt of theft nor of a dissolute life. They must not have been wrathful or quarrelsome persons, or have dabbled in sorcery. In this respect, to Kabasèlè, an ancestor is by a definition a good person – there is no bad ancestor to be found amongst the Bantus.

However, Kabasèlè concedes that the appellation "ancestor" can be extended to the deceased who have not fulfilled all the necessary conditions mentioned above. Nevertheless, such a category of "ancestors" is not regarded as mediators in the true sense of the term. The role of mediation between God and human beings is played out only by those who have fulfilled the necessary traditional and moral conditions.[10]

Amongst the Bantus, the primary datum concerning the ancestors is found in the role they play in the "transmission and safeguarding" of life. Kabasèlè notes that Christ came to provide life and thus meets the requirements of being an ancestor. In the same sense that the ancestors watch over the lives of their descendants and continuously strengthen it, does Christ continuously nourish the life of believers (Kabasèlè 1991:120).

Kabasèlè also postulates that Christ is an ancestor in the sense of an elder brother. The Bantu notion of eldest child or eldest sibling focuses on the notion of anteriority. The eldest brother makes the offerings to the ancestors and to the Supreme Being on behalf of all the rest of his brothers. The eldest brother represents an example to be followed by the other siblings. In virtue of his exemplary function, the eldest child is charged with the responsibility for the acts of the younger ones. Kabasèlè notes that, as the case is in any other situation, some eldest brothers do not live up to the expectation; thus they disappoint the family (Kabasèlè 1991:122).

Kabasèlè (1991:120-21) then suggests that Christ, God's only Son, likewise receives the attribute of "Eldest". Christ has shown himself to be the eldest brother, by taking responsibility for the wrongs, by performing expiation for his people. As a true "eldest one", Christ has disappointed neither our expectations nor those of his Father. Thus for Bantu Christians, Christ performs the role of ancestor through the mediation he provides.

Kabasèlè notes that Jesus Christ is exalted above all spirits. He distinguishes Christ from

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[10]   Kabasèlè notes that for the more devoted amongst the Bantu, all acts of daily life must be steeped in the presence of the ancestors. Before taking a drink or tasting food, a devout Bantu will pour some of it on the ground, in token of deference to and participating in the life of the ancestors. If someone happens to sneeze, he or she will mention the name of an ancestor, as if asking for a blessing.

other ancestors. Christ is labelled as the ancestor par excellence. Thus, there are two lines of ancestors: the Great Spirit (ancestor) who is Christ and the founding ancestors who are the relative ancestors (Kabasèlè 1991:17).

4.2.5 Ancestor Christology in the Akan context: John Pobee and Kwame Bediako

Within the Ghanaian-Akan context, contributions to an ancestral Christology were provided by the design of Kofi Appiah- Kubi (1977: 51-65), John Pobee (1979), Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1986), Kwame Bediako (1990), Abraham Akrong (1992:119-26), Kwasi Sarpong (1998), and many others. Here I will focus on the ancestor Christologies of John Pobee and Kwame Bediako.

a) John Pobee's ancestor Christology[11]

Pobee (1997:85) starts his ancestor Christology with a credo: Christ is truly human as well as truly God. Pobee then attempts to express this credo within an Akan framework in various forms by interpreting Christ's divinity and humanity according to an Akan understanding. He notes that the Akan and biblical ways of expressing humanity are very similar. However, he contends that "functional Christology" better fits the mentality of the Akan (Pobee 1979:83-84).

Discussing Christ's humanity, Pobee notes that, within the Akan context, a human being must fully realise himself/herself within society. He suggests that any construction of Akan Christology must stress Christ's kinship, circumcision, and baptism. He notes that these are rites that incorporate initiates into a group. From this idea, Pobee emphasises Christ's humanity within the Akan context.

Christ's humanity is further accentuated by the dread of death and finite knowledge. He particularly points to Christ's attitude in Gethsemane – the fear of his approaching death. Pobee also notes that the synoptic gospels clearly inform us of the limits of Christ's knowledge in this regard. Another human characteristic, according to the Akan, is dependence on a superior power. Pobee sees this characteristic in Jesus with reference to the frequent prayers offered to his Father.

On Christ's divinity, Pobee (1979:85) points to sinlessness as one of the divine qualities. Amongst the Akan, sin is regarded as anti-social. He sees Christ's sinlessness as a true sign of his divinity in the Akan context. He notes that Christ committed no sin but fought against sin

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11   For the details on this, see Pobee (1979: 81-98).

by his conduct of love towards others. He showed his concern for those oppressed in any way possible and made all the necessary efforts to relieve their pain and suffering.

Pobee further observes that, within Akan society, divinity is also demonstrated in authority and power, in the capacity to heal and to create. Pobee contends that, by performing miracles and curing people, Christ manifested his divine status. He also stresses that Christ is the pre-existent agent of creation. According to Pobee, this is the distinctive Christian claim, which has no parallel in Akan religion.[12]

Of the images that give expression to the person and the work of Jesus, Pobee's suggestions include *okyeame*[13] and ancestor. To Pobee (1979:94), the practical relevance of ancestral Christology is that Jesus is *Nana*. Amongst the Akan, the term *Nana* is used in two senses. Basically, it refers to one's grandmother or grandfather. However, it is also generally used as a title to refer to the Supreme Being, the ancestors, the lesser divinities, chiefs, and any elderly person (senior citizen). It implies a title of respect which could be accorded to anyone to whom such respect is due. According to Pobee, Christ is *Nana* in the sense of an ancestor. As such, Christ has power and authority to judge, reward, and punish. But as God-man, Jesus is superior to all ancestors and all spiritual beings.

The title *Nana,* in practical terms, embraces all the respect accorded to the highest authorities amongst the Akan. Pobee thus argues that the image of ancestor in the sense of *nana* will portray the supremacy of Jesus with reference to personal orientation, the structures of society, economic processes, and political forces amongst the Akan.

While analysing Pobee's ancestral Christology, it is important to note that he leans to an approach of functional Christology (Pobee 1979:85). Thus, he views Christ's divinity in the sense of Jesus' functions as God, while Nicene Christology also affirms that Jesus is "of one essence with the father". Pobee contends that African Christian theologians need not follow the Nicene Creed or the formulas of Chalcedon. His reason is that the Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology was constructed in a particular context which is quite foreign to African culture and even the contemporary Western world. He buttresses his contention with the argument that the New Testament does not speculate about the ontological nature of Jesus. Rather, it depicts Jesus as the unique representative of God. He further contends that "functional

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[12]   Yet, Pobee neglects the fact that pre-existence is not something new to the Akan; the *okra* (soul) pre-existed with God before becoming a person. Nevertheless, there is no claim that the *okra* is an agent of creation. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter 6.

[13]   For the title of *okyeame,* see chapter 2 of this thesis.

Christology" suits the mentality of the Akan better.

Pobee may be partly right in the sense that the Akan do not only see "good works" as *Nyamedwuma* (God's works) but usually also allude to anyone who does good work as "*me-Nyame*" (my God). That Jesus is viewed to be without sin, implies that he is God in a sense similar to the idea of functional Christology. Therefore every Akan may affectionately call him "*me-Nyame*" (my God) in one way or the other. Nevertheless, the status of Jesus as "*me-Nyame*" (my God) over and above any other person may be considered in the sense of (what one may term as) "degree Christology".

Besides, one may suggest that the Nicene affirmation equally fits an Akan mentality. The Akan believe that an entity called *okra* forms part of a human being. This entity is also believed to be the God's nature within each human being. Based on this belief, the Akan refer to every human being as *Nyameba* (God's child). In this regard, the Akan believe that a human being is not only capable of functioning as God in some ways but is also capable of bearing the nature of God. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter 6.3-4.

b) Kwame Bediako's ancestor Christology
Bediako focuses his Christology primarily on the Akan ancestors. For Bediako, the term "ancestor"[14] is the most significant African title to be used for Jesus Christ. The reason being that the ancestors comprise the most visible and prominent aspect of the Akan religious world. Amongst the Akan, the image of ancestors (apart from God) reigns supreme in the structures of society, in economic processes and amongst political forces.[15] By naming Jesus as an ancestor, Bediako (1990:10) places Jesus amongst the outstanding persons of the community.

He maintains that there is a need for African Christians to relate to Jesus as an ancestor. One reason is that the identity of Africans is linked to their ancestors. Thus, in order to be a true African, one has to be connected to the reality of the ancestors. Bediako contends that if one can relate to Jesus as an ancestor, one may be fully integrated as an African as well as a Christian.

Another reason is that, in order to make Jesus relevant to the people in Africa, it is crucial to come to terms with the way in which Jesus relates to the importance and function of "spirit

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[14] Bediako uses the title "ancestor" in three ways. He uses it for Christ, for non-Christian traditional Africans and for Christian ancestors.

[15] This is the case seeing that the power underpinning the institution of chieftaincy is the ancestors' cult.

fathers" or "the ancestors". For Bediako, the solution is to identify Jesus as *Nana Yesu* (ancestor).

The Akan believe that the ancestors take care of individuals and the community. They protect people on a journey and on the farm. They guarantee the continuance of a family by securing pregnancy and enough food and clothing. The ancestors lay out the communal ethic and serve as custodians of public morality. They punish those who violate the law and safeguard the power base of the ruler and the sustainability of society. Bediako holds the view that Jesus replaces the ancestors as the benefactor of society and as a source of protection (Bediako 1984:99).

He contends that Christ has come to fulfil all the aspirations that are traditionally assigned to the ancestors. Therefore, the role of the ancestors has to be transferred to Christ. Such an idea was first proposed by Bujo (1992:297) and was later echoed by Nyamiti.

Bediako also contends that the ancestors serve as the mediators between God and humankind. He claims that, in Akan thinking, the ancestors mediate between God and human beings, acting on "authority delegated by God". Such mediation includes various aspects of what may be called "salvation": rescuing in times of trouble, securing the continuation of society, restoring when sin destroys the social order, and receiving prayers for help. Bediako suggests that Christ has taken over the mediatorial function of the ancestors.

He notes that as one with God, Jesus is automatically elevated above the ancestors, and as Lord and Saviour, he replaces them and for humankind becomes the only mediator between God and humankind. Bediako also contends that by becoming a human being and sharing our condition, Jesus can also be seen as an Elder Brother who lives in the presence of God. As such he displaces the mediator function of our natural spirit father.

To Bediako the ancestors are worthy of respect, but he also alleges that they have an ambivalent nature. He contends that some ancestral spirits are "malevolent", thus some ancestors may terrorise people. He therefore desires to see an end to this negative influence of ancestors on society, and he sees Jesus as the one to achieve this. By fulfilling the role of the ancestors, he claims that Christ has rid society of the terror pertaining to the ancestors. He poses that when Jesus takes his place as the sole divine ancestor, the terror of the ancestors is eliminated (Bediako 1984:114).

He further postulates that, by becoming Lord of the ancestors, Jesus empties them of their powers, and claims that power for himself. In this way, according to Bediako (1984:114),

Jesus "neutralises" the ancestors; being replaced by Jesus, the ancestors have no power to save nor harm. Nevertheless, Bediako's assumption and approach is debatable. Contrary to Bediako's view, Sarpong (1974:36) also speaking from within an Akan framework, rightly contends that an ancestor is by definition a good human spirit; no bad ancestor exists. Inferring from Sarpong's definition of an ancestor and their position as custodians of public morality, one may argue that the ancestors only exercise their "executive powers".

Thus, to consider the exercising of such "executive powers" as "terror", negates the idea of the ancestors as custodians of public morality – unless one would want to charge the ancestors with abusing such "executive powers". Nonetheless, such a charge would be inconsistent with the traditional understanding of the nature and role the term "ancestor" summons. Linguistically within the Akan context, a "malevolent ancestor" would be a contradiction in terms.

Furthermore, the Akan differentiate between ordinary ghosts and the ancestors. Not all the deceased qualify to be ancestors; only those who meet certain conditions. Those who do not obtain the status of an ancestor become *samantwentwen* (roaming ghost). They roam about terrorising people until they are reborn as human beings. Thus, there are bad ghosts in the Akan context. But for Bediako to talk about "evil ancestors" means that his definition of ancestor may differ considerably from the traditional Akan concept of ancestor. Notwithstanding this, Bediako (1975:23-24) maintains that ancestors are custodians of public morality.

Again, Bediako contends that Jesus has emptied the ancestors' power and has claimed that power for himself. Such an assertion creates the impression that Jesus had somehow engaged in warfare with the ancestors. Yet, there is no Akan or Christian notion on the warfare between Jesus and the ancestors in which Jesus triumphed over them. Of course within the context of Christian theology, particularly in line with the view of atonement incurring *Christus Victor*, one may hold that Jesus has conquered all the evil spirits and powers. However, could one go as far as presuming that the ancestors are amongst the evil spirits or powers that are presumed to have opposed Jesus? Certainly, this is not the case in terms of the traditional Akan understanding of the ancestors.

On a different note, Bediako believes it important to desacralise ancestors and view them as ordinary members of the community. He notes that, the coming of Christ inaugurates a new humanity and creates a regenarated history for Christians.

In this way, Christ is seen as the only Lord, and the ancestors are reduced to participants in the community. For Bediako, desacralising the ancestors occurs at two levels. The first level is to withdraw divinity from the ancestors and restore their humanity. The second is to desacralise the king who rules on their behalf so that he becomes a human being amongst other human beings. By desacralising the traditional ancestors, Christ will, in the end, stand alone as divine ancestor.

By implication, Bediako assumes that the ancestors are or have become divinities. Thus it is necessary to strip them of their divinity so that Christ alone could become a "divine ancestor". The term that Bediako uses for stripping the ancestors of their divine status is "desacralisation". He says: "other ancestors should be desacralised" to become "non-divine". However, the Akan do not see the ancestors as divine. Besides, Bediako (2000:22-23) maintains that ancestors are human spirits, thus they are not worshipped but receive veneration. However, if one supposes that the ancestors are not worshipped because they are not seen to be divine, one cannot use the image of the ancestor to account for Christ's divinity.

Having enumerated all these differences between Jesus and the traditional ancestors, one is tempted to enquire whether "ancestor" is a viable Christological title after all. If Christ exceeds the original ancestors to that extent, why does Bediako insist on using this term for Christ? Because of the differences between God, Jesus and the traditional ancestors, Dankwa, an Akan traditional paramount Chief of Akropong Akuapem, rejects the idea of using the title "ancestor" either for God or for Jesus Christ. His reason is that the traditional African ancestors are merely human and are not worshipped (Dankwa 1987).

c) Some other Akan ancestor Christologies

In his contributions on Christology, Sarpong is reluctant to consider Jesus as an ancestor. He notes that Jesus Christ is indeed a great personality whose life conforms to what the Ashanti (the largest and the dominant group amongst the Akan) expect of a great leader or ancestor. The greatest of these ancestors are obviously the kings who fought to protect the Asante nation and who led the Asante to enjoy security and peace (Sarpong 1998:155).

According to Sarpong, the Asante may see the person, the role and the mission of Jesus as reflected in the various achievements of the various ancestors of the Asante people. In this sense, Jesus is considered much higher than an Akan ancestor.

Sarpong cautions that the ancestral image fails to account for the divinity of Jesus and as such

82

conflicts with the doctrine of the trinity (Sarpong 1998:137). Sarpong therefore argues as follows. The concept of an ancestor makes it possible for us to appreciate what Jesus means or meant for us. Nevertheless we realise that Jesus is far above any ancestor and all the ancestors put together.

However, Sarpong notes that much can be gained by following in the footsteps of the ancestors, although one cannot imitate all the traits of any given ancestor. His reason is that, the basis of the ancestor's exemplary life is in many ways defective. This is especially evident in the criteria for becoming an ancestor. In the case of Jesus, we can and should imitate every aspect of his life. Jesus exhibits more perfect qualities against that which the ancestors have practiced (Sarpong 1998:143).

Appiah-Kubi (1977:51-65), a Ghanaian sociologist, approaches African Christology through the African Independent Churches. He maintains that the African understanding of Christ is threefold: Firstly, Christ is seen as the mediator between the living and the dead – which he claims is based on the ancestral conceptions and practices in traditional thought. Secondly, Christ is designated as saviour and Liberator from all the oppressive forces – physical, social, and political evils that wage war against humankind. Thirdly, he is seen as a healer of physical sicknesses. Akrong (1992:119-26) also postulates that the ancestors serve as the intermediaries between God and humankind.

d) Conclusion

In searching for an adequate image to give expression to the person and the work of Christ, there seems to be some stages of development in African Christological discourses. This is particularly true for those who follow the line of Nicene Christology. Tentatively, one may see three such stages.

In the first stage Jesus is seen as a functional liberator without any reference to his divinity, though his divinity is not necessarily excluded. Some positions on liberation Christology illustrate this stage. The second stage is where Jesus is seen as a mere human (with the functions of God) mediator between God and humankind. The approach of Pobee (1979) may serve as an example in this regard.

In the third stage theologians such as Nyamiti and Bediako reconfigure the person of an ancestor to be a divine being in order to express Jesus' 'humanity and divinity. Nyamiti's approach (following Danquah's assumption) constitutes an example of this third stage. However, the claim that God once had a human nature is yet to be established in any society

in Africa. The Akan may see some form of God's nature in human beings, namely *okra* (akin to soul). But, there is no myth, story or maxim that depicts God as a deified human being amongst the Akan as Danquah proposes. The Akan maintain strict distinctions between the ancestors, the lesser divinities and the Supreme Being.

In another development, Bediako suggests that the ancestors should be "desacralised" and that Jesus should become the only "divine ancestor". His suggestion is based on the assumption that the ancestors are divine and that there is a need to divulge them of their divine status. Here the words "sacred" and "divine" are used synonymously. However, this does not necessarily pertain to their use in the Akan context.

To Bediako, the ancestors are divine because they are sacred. Indeed, the ancestors and even chiefs are regarded as sacred amongst the Akan. Yet the Akan do not equate sacredness with divinity. Whereas all that are divine may be sacred, not all that is sacred is divine, particularly within the Akan context. Amongst the Akan, the ancestors are viewed as human spirits; they are never elevated to the status of divinity or take on any divine form.

Nonetheless, in some African societies, particularly Yoruba culture, the ancestors are elevated to divinities (Idowu 1973:172). Obviously, this development might have had some influence on the third phase of Christological discourse to which Nyamiti and Bediako subscribe.

However, in the context of the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ, these ancestors who have been elevated may become lesser divinities. The reason is that, if it is granted that the ancestors were once merely human beings and were later elevated or became divinities, then this image runs the risk of adoptionism: there was a time when they were not divine although they later became that way.

Analysing these Christologies, it becomes obvious that their weakness lies in their expression of the person of Christ as a truly divine being. Nonetheless, the strength of ancestor Christologies may lie in the area of Christ's work. However, the image of an ancestor in the Akan context (and also in the general African context) does not express adequately the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ as "truly God" as well as "truly human". Therefore it cannot also express the atoning work of Christ adequately either. What follows, is a further analysis of Akan concept of ancestor and the Christian (Nicene) understanding of the person of Christ.

4.3 The person of Jesus as an "ancestor" within Akan context: A conceptual analysis

In determining whether, and to what extent, the image of ancestorhood is relevant or can express the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ adequately, one needs to examine the Akan notion of ancestorhood and the Christian (Nicene) notion of the person of Christ. To what extent could the ancestor image be stretched to express the person of Christ as truly human as well as truly God? A brief comparative analysis of the person of Christ and the Akan concept of ancesterhood will help in this assessment.

4.3.1 Who are the Akan ancestors?

The most important aspect of the Akan traditional religion is the ancestral cult. Rattray (1959) argues that the predominant influence in the Akan religion is neither *Onyame* (Supreme Being) nor the hundreds of *abosom* (lesser divinities), but the *nsamanfo* (the ancestors). To find out who these ancestors are, I will in this section describe and analyse the identity of the ancestors.

a) Qualifications for becoming an ancestor

Amongst the Akan, not every deceased can become an ancestor; one must fulfil certain conditions. The person must be an adult and must have attained a senior age and must have had children. Thus, those who have died as children cannot become ancestors.[16]

Akan ancestors include both men and women.[17] Ancestors must have led a life worthy of emulation, that is an exemplary life while on earth. A "natural" death is also an important condition for ancestorship. One cannot be an ancestor if one dies by way of an accident or suicide,[18] or through an "unclean" disease such as lunacy, dropsy, leprosy/epilepsy or HIV-AIDS (Sarpong 1974:34).[19]

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[16] As Sarpong (1974:34) notes, amongst the Akan, an adult is by definition a married person. A teenager that is 15 years old who is married is considered an adult. An old man of 60 years who has remained a bachelor all through his life is not viewed as such. This raises the question as to whether Jesus would qualify as an ancestor amongst the Akan. Actually, his age of 33 years when he died is too young to have him considered as an ancestor. Had he married, his status would not have been debatable in this regard. At 33 and presumably unmarried, it would be strange for the Akan to consider Jesus as an ancestor.

[17] The Akan ancestral cult does not exclude women from being ancestors: There are women ancestors amongst the Akan. By contrast, Tlhagale (2004:48) notes that women are excluded from ancestorship in some South African societies.

[18] The Akan frown on suicide. It is believed that those who commit suicide have some hidden sins which they refuse to face. However, the Akan also believe that: *animoguase ne wuo dei fanyam wuo* ("it is better to die than to live in disgrace").

[19] Such criteria raise a serious question regarding the possibility of the disabled attaining ancestor status.

b) The person of an ancestor: "living" dead or "risen" from death?

According to Akan beliefs, death does not immediately annihilate life. The departed continue to live in the spirit world; the ancestors live in *asamando* (place of rest)[20] while those who do not qualify as ancestors roam about.

The Akan believe that from the dwelling of bliss, some ancestors can come back to be reborn in order to finish an assignment which he or she started, but could not complete.[21] It is also believed that some of the deceased can decide to come back to be reborn for another lease of life. Thus, the Akan name *Ababio* (return from the dead).[22]

However, the Akan do not attach any strong connection between the deceased and the human being as the same person. The Akan only draw some bodily and behavioural similarities between the dead and living human beings

Moreover, the Akan also believe that some people, on an individual basis, can appear to living human beings from "beyond death". Amongst the Akan, it is generally believed that the dead are supposed to return within forty days and reveal themselves in one way or another to their relatives. The deceased are usually believed to reveal themselves to a known person who does not yet know about the death of that person. The one experiencing the appearance would later be informed that the one he/she encountered had already died. According to the Akan belief, after forty days, the deceased will disappear to join the ancestors (or not).

Remarkably, to the Akan, such persons – who make appearances beyond death, are not regarded as being raised from the dead. Thus, Komfo Anokye, the co-founder of the Asante Kingdom and a renowned traditional priest is said to have made some appearance after his death. Yet it is said of him that "Anokye went for death antidote but he could not return from death", i.e. he could not rise from the dead.

Moreover, amongst the Akan, all ancestors are regarded as *awufo* (dead people), thus the saying in reference to the ancestors: *nsamanfo mpo se wope dodo na ateasefo* (if the dead or ancestors want a multitude, how much more the living?). Though not all of the deceased are regarded as ancestors, every ancestor is a dead person. Of course, they are seen as the living

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[20] The Akan believe that those who could not get entry into bliss (the place of rest), roam about as ghosts terrorising people until certain rituals are performed or until they are reborn. Sarpong (2002:99) suggests that this type of return into the world imlplies a kind of re-incarnation. He also maintains that the Christian concept of hell has no analogy within the Akan worldview and is therefore foreign to the Akan traditional thinking.

[21] The Akan believe that no one is eternally doomed, those who cannot make it as ancestors, have an opportunity to be reborn.

[22] The Yoruba of Nigeria has a similar belief. See Opoku (1978) for a detailed discussion on this.

dead. However, this does not change their status as dead persons. This is clearly less than what Nicene Christianity would affirm about Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, there is another Akan belief about life beyond death; which may permit one, somehow, to talk about one "rising" from the dead. Amongst the Akan, there is the belief that those who die before their *hyebre* can come back by means of "rising from the dead" in order to finish a job they started, but could not complete. (*Hyebre* denotes the time they told *Onyame* they would spend on earth – particularly a young man or woman.) Such people[23] would usually live outside of their hometown; they could get married and raise children. They live their lives like any other normal human being except that they would not eat pepper. An example from an incident in an Akan village will illustrate this belief.

In the late 1980s something happened in one of the Akan villages that became a point of discussion for both adults and children around that area. A middle aged woman one day called in at a certain house and introduced herself as the daughter of a woman whom the people in the house knew to have died without children some years ago.[24] The middle aged lady informed her host that the woman in question had died recently and not long ago as the villagers seemed to have recalled.

She explained that before her death, her mother (who had not visited her hometown during all her stay as a "risen one") gave her children directions to her home town as well as her family's contact details. According to the young lady, their mother further encouraged the children to visit her family in her hometown some day.

The young lady was able to narrate the whole life story of her (risen) mother – of course without any mention of her "first" death – in order to convince her host about the genuineness of her mission. The host and the other family members were finally convinced. It would certainly require someone closely acquainted with the family to be able to provide such vital information about the supposed "mother", as the middle aged lady has narrated. Moreover, the family of the deceased woman was poor. There would therefore be no obvious benefit for

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23   There are a myriad of stories about such people. It is believed that some could send their children to their families while others also send money and other goods to the family members. There are also stories about family members who tried to coerce such people back into their homes. However, in most cases they are outwitted. The "risen ones" vacate their dwelling place before the family member reaches it. It is generally believed that if one meets such a person and is able to give her/him a pepper, the "risen one" would not scuttle away again; she or he could then be integrated into the community as a human being.

24   The Akan believe that only an individual can make an appearance after death or can be raised from the dead. There is neither a question of "corporate resurrection" nor any notion of a set day that all or some of the dead will be raised from death.

a family member who was not genuine concerning his or her mission. This event was indeed surprising but not something unheard of amongst the Akan. Similar examples of such an event took place in the past and are expected to occur in future as well. Such an experience is indeed common amongst traditional Akan communities.

After conferring amongst themselves, the family broke the news to the middle aged woman that the woman (her mother) she was talking about was their relative but that she had already lived, died and was buried in her hometown. They added that they had her tomb to prove their report. Nevertheless, since their "sister" had risen from the death, lived somewhere and raised a family, they cannot reject her children as family members. Thus, the middle aged woman and her family were then welcomed into the family. On the basis of an assurance from the family, the young woman went back and later came along with other members of her family.

Usually, someone who was reportedly raised from the dead does not qualify to be an ancestor. The reasons are related to the age of their death or their means of death, especially in cases of death by accidents. As indicated above, either one of these can disqualify one from becoming an ancestor. Moreover, when there are enough grounds to suspect that a relative is living somewhere as a "risen human being", that person will never be regarded as an ancestor.[25]

One may therefore conclude that an ancestor dwells amongst the living-dead and does not imply one who has reportedly been "risen from the dead". Most likely, the Akan will not consider someone to be an ancestor if it is believed that that person has risen and has resettled in another vicinity.

c) The person of an ancestor: Human spirit, lesser divinity or divinity?

Danquah was the first African theologian to refer to *Onyame* as ancestor. He portrays *Onyame* as an old human being who lived on earth, died and was subsequently deified to be worshipped as an ancestor. Danquah therefore equates the worship and veneration of the ancestors with the worship of *Onyame*. If one accepts Danquah's suggestion, then an ancestor could be seen as deity. However, as previously argued, such a suggestion does not have a basis in the Akan culture and worldview.

Another argument professes some lesser divinities to be deified heroes. This would imply no clear line between the ancestors and the lesser divinities. The Yoruba solar and thunder

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[25] In referring to such stories, the Akan do not apply the term "risen from the dead" explicitly. The emphasis is usually placed on the claim that (supposedly) the dead person had resettled in another vicinity. For the Akan, the question whether the tomb of such a person who has supposedly resettled elsewhere is empty or not is not even raised.

divinity, Sango, was reportedly originally a human king and later became deified as a lesser divinity. Idowu (1973:186) concedes this point, but contends that the case of Sango is a rare example. He therefore insists that Africans by and large draw a distinction between the Supreme Being, the lesser divinities and the ancestors (Idowu 1973:171-173).

When one analyses the status of the ancestors within the traditional African context, the person of an ancestor may be regarded as a human spirit or a lesser divinity. However, no African myth, story or maxim, at least not in the available literature, depicts the Supreme Being as a deified ancestor. Thus, the proposal that the Supreme Being may be regarded within the traditional African context as an ancestor is questionable. Amongst the traditional Akan, the ancestors remain mere human spirits; none of them becomes a lesser divinity or deified hero.

4.3.2 Who is Jesus Christ: "living" dead or "resurrected" person?

My focus here is to ascertain whether it will be appropriate to categorise Jesus as being amongst the Akan ancestors – whether explicitly or implicitly. I do not intend to enter here into any debates on the search for a historical Jesus or on the interpretation of the (physical) resurrection of Jesus. Instead, I want to test the hypothesis that the Akan concept of ancestorhood stands in conflict with the Christian understanding of Jesus' resurrection. The statement "Jesus is our ancestor" would therefore be inappropriate. In this section, I will test and develop this hypothesis through a critical examination of the Akan concept of ancestorhood and the Christian understanding of Jesus' resurrection, with particular reference to the biblical accounts of the "empty tomb".

In the New Testament, the name Jesus Christ refers to a historical figure. Jesus the son of Joseph might have been the common name by which he was known to his contemporaries. But later on, and more frequently after his death and acclaimed resurrection, he was referred to as Jesus Christ. The term "Christ" (*Christos* in the Greek and its Hebrew equivalent *Messiah*) is associated, more than anything else, with the belief that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

According to the Nicene Creed, Jesus Christ is "truly God" as well as "truly human". The Council of Chalcedon added that he has two natures in one person. Nicene Christianity affirms that Jesus Christ became "incarnated from the virgin Mary, suffered and died under Pontius Pilate, but was risen from the dead. Christians have often affirmed the "bodily" resurrection of Jesus Christ to indicate that it was not just his influence or the movement Jesus

instigated that continued after his death but that he is indeed still present in a (omnipresent) bodily form. However, the biblical narratives, the creeds or the ecumenical councils do not provide clarity with regard to the nature of the body of the risen Christ. In fact, speculation in this regard is widely discouraged.

Nonetheless, the biblical narratives concerning the empty tomb at least suggest the Christian conviction that some change befell the physical body of Jesus during his resurrection. This does not imply that the resurrected body of Jesus Christ was simply the same as his pre-resurrection one. He died and his corpse was buried. If his corpse could not be located, it was either stolen or misplaced, or otherwise. The biblical testimonies suggest that he was "risen" through the power of the Holy Spirit. How that happened and how this should be understood is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Before Jesus' death, it was simply assumed by those who were closest to Jesus that he was as much a human being as they were. After his resurrection, according to the biblical testimonies, there was some doubt as to whether Jesus was indeed a human being or a spiritual one. In response, Jesus invited his followers to establish for themselves that he was indeed a being of flesh and blood: "See my hands and my feet … handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). Obviously, this invitation served to counter the possible view that he appeared to them as a ghost.

4.3.3 Can one categorise the being of the resurrected Christ amongst the Akan ancestors?

An answer to this question demands two focal points. The first is one's understanding of Christ's resurrection – as this subject has several interpretations. The second is how far one can draw out metaphoric language to express one's understanding of Jesus' resurrection within the Akan context. The problem largely lies with the failure of the advocates of the ancestor Christology to align their view of Jesus' resurrection with the Akan concept of ancestorhood which is relatively clear cut. Unless, one clarifies one's view of Christ's resurrection, an answer to this question becomes bizarre. Nonetheless, the doctrinal question that besets the Akan Christian is: In what way does the notion of Jesus' resurrection become unique amongst the Akan Christians?

Notably, according to Akan belief, all the ancestors are regarded as *awufo* (dead people), which leads to the saying about the ancestors: *nsamanfo mpo se wope dodo na ateasefo* (if the dead or ancestors want a multitude, how much more the living?). Though not all deceased are

regarded as ancestors, every ancestor is regarded as deceased. Of course they are seen as the living dead. Nevertheless, this does not change their status as dead persons.

Here the question confronts us, if Jesus could not be regarded as *owufo* (a dead person) can he be regarded as *oteasefo* (a human being)? Notably, the Akan use the term *oteasefo* only in reference to human beings, but can Jesus be regarded fully as such a being?

The Akan Twi translators in Luke 24:5 referred to Jesus as *oteasefo* – "Why do you look for the living *(teasefe)* amongst the dead *(awufo)*?" Of course one does not have to agree with the Twi translators. But in case one does, it becomes clear that tagging Jesus as an ancestor is a way of looking for *oteaseni* amongst the *awufo*. Of course some conceptual problems are associated with the Twi translation in this regard.

Nonetheless, this poses a question as to whether Jesus as ancestor is still a dead person – and "ancestor" – or a "risen one". Logically, the two cannot be held concurrently – if one agrees with the Akan Twi translators, for these views are in opposition.

On the other hand, if Jesus could neither be regarded as *owufo* (a dead person) nor *oteasefo* (a human being), what then is the status of Jesus' person amongst the Akan? Here the burden of proof lies with the advocates of ancestor Christology. Indeed, by inference, they contend that Jesus' experience is similar to that of the ancestors – or what justification would there be to profess Jesus as an ancestor? Nonetheless, I will now analyse briefly the possible positions of the advocates of an ancestor Christology.

To commence the analysis, let me pose this question: What does it entail when one asserts that "Jesus is an ancestor"? By using this expression, does one mean to say that "Jesus is an ancestor" in a sense that one would refer to the past Akan historical figure like Komfo Anokye in that regard? My contention here is that, logically, to assert that "Jesus is an ancestor" is tantamount to denying the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection, unless the advocates of an ancestor Christology can prove the contrary. I also contend here that one may rarely avoid such denial by implicitly categorising the being of Jesus "as" ancestor.

I will begin with the statement "Jesus is an ancestor". Is this an expression of factual assertion according to the Akan tradition? Granted that Jesus qualifies as an ancestor within the Akan context, certainly, the statement may be regarded as factual. This is so because, to the traditional Akan, Jesus was a historical person who lived an exemplary life and died.

Another question emerges: If Jesus is an ancestor, could he still be proclaimed as resurrected Christ? The answer will depend on one's view of Christ's resurrection. If not, the

identification of the risen Christ with the concept of ancestorhood would commit us to a statement that is theologically confused. If there are such similarities what do they entail? Would such similarities include room for the uniqueness of Jesus as "risen one" amongst the ancestors? Probably not! An example of such a theological distortion of Jesus' resurrection may be taken from an incident reported by Sarpong. He captions the story: "A true story, the resurrection".

> There is a true story of a missionary who went to one of the villages of Ghana to preach. In his explanation about what Christianity was, he tried to convince his hearers that Jesus was an extraordinary person and the prominent fact in the life of Jesus that he used was Jesus' resurrection. For over 30 minutes, he hammered on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and that this is true, that this is not a story, that we must all believe it and that if we did, we could all be saved. The villagers looked at him with amazement, not because of what he was saying but because of the enthusiastic way he was saying it. They wondered what point he was trying to make. They were perplexed as to what was so remarkable about it. It was clear that nobody was impressed. The chief of the village, in his role of leadership, simply replied: "Did you come all the way from Europe to tell us that somebody died and came back to life? What is so special about this? We have exactly the same experience, multiplied dozens of times here. Our forefathers have all died but they do come back into the world; so what is so peculiar or so wonderful about this particular return of this Jesus into this world? Probably what is unusual about it is the speed with which he returned. You say he came back a day or two after his death; our ancestors take a little more time to come back. This is an ancestor and ancestors are supposed to come back and reveal themselves in one way or another to their relatives and so if your Jesus did that, then he did a natural thing. What is so mysterious about it?"

By way of conclusion, Sarpong (1978:45) says: "The story of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, only convinced the Asante that Jesus is an ancestor, a great and good leader who was willing to do anything for his people, including dying, and would not abandon them after he had returned to the place of the dead."

Indeed much can be gained by identifying Jesus with the ancestors – who are prominent and respected above everyone apart from God. The question remains, however, whether this would do justice to the Christian confession that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead – upon which the divine status of Jesus the Christ is especially built.

Notably, the biblical narratives on the empty tomb suggest what transpired with regard to the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth and that there is a vestige of recognisable continuity between the body of Jesus of Nazareth and the bodily appearance of Jesus as risen Christ. Of course the notion of the "bodily" resurrection of Christ is highly contested (and therefore cannot be discussed here).

Admittedly, asserting the resurrection of Jesus amongst the Akan already creates complications – particularly if one interprets it within the framework of ancestorhood. Yet

proponents of an ancestor Christology claim that the status of Jesus may be likened to that of the ancestors. They would claim that this image does justice to Jesus Christ's resurrection with reference to reports in Akan traditional culture on the appearances of deceased persons to living relatives. In this respect, the burden of proof lies on the proponents of ancestor Christology. They have to clarify whether their views would do justice to the Christian confession that Jesus Christ is risen. As they have not clarified this crucial question, one may therefore conclude that an ancestor Christology is not (yet) plausible.

4.3.4 Can the ancestor image adequately express the Nicene notion that Christ is "truly human" and "truly God"?

As argued above, the notion of Jesus as an ancestor does not do justice to the Christian (Nicene) understanding of Jesus' resurrection. In this section, I submit the further argument that the ancestral imagery does not adequately express the Nicene affirmation pertaining to the person of Christ, namely that he is "truly human and truly God". Here one needs to consider a) the doctrine of Trinity and b) the worship of Jesus as the Christ.

Firstly, the notion of "Jesus as ancestor" does not capture adequately what is at stake in the doctrine of Trinity. This is so because the ancestor image portrays Jesus as merely a human spirit, at best a lesser divinity. The crux is that the advocates of the ancestor Christology have not shown how the image of ancestor could indicate that Jesus is of one substance with God the Father. Notably, ancestors are creatures while Jesus is the creator of the ancestors ("through whom all things were made"). Hence, Jesus cannot even be called an ancestor par excellence. The best that could emerge from the notion of Jesus as ancestor is that Jesus is not divine but an agent or representative of God. Certainly, such a view of Jesus cannot do justice to the Christian doctrine of Trinity. While Christology serves as the main focus of theological reflection, one must recognise that Christology traditionally also served as preamble for reflection on the Trinity. This is most true when Christ's divinity is not denied – as is the case in many of the African Christologies (Vähäkangas 2000:34).

Secondly, if Jesus is not deemed truly God, it then follows that it is inappropriate to worship him, because Christian faith accords worship only to God. As already argued above, amongst the Akan, the ancestors are not regarded as God or gods; they are not even deemed divine. They are human spirits. Sarpong thus argues that the ancestors are not worshipped. Also, African theologians such as Mbiti argue that the ancestors are not divine, neither are they worshipped. On this basis, one may rightly infer that the ancestors cannot be worshipped alongside God – for they are merely human spirits while Jesus is God. If one would grant that

Jesus is an ancestor in the Akan context, will Jesus then be regarded as God? Will he be worshipped? Obviously not!

One may argue that Jesus represents believers in heaven, yet he is an object of worship. Certainly he is truly human, but even more, he is also truly God. Thus, Jesus does not only represent believers in heaven, but figures also as a creator – truly God. Therefore, even though he condescended to dwell within a human body, Jesus is still our Lord, our creator, our maker. Hence, the claim that Jesus may be regarded as an ancestor, may ultimately distort not only the Akan culture but the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as well.

Nonetheless, more that anything, it is the roles that the ancestors are supposedly playing that the advocates of an ancestor Christology find compelling. The question that has to be addressed here is: Can the ancestral imagery express the work of Christ adequately if it cannot do justice to the unique person of Christ?

4.3.5 Can the ancestral imagery adequately express the atoning work of Christ?

The idea of viewing Jesus as an ancestor, seems to stem primarily from the obvious similarities between the work of Christ and that of the ancestors. Undoubtedly, such similarities have been demonstrated by the various theologians whose works we have discussed above. On the basis of such a comparative analysis some African theologians have proposed that Jesus may be regarded as an ancestor. For the benefit of African Christians it has been suggested that Jesus should replace the ancestors as benefactor of society and their source of protection. The question remains though: Can the ancestral image express the atoning works of Christ adequately? My line of argument here is that the ancestral imagery establishes no more than a functional association with God. That is to say, there is no ontological relation between the person of an ancestor and God. In this respect, since the ancestral image does not adequately express the unique person of Christ, it cannot adequately express the redeeming work of Christ either.

From a Nicene perspective, the divinity of Jesus Christ forms a prerequisite for his atoning work. As Aulén (1948:221) rightly puts it: "No other power than the divine could accomplish this [the work of atonement]". He further contends that the confession of divine incarnation in Jesus Christ is thereby a statement essential to the Christian conception of God. Inferring from Aulén's assertion, the Nicene confession of faith in Christ is essentially a confession that God became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

Of course, it could be argued, contrary to the affirmations of Nicea and Chalcedon, that the

work of atonement may be possible without claiming such divine status for Jesus Christ. This is especially the case in Abelard's "moral influence" theory of the atonement – whereby Jesus' death is seen only as an example of the willingness to die for a good cause. Thereby Jesus leaves a remarkable example to follow. This position does not regard Christ's incarnation as a necessary prerequisite for his atoning work. Nonetheless, it is debatable whether this position could do justice to the divinity of Jesus Christ. I will return to this matter in more detail in chapter 7.

4.3.6 Can one separate the work of Christ as Mediator from the person of Christ as truly human and truly God?

There are two ways in answering this question. Firstly, it must be noted that Christology intrinsically belongs to soteriology, thus any image which fails to account for the person of Christ as truly human and truly God also inevitably fails to express the salvific work of Christ adequately. If the person of Christ is merely interpreted within a soteriological framework, then it becomes an appendix to the work of Christ. However, unless assertions of Christ's significance are based upon beliefs or statements about his being, Christ then becomes no more than his benefits – in the sense that the individual believer happens to conceive of them. In such a case, it may happen that truth is made subordinate to meaning and Christology thereby deprived of its foundation. In this respect, as the ancestral image cannot adequately account for the Christ's unique person, it follows that it cannot account for the work of Christ either.

Secondly, although Christ's person and his work are inseparable, it must be noted that a distinction is nevertheless necessary here. Unless one makes room for a distinction between Christology and soteriology, between what Jesus is in himself and what he holds for us, one fails to ground the significance of Jesus for our salvation.

Nonetheless, in African Christological discourse, there is a strong tendency to reduce Christology to soteriology. Support for this allegation may be found in the Christological image of chief, linguist, master of initiation and even in the ancestral imagery. The Christological proposal based on such images reveals obvious similarities of the roles attributed to such images and that of Jesus. However, as argued above, these images cannot express the divinity of Christ adequately. What one observes here is that the unique person of Christ is typically reduced to the benefits derived from him.

This trend is not only typical of African theologians. The dictum of Melanchthon "[t]o know

Christ is to know his benefits, not to contemplate his natures and his modes of incarnation, as the scholastics teach", may be the background of this trend. This dictum served, whether appropriately or not, as a significant source of that very reduction of Christology to soteriology. Christology on this account thus becomes subordinate to soteriology.

Nevertheless, as Gunton (1977:27) rightly points out, in this passage Melanchthon "was protesting against the excessive objectivism of the scholastics in order to connect a Christ who is not simply an object of knowledge, but is what he is in the meaning he has for believers."

Notwithstanding this trend, it must be noted that Christology concerns Jesus himself as person – about his identity. Thus, the person and status of Christ must remain prior to the benefits that may be derived from knowing him. In order for faith in God's salvation to keep true to its very foundation, soteriology must follow from Christology, not vice versa (Pannenberg 1968:48).

For this reason a more careful examination is needed to find out whether the person of Christ, as truly human as well as truly divine (the ontological), and his work (the soteriological aspect) are intrinsically related in any proposed Christology. In this an ancestor Christology is found wanting. The ancestral imagery accounts only for Christ's one nature, namely that he is "truly human". Nevertheless, an adequate mediator between God and humankind must also be truly God.

4.4 The strengths and weaknesses of ancestral Christology

4.4.1 The strengths

Advocates of the ancestor Christology advance several reasons why Jesus could be regarded as an ancestor. These explanations reflect the interplay between the roles that are traditionally attributed to the ancestors and to Jesus in Christian theological discourse. Here I will enumerate six of these advantages.

In the first place, a parallel role between Jesus and the ancestors is presumed – both the ancestors and Jesus are community founders. It is proposed that Jesus fits exactly the role of the supreme ancestor, seeing that he founded a new and universal community.

The second major role of the African ancestors, which is parallel to Jesus' role, is that of ongoing participation in the life of the human community, specifically as family guardian. It

is argued that the role of the ancestors is to protect and care for the totality of life. If Africans therefore are to experience Jesus as a protector and one who truly cares about their daily lives, Jesus also has to be understood as an ancestor.

Thirdly, both the ancestors and Jesus share a common role as custodians of public morality. For many African societies, the ancestors serve as sanctioners of such morality. Such a role correlates with the similar role attributed to Jesus as the custodian of Christian morality. If Jesus is to be regarded as an ancestor, he may then be regarded as the custodian of public morality in the African societies. Sarpong (2002:9) argues that viewing Jesus as the custodian of African societal norms and values, will give a purified meaning to the African cultural practices. This will conform with Christian truths. To Tlhagale (2004:43), this should be the goal of the concept of inculturation.

Fourthly, another role which is attributed both to the ancestors and to Jesus is that of "role model". In African societies, the ancestors are regarded as societal role models, insofar as their exemplary life is deemed worthy of emulation. For the traditional African, the ideal life implies to grow up, undergo the rites of passage, to die and to become an ancestor. It is therefore argued that the ideal nature of the ancestors would be a framework within which one could also articulate the ideal nature of Jesus Christ. This role correlates with the Christian concept of following in the Christ's footsteps (Sarpong 2002). In a way it implies a meaningful category, because the ancestors, like Jesus stand for what one may call the fullness of life.

The fifth major advantage of an ancestral Christology is that the revering of ancestors lies at the heart of African spirituality. If Jesus is to be considered more than a guest and a stranger from the outside world to Africans, he has to be amongst those to whom they can relate at the level of their heart (Bediako 1995:219). For this reason, ancestral Christology promotes Christian spirituality within the African context.

Sixth, Christianity will gain much credibility and respect amongst the Africans if Jesus would be regarded as an ancestor. In the African societies, the ancestors are prominent and respected above everyone apart from God. In this regard, there would be much gain in terms of reverence and the high sense of devotion to the Christian faith. That is, if Jesus could be identified with the ancestors.

Remarkably, with the exception of the intermediary role between God and humankind which the ancestors are said to play, I have no problem with any of the proposed functions of the

ancestors.

4.4.2 The weaknesses

Having enumerated the advantages of ancestor Christology, the question needs to be posed: Do such advantages outweigh weaknesses of the ancestor Christologies? To this question, only brief answers will be given here. The reason being that in this chapter the whole of the argument has been structured to refute the claim that the ancestral image expresses the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ adequately. To highlight my contentions, I will only summarise my major points.

My objections to the ancestral image stem primarily from the contention that this image does not adequately express the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ, namely as "truly human as well as truly God". As a result, the ancestral imagery does not do justice to the atoning work of Christ either. Here my major points are as follows:

Firstly, the notion of "Jesus as ancestor" does not capture adequately what is at stake in the doctrine of Trinity. Secondly, if Jesus is not truly God, it then follows that it is inappropriate to worship him, because the Christian faith accords worship only to God. Thirdly, and on a more serious note, categorising Jesus as being amongst the ancestors leads to some serious confusion between the (Nicene) Christian understanding of Jesus' resurrection as one "risen from the dead" or as one who merely made "appearances beyond death".

4.5 Conclusion

With rare exceptions, the advocates of ancestral Christology approach Christology from the perspective of what has been tagged as "Christology from below". The concept of ancestors as human spirits shapes their understanding of Christ. The Divine conqueror Christology as already indicated in the Chapter 3 takes its point of departure "from above". It is indeed remarkable to see how the two Christologies reviewed in this and the previous chapters are in parallel with the two approaches to Christology in Western Christianity, namely "from above" and "from below".[26]

It must be noted that without any kind of synthesis between the Christology "from above" and "from below", reinterpreting the person of Christ as truly human and truly God remains a

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[26] Demarcating the Christological methods as "from below" and "from above" may give the impression that these are mutually exclusive methods. Yet, what constitutes Christology "from below" and "from above" are not without conceptual difficulties. However, this topic lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

pipedream. As has been indicated in chapter 3, if a method of Christology cannot harness the Christology "from above" and "from below", it is doubtful whether such a Christology can express the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ adequately.

Nonetheless, the riddle is that if one starts "from below", one can rarely avoid a heresy similar to degree Christology – professing a divinised man. Likewise, the method of Christology "from above" may also run the risk of docetism. In this respect, the divine conqueror image, as shown in chapter 3, becomes prone to docetism. As also indicated in this chapter, the ancestral image which usually has its starting point "from below" also runs the risk of falling into the heresy of adoptionism.

Methodologically speaking, Christology "from below" and "from above" are Christological approaches which are likely to absolutise either "time" or "eternity". While "from below" is likely to render time absolute, "from above" is also likely to consider eternity in the same vein. When any of the methods is trapped in this way, the content of the proposed Christology will be inevitably influenced by such methodology.[27]

This points to the necessity of harnessing both Christological methods from above and from below, to achieve a synthesis rather than assessing one to be the only solution of expressing the notion of "truly God" and "truly human". In this respect, the question has to be addressed whether and in what form the Christology "from above" and "from below" can be harnessed to achieve such a synthesis.

Without the said synthesis, one may be rarely able to express the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ adequately as truly God as well as truly human. The rest of this thesis (chapters 5-8) will grapple with this question. It may be helpful to give a brief account of the argument that is to follow:

Overall, the core of my proposal is summed up within the Akan concept of *okra*. This concept is loosely translated in English as "soul" but could be better rendered as *Logos* in its dynamic equivalency. This concept carries/contains the quality of a co-presence of time and eternity – a concept that holds together time and eternity, immanence and transcendence. That is to say, the Akan idea of *okra* may embody the synthesis of the notion of time and eternity. Thus, the Akan poses/mentions *okrateasefo* as the point where sparks of God's nature and human flesh meet. Before introducing this concept, I will in chapter 5 suggest and develop a coined term

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27 Nonetheless, some theologians like Pannenberg who starts his Chirstology "from below", appeared to express the person of Christ as truly human and truly God concurrently. However, it is debatable whether his approach is not "an unaided ascend from below" as Gunton contends (Gunton 1997:31).

Nyamesofopreko (God's unique Priest) as a Christological designation which suggests the need for a mediator between God and humankind. This idea is patterned along with the designations of Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of God.[28]

In chapter 6 I will then employ this Akan concept of *okra,* which is similar to the concept of *Logos* and carries both the properties of that which is divine and human. Through this conceptualisation I will suggest that Okra is incarnated in the person of the *Nyamesofopreko*. This may be similar to *Logos* (*okra)* incarnated in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

In the chapter 7, the designation *Afomusuyideε* (sin and curse bearer) will be developed to account for the unique atoning work of Jesus. The concluding chapter 8 will be devoted to the ecumenical significance of this thesis.

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[28]   In chapter 5, I will suggest how Jesus who is not Akan may be accepted amongst the Akan.

CHAPTER 5

A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology: The need for a mediator

5.1 Introduction

In critical dialogue with the Christologies based on the divine conqueror and ancestor Christologies discussed in the previous two chapters, in this second part of the thesis (chapters 5-8) I will propose a Christology based on the concept of "God's unique priest" (*Nyamesofopreko*). In this Christology, three themes will be developed. The need for a mediator between God and humanity will be discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will then focus on the person of Christ as a mediator between God and humanity. This will be followed by a discussion on mediation as the work of Christ in Chapter 7. Finally, Chapter 8 will explore the ecumenical significance of the proposal.

In each case, the core tenets of the Christian faith will be related to themes in the traditional Akan culture, worldview, and belief system in an attempt to offer a constructive reinterpretation of such themes based on the notion of *Nyamesofopreko.* This neologism expresses the person and the work of Jesus Christ as "God's unique priest". As God's unique priest, Jesus mediates between God and humankind following the alienation between them (interpreted in the traditional Akan context in terms of the myth of God's self-withdrawal).

The argument of this chapter will be structured in three main parts. In section 5.2 I will offer a very brief survey of traditional Christian discourse on the need for a mediator between the triune God and humanity – specifically with reference to the Christian understanding of sin in terms of a broken relationship between God and humanity (alienation). In section 5.3 this will be placed in juxtaposition with traditional Akan views on mediation in ordinary human affairs (with reference to the roles of the priest and the linguist) but also the need for a mediator between the Supreme Being (*Onyame*) and humankind. I will refer back to the traditional Akan myth of *Onyame*'s self-withdrawal and the absence of a priesthood for *Onyame*. On this basis I will offer the observation that, in traditional Akan religion and culture, no suitable mediator has been identified that could restore the relationship between the Supreme Being and humanity. In section 5.4 I will then develop a constructive proposal on the need for such a mediator. My proposal is as follows: The term *Nyamesofopreko* may be employed to portray Jesus Christ as God's unique priest, i.e. as one who, for the first time, could fulfil this mediating role since he is professed to be a person who is without sin. This is the basis for the

proclamation of the Christian gospel that salvation may be found in the mediating work of Jesus Christ. In section 5.4 I will also consider various objections which may be raised in response to this proposal. This will be followed by a brief conclusion in section 5.5.

5.2 The need for a mediator between God and humankind in Christian discourse

Mediation is a prominent soteriological concept pertaining to the biblical roots and the subsequent history of the Christian tradition. The term "mediator" occurs infrequently in the Scriptures but the idea of mediation and of persons acting in the capacity of mediator permeates the Bible as a whole. The situation requiring a mediator is often one of estrangement and alienation, while the mediator then effects reconciliation (Oepke 1974:598-624).

5.2.1 The concept of mediation in the Old Testament and in Judaism

The Hebrew word *mesites* may be translated as mediator. The term mediation does not have an exclusive religious usage; it could be given a theological as well as a legal content. Rabbinic Judaism introduced the term "mediator" in its theological sense. The basis is the concept of the negotiator, broker or interpreter. The term is used especially with regard to Moses as God's commissioned agent. Moses acts as go-between who brings God and his people together. In apocalyptic literature, the Messiah serves as such an intermediary.

Hellenistic Judaism saw considerable development with regard to the notion of mediatorship. In the work of Philo, angels are regarded as heavenly mediators (*logoi*) connecting heaven and earth. For Philo, Moses is also a mediator either at the human or the cosmological level. Under Hellenistic influence, there is a tendency to exalt the mediator of the covenant (e.g. the high priest) almost to a semi-divine status.

In later Hebrew thought, the word *mesites* was most commonly applied to Moses. It was through Moses that God gave the covenant and the law to Israel. Moses was therefore the mediator between God and his people (Stahlin 1974:289-93). There is another particular Hebrew use of the concept of mediation pertaining to angels. The angel who had this particular charge was Michael. Sometimes in Jewish thought, Michael was called the *mesites*, the mediator between God and humankind.

Moreover, in the Old Testament, the prophet and the priest fulfilled, most characteristically, the office of mediator in the institution which God established in terms of covenant relations

with his people. The prophet acted as God's spokesperson (Deuteronomy 18:18-22). The priest also acted on behalf of human beings in the presence of God. These offices complemented each other in terms of mediation between God and humankind. In the Old Testament, however, Moses, of all human instruments, was the mediator par excellence.

It is with Moses (as prophet) that Jesus as Mediator of the new covenant is compared and contrasted. There is a tendency for the offices of the priest and the king to flow into one another as far as the role of mediation is concerned. When the office of prophet is added, the stage is set for the threefold New Testament mediator (Oepke 1974:598-624).

5.2.2 The concept of mediation in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as the *mesites*, the mediator, "middle-person" between humankind and God. It is his supreme function to bring together humanity and God. The idea of Jesus as mediator is deeply embedded in Christian thought. It is also interwoven into Christian language, especially the language of devotion to Christ.

The word mediator is applied to Jesus four times. In the Pastoral Epistles, it is said that "there is one mediator between God and men: the man Christ Jesus' (1Timothy 2:5). In the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is thrice professed as the mediator of a better covenant between God and humankind (Hebrews 6; 9:5; 12:24).

Jesus did not appropriate the term mediator for himself. Nevertheless the connotations are present in his demands (Matthew 10:37 ff), claims (Matthew 11:27), remission of sins (Mark 2:1 ff) and in the idea of relating human destiny to himself (Matthew 11:27) (Oepke 1974: 598-624). The main form of Jesus' mediation is set in a unique combination of majesty and humility that is strongly oriented to the servant of Isaiah 53 (cf. Mark 10:45).

For Paul, Adam the first human, mediates ruin, but Christ, the last Adam, mediates salvation as the incarnate Son. In St John's Gospel and the Epistles, the term mediation is not directly applied to Jesus, yet these books are full of indications that Jesus serves as Mediator between God and humankind. In contrast to all other means (John 10:8), Christ is the only way, truth, and life (John 14:6). Jesus' role as Mediator culminates in his death (John 10:11). The atoning significance of his death is emphasised in 1 John (1:7; 2:2). In the other New Testament books, one may not find the term mediator directly applied to Jesus but they tacitly presuppose the notion of mediation (Oepke 1974:598-624, De Bary 1986).

In both the Old and New Testaments, the need for a mediator arises out of the stark reality of

sin. Sin interrupts the harmonious relationship between God and humankind. It results in a state of alienation from God upon which Jesus serves as mediator between God and humankind. To understand the need of a mediator well, one has to comprehend the nature of sin which calls for mediation.

5.2.3 The need for a mediator between God and humankind: The impact of sin

I shall not be concerned in this section with any form of exegesis on the theme of sin per se. I also do not intend to offer an exhaustive account of the theology of sin in the Old and New Testaments. An exegetical work or any such thorough account of sin in the Old and New Testament, would need investigation on a vastly larger scale than what can be offered here. All that I shall attempt in this section is to capture briefly the concept of sin in the Old and New Testament. This will serve as background for the proposal that Jesus may fill the need for a mediator in the Akan context. My major sources for this discussion include the *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, the *New Bible Dictionary* and the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

a) Sin according to the Old Testament and in Judaism

The complexity of sin is illustrated by the great number of Hebrew words used to describe it. Amongst the more important ones are *hatta't* (missing the mark), *pesa'* (rebellion, transgression), *awon* (perversion), *ra'*(an evil disposition) and *resa'* (impiety). In the LXX (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in the New Testament common words that are used to denote sin include *hamartia* (missing the mark), *parabasis* (transgression), *adikia* (unrighteousness), *asebeia* (impiety), *anomia*, (lawlessness), *poneria* (depravity) and *epithymia* (evil desire).

There is no uniform concept of sin within the Old Testament testimony. The Hebrew term *hatta't* with its derivatives conveys the idea of missing the mark, or deviating from the goal. The term *hatta't* is translated as *hamartia* in the LXX. *Hatta't* has religious as well as legal connotations. The religious use is prominent but not exclusive. In the Old Testament, sin is regarded as an act against the norm: transgression of custom, law, treaty or obligation. In each case such an act implies a sense of guilt.

In Judaism, the law as a whole, legal as well as cultic and moral, reveals God's will. Hence every transgression of the law is regarded as sin. Both the Old Testament and Judaism proclaim sin to be universal. It is held that whereas Israelites sin by breaking the law, the

Gentiles sin by breaking the Adamic and Noachic covenants, or even by refusing the law when it is offered to them.

The emergence of sin is usually traced to Adam and Eve or at times to the fallen angels (Genesis 6:1 ff.). It is believed that sin can be overcome by observing the law. However, if one fails to observe the law, this has serious consequences. It entails continual sinning, separation from God, and disruption of God's gracious purpose as well as the punishments of sickness, death, and eternal damnation. Nonetheless, human beings are offered the opportunity to repent and return to God (Stahlin and Grundmann 1974:289-93).

b) Sin according to the New Testament

By far the most common word for sin used in the New Testament is *hamartia* (Hebrew, *chatt'ath*, *pasha*, and *asham*). The word *hamartia* contains a metaphor derived from the practice of shooting an arrow. *Hamartia* means missing the target, whether mistakenly or on purpose.

For Paul, sin at its root pertains hostility to God. Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans chapter 5) and brought death as its wage (Romans 6: 23). Paul thus connects sin with universal destiny, but does not depict it as a necessity related to creatureliness. For Paul, the act of Adam, death and the general state of sin are interconnected.

For St James sin is derived from human desire. It relates to human will, and finds its end in death (James 1:14-15). However, confession and prayer bring forgiveness (5:15-16). To rescue others from sin is a Christian ministry (5:19-20). The first letter of St Peter proclaims Christ as the victor over sin by his voluntary submission and atoning death as the servant of the Lord (2:22, 24; 3:18).

In the New Testament as a whole, the decisive message concerning sin is that Christ has died as the offering for humankind. The victory consists of the saving action by which sin is forgiven and life is constituted anew (Grundmann 1974:302-316).

c) The understanding of sin in the history of Christian Theology

My intention here is not to engage in any comprehensive review. An exhaustive account of sin in Christian theology would need an exposition on a more comprehensive scale than what can be offered here. In this section I will only attempt to describe briefly the major views on the Christian doctrine of sin. This will be followed by an account of the positions of some individual theologians, selected either for their representative character or the particular

interest in their theories. My major selections for this discussion are the works of Kelly (1977), Lohse (1966), Berkhof (1937), Brunner (1952) and Pannenberg (1985).

The history of the doctrine of sin within Western Christian theology may be divided into four periods: the patristic period, the medieval period, that of the Protestant Reformation and the modern period – since the time of the European Enlightenment.

In the Patristic period, it was during the time of the Apologists when interest in the idea of sin began to emerge. In this period, one may think of well-known apologists such as Justin (100-165), Tatian, Irenaeus (130-200) and Theophilus. Justin believed that sin consists of erroneous belief and ignorance of what is good and the resultant rebellion against God's commandments. He also blamed the "malign demons" which he believed were the product of fallen angels' union of with the daughters of men [sic] (Kelly 1977:167).

Tatian believed that human beings fell into sin by attaching themselves to one of the angels – who was more subtle than the others – as well as through venerating this angel as God. As a result, human beings became the prey of demonic assaults.

Irenaeus argued that Adam became an easy prey to the serpent's wiles and disobeyed God. Consequently, Adam lost the divine image and likeness of God in each human being. For Irenaeus, the essence of sin consisted of disobedience, which the serpent instigated. Most of the Apologists, including Irenaeus, held a belief that a human being is endowed with "free will". Theophilus argued that a human being is neither mortal nor immortal, but is capable of both. The destiny of a human being depends on how he or she acts on his or her own free will (Kelly 1977:168).

Moreover, some of the Apologists, including Theophilus believed that Adam's sin had negative consequences for his descendants. Nonetheless, this line of thinking should not be confused with the doctrine of original sin, which developed in the fourth century (Kelly 1977:171-174).

In the period of the Church Fathers, the subject of sin came under scrutiny, particularly, amongst the Greek fathers. The Greek fathers believed that before the fall (Adam's sin), human beings were in a state of perfection and blessedness. This is the view of, particularly, the Cappadocian fathers, including, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa (330-395) (Kelly 1977:348-352, McGrath 1994:270). Nonetheless, for the Greek Fathers, even though the fall corrupted the human nature, the human "free will" was not affected. As far as the Greek fathers were concerned, any act of sin was the result of an individual's own free choice

(Kelly 1977:348-352).

The debates on the subject of sin amongst the Greek fathers serve as the starting point for the discussions of the Latin fathers. As a result, the thoughts of the Greek fathers – with regard to sin had a significant influence on the way the Latin Fathers in Western Europe approached the reality of sin (Berkhof 1937:128-130). Like the Greek Fathers, the Latin Fathers maintained that a person's original state was that of supernatural blessedness.

Concerning the debates on "free will", Tertullian (160-225) followed in the footsteps of his Greek counterparts, as he strongly believed that free will plays a major role in human behaviour with respect to sin. He defended the existence of man's "free will" against Marcion and Hermogenes (Kelly 1977:174).

However, the Latin Fathers increasingly emphasised the idea of "original sin", especially during the third and the fourth century. Unlike the Greek Fathers, the Latin Fathers began to accentuate the solidarity of the human race with Adam including all that this incorporation entails (Berkhof 1937:129). For example, statements such as "all sinned in Adam'" and "all are guilty in Adam" became more popular and common in the writings of the Latin fathers such as Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, and Cyril of Jerusalem (315-387).

Later on, the role of "free will" received less attention in the writings of the Latin Fathers, as the focus shifted towards the part grace plays. This trend reached its zenith in the fourth century through the contributions by St Augustine (Berkhof 1937:127-130). Augustine took the discussions on sin to a new level. He contends that human beings are inherently sinful because of the fall. This condition causes the human "will" to be generally biased towards evil. However, it is worth noting that, in spite of the influence of Augustine's doctrine of sin, his views were strongly opposed by a learned scholar (however not a cleric) Pelagius (cf. Lohse 1966:114). Pelagius totally rejected the idea that "human will" has an intrinsic bias in favour of wrongdoing because of the fall. He taught that human beings have a unique privilege to accomplish the divine will out of their own choice.

In the medieval period, Augustine's theory of sin became so prominent that it served as the basis for discussions on sin. A particular emphasis was placed on Augustine's doctrine of original sin and the bondage of the will. The Roman Catholic priest Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) contributed significantly to the advancement of these ideas in his *Summa Theologiae* (also see Brunner 1952:115, Hick 1968:100). For Aquinas, sin implies an unintended by-product of a good creation (Berkhof 1986:204).

During the period of the Protestant reformation, Augustine's views on the doctrine of sin were revived (Brunner 1952:114). Both Luther and Calvin based their doctrines of sin mostly on the views of Augustine; they believed that Augustine represented the best wisdom of the ancient church, uncontaminated by the subsequent aberrations of Medieval Scholasticism (Hick 1968:121). Both Luther and Calvin believed in the reality of original sin. As in the case of Augustine, they held that the human will is enslaved through sin, and that God's grace provides the only hope for such a situation (Brunner 1952:115).

However, the doctrine of sin as formulated by Augustine and advanced by the Reformers came under attack in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. Firstly, Augustine is accused of being self-contradictory. One of the areas in which such contradiction is observed is in Augustine's affirmation of the universal inevitability of sin – which is reflected in his doctrine of original sin, as well as a personal responsibility for sin – which he maintains through his emphasis on the "free will." The attack on the Augustinian's theory of sin had a major impact on the theological discourse with regard to the doctrine of sin up to the 20th century.

Nonetheless, around this period a number of books were published on the doctrine of sin. The major contributors included Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. Other leading figures from this period who contributed to the doctrine of sin include Reinhold Niebuhr,[1] Paul Tillich,[2] F.R. Tennant and Emil Brunner.

The doctrine of sin also elicited the attention of quite a number of theologians towards the middle and the end of the twentieth century. Major contributions available in English came from prominent European and American authors such as G.C. Berkouwer (1971), Hendrikus Berkhof (1986), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1985), and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (1995).

Other developments regarding the doctrine of sin took place within the context of theological movements such as liberation theology,[3] black theology, feminist theology, and African

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr views the problem of sin in terms of anxiety owing to human finiteness. He contends that sin arises from the predicament of human's finitude on the one hand, and his/her freedom to aspire to higher heights on the other. In his assessments of the human predicament, Niebuhr saw the removal of this contradiction as the aim of every religion. For Niebuhr, this contradiction does not constitute sin, but serves as an occasion for sin, although not its cause. This is what Niebuhr calls "natural contingency" (Niebuhr 1941, also see Erickson 1985:581- 585).

[2] Paul Tillich's view of sin is built on the theory of existentialism. According to this view, human being's state of existence comprises of a state of constant estrangement – from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from him- or herself. In many ways this estrangement is an equivalent of what Christianity has traditionally called sin. Yet, to Tillich, estrangement is not identical with sin, for sin refers to a reality not included in the concept of estrangement (Tillich 1957).

[3] In most cases, the advocates of liberation theology understand sin as arising from economic struggles. This is quite different from the conventional or orthodox view. A first step in understanding the position of

theology.[4] Within these contexts, sin came to be understood progressively in terms of "being sinned against" through colonialism, discrimination, oppression, patriarchy, and in terms of anything that hinders the well being of a society.

Theologians within this context tended to focus their attention increasingly on the impact of sin on society – in the form of structural sin and violence. Major contributions in the development of this new way of viewing sin came from authors such as Gustavo Gutièrrez (1978), James Cone (1969) and Judith Plaskow (1980). African theologians who have also written on sin include Harry Sawyer (1972:1964) and John Pobee (1979).

5.2.4 Conclusion

Christian theology suggests and develops an idea that sin breaks the human relationship with God and thus leads to death. Sin has marred the relationship not only with God, but also with one's neighbor, and with nature. This has resulted in a state of mutual alienation between humanity and God on the one hand, and humanity and nature on the other. Hence, there is the need for reconciliation: a removal of God's displeasure against the sinner as well as of the sinner's hostility towards God. Such reconciliation would require the work of a mediator. The New Testament makes it explicitly clear that Christ is the only Mediator between God and humankind in this regard (Berkhof 1986:194, Erickson 1985 and Plantinga 1995).

5.3 The need for a mediator between God and humankind in the traditional Akan context

5.3.1 Introduction

In the traditional African context, both human and spirit beings serve as intermediaries.[5] Some of these human intermediaries are priests, kings, linguists, medicine-persons, seers, diviners, rain-makers and ritual elders. The lesser divinities and the ancestors also serve as intermediaries. Amongst the Akan, any person who mediates between human beings may be referred to as *okyeame* (a linguist). Likewise, any person who mediates between human beings and spirit beings may be referred to as *osofo* (a priest).

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liberation theology is to note its rejection of the privatisation of sin (Gonzalez 1980:23). In terms of the more traditional understanding, sin is seen as a matter of the individual's broken relationship with God. Thus sin is basically understood as unbelief and rebellion. For liberation theologians, however, sin is much more concerned with the social dimension, oppression, and exploitation.

[4] For review of African Christian theology on sin, see Sakuba (2005).

[5] For further discussions see Mbiti (1988:75-90).

However, in the traditional Akan context, there is no human institution or priest or spirit being who mediates between God and humankind. In the relationship between God and humankind, the Akan believe that God uses any ordinary person – as long as that candidate makes himself/herself available to perform what is called *Nyamedwuma* (God's work).[6] Nevertheless, as I will argue below, evidence suggests that there is in the Akan context the need for a mediator; a priest between God and humankind.

5.3.2 Mediation in the traditional Akan context

a) The *okyeame* (linguist) as intermediary

In most African societies the roles played by mediators or intermediaries form part and parcel of everyday life. Amongst the Akan of Ghana, the traditional chief does not generally speak directly to the people, and the people also normally do not approach the chief directly except through the linguist. The linguist receives and transmits the message from the chief to the people and vice versa. In this regard, the linguist (*okyeame*) is a very important personality in the Akan court. He is close to the chief, relaying the chief's requests and pronouncements to others. This has become part of the social order of the Akan people (Pobee 1979 and Yankah 1995).

Usually, at family meetings, special agents act as linguists. Alternatively, anyone can be randomly chosen to act as linguist, and the one involved would be addressed as *okyeame* (linguist) at that particular occasion. Moreover, at every shrine, there is an *okyeame* who mediates between the priest and the worshippers or the visitors. In most cases, someone special is designated to serve in that capacity. However, one may also be randomly chosen to serve in such capacity. Thus, in the generic sense of the term, anyone who mediates between individuals or group of people acts as linguist at that particular time. The term *okyeame* embodies all that it takes to act as intermediary in relationships between human beings.

Nonetheless, there are especially informally trained people whose main occupation is that of being a linguist. Such people may engage in other work for a living to supplement their income, but they are known as linguists in the technical sense. Those who serve in such capacities are usually called *nana* in the sense of a sub-chief.

Amongst the Asante (of the Akan), every chief has his own special linguist and every shrine

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[6]   Any acts which the Akan may term as "good deeds" are tagged as God's work, irrespective of the one who fullfilled them.

110

also has its own special linguist. The Asantehene (Asante-king) has several linguists and has a chief (leader) amongst them called *akyeame-hene* (chief linguist).

Linguists mediate in all human situations either for good or otherwise. However, acting as mediator between people, the ultimate intention of a linguist is to bring peace, harmony and stability to all and, more so, to the community.

b) The *osofo* (priest) as intermediary

On the relationship between spirit beings and human beings, the traditional priests serve as intermediaries. Amongst the Akan, it is believed that there are men and women who are able to manipulate spirit forces for evil purposes. These are the *akaberekyerefo* and *adutofo* (charmers, enchanters and sorcerers), and *abayifo* (witches). The activities of these forces are directed against human beings to prevent them from enjoying abundant life. Thus to the Akan, the survival of human beings and their communities is dependent upon the help rendered by superior powers. How one relates to spirit forces is therefore crucial to one's well-being (Larbi 2006:3).

In this regard, the central focus of the religious exercises amongst the Akan is on the harnessing of power inherent in the spirit force for his or her own advantage or for the benefit of his or her community. The work of the traditional priest as mediator between the spirit world and physical world is to "balance the power" in favour of the supplicant.

The traditional priests mediate not only between the lesser divinities and the devotees but also between the human beings and the ancestors. In a general sense, they are also believed to mediate between the physical world and the spirit world. Thus, any issue that relates to spirit beings falls under their jurisdiction. Amongst the Akan, every priest has one or many lesser divinities which he /she is particularly attached to. But no priest is particularly devoted to *Onyame* (God). According to Rattray (1923:142), there was once a temple and priest for *Onyame* amongst the Akan but the institution ceased. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

c) The role of ordinary human beings as "situational" intermediaries

To the Akan, any ordinary human being can act as a "situational" intermediary, with regard to the relationship between God and humankind. The Akan concept of *"Nyame adwuma"* (God's work) connotes that all "good works" done for one, irrespective of the source, ultimately originate from *Onyame.* It is the belief of the Akan that *Onyame* can use anyone to

111

effect salvation: rescue, retake, recapture, redeem, ransom, buy out of servitude; to release, to free, to deliver, to liberate, and to save.

Moreover, in a more interesting sense, one can become another's "God" (God here in a functional sense) when one renders the needed beneficial assistance to that person. In such a situation one may make the point that Kofi, or Yaa (the doer) – "*ye me Nyame*" (is my God). In other words, Kofi or Yaa is my saviour. Notably, the statement "my God" here only applies to human beings.

Furthermore, the Akan maxim: *Onyame bofo sene bofo pa* (God's messenger is preferred to any other good messenger) illustrates that the ultimate end of salvation lies with *Onyame*; yet *Onyame* can use any ordinary human beings to effect salvation. In this maxim, there is a play on words between "good messenger" and "God's messenger". The "good messenger" here refers to one's own arrangement through someone else to solve a problem. God's messenger refers to an unexpected intervention, the value of which far outweighs the original plan.

The idea is not to discourage human effort to solve problems, but to stress the point that in spite of all that one can do, there are sometimes some unexpected interventions that are far better than those one could have imagined. Such interventions are attributed to *Onyame* through the mediation of a human being, who at a particular moment turns into God's messenger.[7]

For the Akan, *Onyame* is Spirit and a perfect being. Thus, one may infer that anyone who will represent *Onyame* as his or her intermediary must exhibit a high sense of devotion to him and live a life worthy to be called a representative of *Onyame*. The Akan may otherwise not recognise that person as such. Such an assertion could be affirmed in the context of the relationship between *abosom* and their representatives, the priests. The traditional priests are expected to live lives which reflect the code of conduct of the *abosom* (lesser divinities) that priest represents. Amongst the traditional Akan, every traditional priest is expected to obey his deity to the point of death. Many stories abound whereby priests have been killed by the deities they serve, for failing to obey their rules and regulations.

However, recognising the reality of human nature, the Akan declares*, bone bata onipa ho* (sin

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7   The Akan Bible translation transposes the English term "Angel" with *soro abofo* (heavenly messenger). Meanwhile, the Akan call anyone who renders "beneficial assistance" as *Onyame bofo* (God's messenger). Thus, the traditional Akan have (God's messenger) as a means of salvation and the Akan Christians, particularly Roman Catholics maintain that heavenly messengers provide a means of salvation. Both approaches confess God as the ultimate end of salvation. Nonetheless, Akan Christians regard Jesus as the only means of ultimate salvation.

lies very close to the human being). This clearly illustrates the human inadequacy to act as the priest or intermediary for *Onyame*. Thus, it occurs only occasionally that a human being is qualified to be *Onyamebofo* (God's messenger), that is, when he/she does something good.

Curiously, the issue that arises here can be posed as follows: Why are there only "situational" intermediaries between the Supreme Being and humankind? Although one cannot give any concrete answer to this question, it is undisputable that the Akan may expect a representative (priest) of *Onyame* to be sinless.

Recognising that this is not possible for any ordinary human being, the Akan settled with a "situational messenger or priest" as God's agent. This may account for the reason why *Onyame* does not have any special priest. Nonetheless, there is room for anybody to approach God as best as one can.

A related question that arises can be posed in this way: Why is it that human beings cannot enjoy an adequate fellowship with *Onyame* who is duly regarded as the Creator of human beings? An analysis of the Akan myth of God's withdrawal, which is also well known in many African societies, may provide a clue to answer this question.

5.3.3 Traditional Akan terms and ideas for sin

The need within the Akan context for a mediator between God and humankind arises out of sin. Remarkably, the only instance that human beings are said to have sinned against God directly is noted in the myth of God's withdrawal. In all other cases, sin against God is regarded as indirect, i.e. resulting from sin against fellow human beings or nature.[8] Inferring from the myth of God's withdrawal, it is indeed obvious that the broken relation between God and humankind is due to humans sinning directly against God. Correspondingly, the need for a mediator between God and humankind arises from this direct human sin.

In discussing the concept of sin, the question of language is extremely important. The English term "sin" does not always translate adequately into the African language. Amongst the Akan, four major terms; *mfomsoo, mmrato*, *musuo* and *bone* may capture the English term "sin". It is necessary to analyse these terms in order to penetrate their cultural and social connotations.

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[8]   In the traditional African context, what is called sin basically pertains to relationships within the community. The community consists of the departed and the living. Any breach which punctures this communal relationship amounts to sin, or whatever word may be used to explain this concept.

a) *Mfomso* (error or wrongdoing)

The stem of the word *mfomso* is the verb *fom,* meaning to offend. *Mfomso* is the noun form of *fom* which means "an error or wrong action without a malicious intention". Amongst the Akan, one is said to have committed *mfomso* when one offends an individual or a group or the whole community without an evil intention. *Mfomso* therefore is tantamount to a sin, but it is applied to denote an error or an unintentional wrong action. Usually, *mfomso* emerges within issues of interpersonal relations. The problem involved is usually settled with or without a third party. The state does not normally interfere. However, at times, *mfomso* can lead to a breach of societal laws and norms. In this sense, an individual as well as group or the whole community can commit *mfomso* against another individual or community.

Usually *mfomso* does not call for a sacrifice as it is not taken as a serious sin. However, one can be said to have committed *mfomso kese* (severe error). With the qualification of the adjective "severe" the *mfomso* may be unintentional but would be tantamount to a huge aberration problem which may necessitate a sacrifice to the ancestors and the lesser divinities. For example, one may unknowingly have sex with a matrilineal blood sister which is forbidden in the customs of the Akan. Though the act was committed unintentionally, it is *mfomso kese,* and as such, sacrifice is needed to remove *musuo* (abomination) from both the man and the woman. The Akan term *musou* has an extremely interesting background. I will return to it in more detail in section 5.3.3(c).

b) *Mmrato* (breach of the laws and norms of the state)

Mmrato is composed of two words: *mmra* (laws) and *to* (breach). It carries the sense of *mfomso* but implies more than *mfomso*. While *mfomso* usually denotes an unintentional act*, mmrato* can be either intentional or unintentional. When a stranger or foreigner breaches the law *(mmrato)*, it is not taken as sin, as the Akan would say: *Ohohuo nnto mmra* (a stranger "to the law" does not breach the law). This is contrary to the English common law (as used in Ghana), namely that ignorance of a law is not an excuse.

However, when a stranger breaches the law and the case is classified as *musuo,* the case may call for a sacrifice. Amongst the Akan, *mmrato* is usually a breach of laws and norms against the community (the corporate community) rather than an individual.

(c) *Musuo* (taboo or abomination)

The term *musuo* is made up of two words *mmoa* which means (animals or beasts) and *su*

(behaviour). Thus, *musuo* literally means "the behaviour of animals or beasts". The etymological meaning of *musuo* denotes "behaviour of a beast".

In its technical and current usage, the term *musuo* denotes taboo, abomination or curse. In some cases, the etymology of a word may have nothing to do with the current usage of that word: however, this is not always the case. Such an exception applies to the term *musuo*.

In the technical and current usage of the term *musuo,* an Akan will say: *wo bo musuo* (he/she has committed an abomination). The abomination here refers to behaviour contrary to what society deems as befitting human dignity. Thus, one can say that the said individual behaved like an animal or a beast.

The prefix *bo* and suffix *yi* usually accompany the term *musuo*. An Akan will say that *ye koyi musuo,* which literally means that "we are going to remove *(yi)* something that is an abomination to the society, i.e. an animal behaviour". *Musuoyi (yi musou)* therefore means a ritual to remove behaviour which society deems unfit for human beings. Such behaviour is regarded as a taboo, abomination or curse in that it offends the ancestors, the lesser divinities, Mother Earth and even God, who are affected by any disgrace of human beings too. These spirit beings serve as the custodians of public morality.

Behind the taboo, abomination or curse, lies the idea that someone has involved himself or herself in an act which human society despises. Indeed it is so brutish and uncouth that it can only be likened to the behaviour of an animal or beast. There is a need to purge society from this abominable act before it spreads to other members; lest it even comes to be considered as normal human behaviour.

It becomes a curse when such behaviour is allowed to permeate the cultured society. Then it will ultimately disorganise the whole of society. The ritual of removing such behaviour (*musuo yi*) involves not only the pouring of libation (an invocation of the spirit beings) but also a blood sacrifice to illustrate the seriousness of this aberration to society. Amongst the traditional Akan, the ritual of *musuyi* is usually preceded by a sacrifice termed *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice). [9] I will return to this topic in more detail in Chapter 7.3-4.

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[9]   In such situations, sacrifices would be needed as an expression to acknowledge one's sin against the spirit beings concerned. Such sacrifice in the Akan context is called *afodie* (which literally means guilt something). This is similar to what the Old Testament terms as sin/guilt sacrifice. Since sin and curse run concurrently within the Akan context, it may be necessary for one also to offer another animal as *musuyidei* (a curse bearer). This may be similar to what the Old Testament terms as "scapegoat". Sometimes the two rituals are carried out simultaneously in such a way that one would not be able to separate *afodeɛ* from *musuyideɛ*. However, the distinctive mark between the two is that, whereas the carcass of the *afodeɛ* is

d) *Bone* **(evil acts)**

The term *bone* is derived from the stem *bon* (stink). It is a general term used to translate the English term sin. All the other terms, namely *mfomso, mmrato*, and *musuo* may be regarded as *bone* (evil). Yet *bone* also carries a distinctive meaning which may exclude other errors or forms of wrongdoing. For example, amongst the Akan, it is against the custom to go out to farm on a certain day. If one disobeys the rule, it is indeed a *mmrato* (breach of law or norm) to the Akan but not *bone*. To the traditional Akan, if two unmarried adults willingly engage in sexual activities it is not considered as *bone*. Smoking and usage of "hard" drugs is also not classified as *bone*.

Bone in its technical sense and current usage is "an evil thought and action against a fellow human being". Technically, evil thought by itself cannot constitute *bone;* however, it is regarded as *adween bone* (evil thought). An evil action by itself cannot constitute *bone* either. One could only be said to have committed *bone* when there is an evil intention that preceeds the evil action.

Bone (evil) may primarily be defined as anything that dehumanises a person. It implies a thought and act that "kills" (dehumanises) one's *sunsum* (spirit/personality), as the Akan would say: *wakum no sunsum* (he/she has killed one's spirit).

To the Akan, *sunsum* denotes a spiritual component of a human being which does not die. Thus to use the term *kum* (kill) to describe one's action against another fellow human being tells us how far one has oppressed that person. Nonetheless, *bone* can also be committed against a group or the whole community thereby slaying the *sunsum* (spirit/personality) of the group or the community. A classical example is the 18th century slave trade in which the Westerners and some Africans engaged in Africa. One may also cite the unfair trade system that has reduced huge masses of people to naked poverty and servitude whilst a few enjoy a "sea of riches". In this respect, *bone* may be regarded as a structural evil.

5.3.5 The Akan conception of sin and human nature

a) Do the Akan believe that human beings are sinners by nature?

The Akan maxim relating to sin and human nature says: *bone bata onipa ho* (sin is very close

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eaten by the traditional priest and others, it is taboo to eat the carcass of *musuyideɛ*. Thus, although the two rituals can be carried out at the same time, there is a clear distinction. I will discuss this in detail in chapter 7.3-4.

to human beings). The key term is *bata*, which I have interpreted as "very close to". Nevertheless, one may also render *bata* as "part of" or "a component of" which then creates an alternate view to my position. However, such a translation may not be sustained in the daily usage of the term *bata*. An example of another Akan proverb which uses the term *bata* will assist here. There is a proverb that goes: *dua "bata" buo a no twa ye twa na* (if a tree is too close to a stone, it becomes difficult to cut the tree). Here the term *bata* is used to combine a tree and a stone. In this context, it is obvious that the idea is "extremely close" but not "part of" – as stones are usually not parts of trees. Thus to use the term *bata* in the sense of "part of" or "component of" is to stress the term beyond its accepted meaning.

Having said that, I maintain that in the Akan myths of God's withdrawal, the separation between God and humankind did not render human beings as sinners by nature. Within the context of Akan traditional religion, there is no original sin, nor is a human being believed to be born a sinner. A human being becomes a sinner by deed in the context of the community of which that person is a member.

b) Do the Akan know a sense of guilt?
The Akan sense of sin clearly also goes against the theories of "shame culture" that hold that Africans do not have a sense of guilt (guilt culture), but they are only concerned about the opinion of the public (shame culture).

Some scholars have suggested that primal societies such as traditional African ones have a "shame culture" in contradistinction to a "guilt culture" – as the case is in Judaism and Christianity. It is argued that, what concerns primal societies is public esteem and not a troubled conscience. In other words, the strongest moral force in African society – tagged as a shame culture – is respect for the public opinion rather than fear of God. However, this does not apply to the Akan. There are at least five examples that negate such an assumption (Pobee 1979:102).

Firstly, the Akan concept of *tiboa* (which refers to the conscience) denotes that sin has a basis of guilt as well as shame. The common saying in this regard is *ne tiboa bu ne fo* (his/her conscience has condemned him/her). Secondly, the Akan saying *Onyame mmpe bone* (God hates evil) also makes it clear that the Akan are not only concerned with people's opinion, but also what God has to say about their sin. Thirdly, the Akan phrase *Nyame ntua woka* also implies that it is not only what people see in one's evil deed, but that God is the final judge of all humankind. Fourth, the Akan believe that the *okra* (soul) returns to God to render an

account of him-/herself. Fiftly, the ancestors, the lesser divinities and God serve as custodians of public morality and provide sanctions to ensure general wellbeing.

Thus, sin within an Akan religious framework, extends beyond public opinion. One has to reckon with the idea that the ancestors and the lesser divinities are also monitoring the thought and action of human beings. These ideas illustrate that the issue of sin is not only about people's opinions but also a matter of conscience relating to God.

5.3.6 The Akan conception of sin in relation to *Onyame* (God)

The myth of God's withdrawal indicates in the first place that the Akan have a conception of sin which relates to God. According to this well-known myth, *Onyame* long, long ago dwelled truly close to humankind. His abode was the sky. There was a certain old woman who used to pound her *fufu* (a meal of mashed yam or plantain) and, whenever she did so, the long pestle she used knocked against *Onyame's* abode – the sky. In reaction to the human misdeed, *Onyame* said: "Because of what you have been doing to me, I am taking myself away far up into the sky where humankind cannot reach me." So *Onyame* went higher and higher up into the sky, and human beings could no longer approach him.

Upon that, the old woman instructed her children to collect all the mortars (used to pound *fufu*) they could find, and pile them one on top of the other. They complied and piled the mortars, until they required only one more to add to the pile so that it could reach *Onyame*. As they could not find another mortar, the old woman advised her children to take one mortar from the bottom, and place it on top. The children accordingly removed one mortar from the bottom, and when they did, all the other mortars rolled and fell to the ground killing many people (also see Pobee 1979).

The implication of this myth, as understood by the Akan is that there developed a distance between the Supreme Being and human beings due to human misdeed (sin). As already noted, the only direct sin against *Onyame* is regarded within the context of the myth of God's withdrawal. Besides that, one does not directly sin against God, since *Onyame*, according to the myth, has geographically removed himself from the reach of human beings. However, the Akan believe that human beings still sin against God in the sense that one sins against other human beings.

In what follows, I will discuss some ways which the Akan believe make it possible to sin against God, though not directly. Some Akan phrases help us to understand such a relationship.

118

This leads us to a second point, captured in the saying *wo abra Nyame* (you have sinned against God). This comprises an archaic Akan phrase. The key word is *abra*. To help us to understand this term better we will compare its usage to another Akan saying: *wobono no abra no su* (he beats him/her and yet stopped him/her from crying). In this context, the term *bra* does not yield to one word. Nevertheless, its meaning is clear. It denotes "extreme suppression". In its daily usage, one would say *woa bo me abra me su* (what you are doing against me is evil; yet you also block the way by which I can solve the problem).

In the modern context, the phrase *woabo me abra me su* may be equivalent to a structural or an institutionalised evil. When evil is an instrument of policy, it discloses two faces of oppression. The classic example is the old discriminatory law in the USA that demanded that a black person may not sit on a seat in a bus whilst a white person is standing. Firstly, what the law demands from the black person is submission and humiliation; it demeans a person. Secondly, the law does not only stop (*bra*) one from addressing the problem but rendered every means of resistance a criminal offence.

When such a treatment is meted out to a human being, it is then said that: *woabo no abra no su* (he/she beat one, yet stopped one from crying). This brings the true meaning of *bone* (evil). In other words, he/she has dehumanised someone and has turned every means of resistance into a criminal offence. This implies a thought and act that "kills" (dehumanised) one's *sunsum* (spirit/personality) as the Akan would express it *wakum no sunsum* (he/she has killed his/her spirit).

In relating this concept of evil to sin and God, the Akan say *woa bra Nyame* (you have acted evil against God). To the Akan, such an extreme oppression constitutes a dehumanisation of the creature which God has created in his own image. The Akan believe that the *okra* (soul) in the human being is a spark of God's nature. Thus, to hurt someone is to hurt God. Within such a context the Akan will retort: *wo ye nipa bone yefoo* (you are an evil person). Interestingly, the Akan concept of *okra* links individuals to God, to one another and God for all – in a triangular manner.[10]

A third point relates to the Akan phrase: *Onyame ntua wo ka* (God should "reward" you according to your deeds). It is normally in the context of *woabo me abra me su* that *woabra*

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[10] Such a notion conflicts with the saying *each one for himself and God for all* of *us*– which may be said to be the factor underpinning the economic ideology of capitalism. I will discuss this in somewhat more detail under *Nyamesofopreko* Christology as synthesis of inculturation and liberation Christologies in chapter 8.3.7

Nyame is added by those who witness the scene. What follows is *Onyame nntua wo ka* (God should "reward" you according to your deeds). In this respect, *Onyame nntua wo ka* is an appeal by the victim to God as the great judge.

This leads to a related question – as the fourth point: Are human beings responsible to God for their sins? Amongst the Akan, when one commits a sin against a fellow human being, one needs to resolve the problem with the offended one. When the problem is settled with that person, it is automatically settled with God.

Thus, David's assertion (after he committed adultery with Uriah's wife and had him killed) "God, you alone I have offended" does not fit well within the Akan context. The Akan will regard such an assertion as perhaps shunning one's responsibility. This is not to say that the Akan do not accept an individual's responsibility towards God. However, the Akan insist that, first and foremost, one should settle the problem with the premier offended party. If that is settled, then it automatically follows that one has settled the issue with God.

It is firmly established in the Akan culture that *Onyame* is the ultimate and final judge of humankind. Thus, when an Akan member finds him- or herself in the midst of injustice without the means of redress, he or she would sigh with the statement, *made masem ama Onyame* (I have committed my case into God's hands).

This leads to another related question – as the fifth point: Is *Onyame* a custodian of societal norms and laws? Some societal norms, rules and regulations specify one's relationship with the State, with an individual human being and the spirit beings. In addition, some rules and norms are attached to the shrine of an individual lesser divinity and to family ancestor black Stools. For example, a particular lesser divinity may hate goat or palm wine. Thus, for one to approach such a shrine of a lesser divinity with one of those items, entails a breach of the rule of that lesser divinity. On the one hand, such a case may cause a problem between the offender and the particular lesser divinity. Thus the offence may be regarded as "civil case".

Nonetheless, on the other hand, when the offended lesser divinity belongs to a community or State, the offence may then be regarded as a "criminal offence": the offended individual versus the community/State. Such a case might be based on the "random taste" of an individual lesser divinity (as not all of the lesser divinities within the State dislike goat or palm wine). It may nevertheless be reported within the context of the Akan that *wato Oman mmra* (he/she breached the norms of the State). Generally, God, the ancestors and lesser divinities are believed to be the custodians of the societal norms and laws.

Obviously, a problem arises when God is said to be the custodian of the societal laws and norms. It is problematic that some of the laws and norms are set not as much to protect human rights but to appease certain lesser divinities or ancestors. Some of these laws however serve to oppress the masses. Thus can one claim that God sanctions such oppressive norms?

Notwithstanding this obvious contradiction, some African theologians have inferred that God acts as the ultimate giver of the societal laws without drawing any distinctions. For such advocates, the lesser divinities and ancestors act as the ministers who enforce the laws on behalf of God.[11] However, the premises of such an inference could be contested. While the fact is acknowledged that God is the creator and therefore the source of all, one cannot overstress it, as it may also logically follow that God could become the source of evil and sin, being the creator of everything.

Besides, to claim that God is the ultimate source of societal laws would cause problems, in that, God then becomes responsible also for the obnoxious laws and norms in the society. In this respect, it will be more appropriate to attribute only laws that relate to human rights and ethical issues to God. Thereby the ritualistic laws and the norms in Akan society are attributed to human beings, the lesser divinities and the ancestors. Such a suggestion may not be without pitfalls either, as the ancestors, by definition, are good persons. However, as one within the Akan context can only attribute perfection to *Onyame,* all other persons may have their limitation.

By way of concluding this discussion, one may say that the implied sin related in the myth of God's withdrawal concerns a combination of the three above mentioned aspects: *bone*, *mmusuo* and *mmrato*. The myth of God's withdrawal suggests the need for an intermediary.

5.3.7 The need for an intermediary between God and humankind

Firstly, amongst the Akan of Ghana, it is generally believed that the myth of God's withdrawal expresses the fact that human action has grossly marred the relationship between God and humankind. In the myth as previously narrated, the old lady was rude to God. The latter moved Himself/Herself further away, hence the recession of the firmament away from humankind. In symbolic language, this denotes the broken fellowship between human beings and God. Within the Akan context, such a state of affairs calls for reconciliation through an

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[11] May one ask if *Onyame* cares about "goat and palm wine laws"? Of course one may also pose the question if God also cares about "eating of pork and rabbit laws".

intermediary. Thus, the myth of God's self-withdrawal provides a clue to comprehed the impact of sin in respect to human relationships with God. Similarly, the need for a mediator between God and humankind could be inferred from the Akan myth of God's withdrawal.

Secondly, the attempt to establish a priesthood institution for *Onyame* amongst the Akan suggests the need for an intermediary. Rattray (1923:142) has illustrated (with photos) that there was a temple and priest particularly dedicated to *Onyame* (Supreme Being). Although all of that became extinct/obsolete, it gives an indication that at least an attempt was made to establish a priesthood for *Onyame* (also see Sawyerr 1970: 6). Such failures, as I may suggest, are a result of the Akan view of *Onyame* as a perfect Being and the human inability to represent God as this would require a perfect agent, that is, a sinless priest.

Nonetheless, there are firm indications that, to the Akan, it requires betterment to an ordinary human being to be sinless. A human being's inability to overcome sin points to the inadequacy of a human intermediary between God and humankind. No other, non-human mediators are available either, since the *abosom* (the lesser divinities) and the ancestors have traditionally not fulfilled the role of intermediaries between *Onyame* and human beings.[12]

5.3.8 The need for an intermediary between *Onyame* and humankind: Some objections and responses

Amongst the Akan of Ghana, it is generally believed that the myth of God's withdrawal carries implications for a broken relationship between God and humankind. However, some objections may be raised in the context of this myth of "God's withdrawal" against a suggestion of the need for an intermediary between God and humankind.Two such objections are: (a) the omnipresence of *Onyame* negates the need for an intermediary; (b) the concept of *okra* also negates the need for such an intermediary.

a) Does the omnipresence of *Onyame* negate the need for an intermediary?

Amongst the Akan, God is compared to the wind, which is to be found everywhere around. The contention here is that since God is everywhere, and is thus able to hear our supplications at any given time, there is no need for an intermediary between God and human beings. It is argued that for this reason God is not identified with anything in particular or restricted to any place either. Therefore there exist amongst the Akan no shrines, temples and feast days

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[12]   Indeed, socio-religious etiquette suggests the need for an intermediary between God and humankind. But to turn such a suggestion into a conclusive argument for the lesser divinities as intermediaries oversteps the boundaries of West African religious experiences.

specifically devoted to God (Opoku 1978:29).

Moreover, there is a saying: *Obi nkyere abofra Onyame*, which may mean either, "No-one shows a child the Supreme Being" (he knows it by instinct) or, "No-one shows the child the sky" – which is regarded as the abode of the Supreme Being (Gyekye 1996:7). It may be argued from this saying that since God is known to everyone through instinct, there is no need for any special agent to mediate between God and human beings.

In response to this objection, I admit that, to the Akan, God is compared to the wind or a spirit that is everywhere. However, the Akan at the same time deem it appropriate to have *Onyamedua* to represent God. Thus, it may be argued that if God can have a shrine, may it not also be inappropriate for God to have a priest to manage such a shrine? The fact that there is no priest for God at present, does not necessarily imply that God does not need a priest to serve as intermediary between Him/Her and humankind.

Again, the argument that God is spirit and therefore does not need a priest is contestable. The Akan do not only regard *Onyame* as a spirit being. They also view the lesser divinities as such. Yet the lesser divinities have intermediaries between them and their worshippers. When the *abosom* (the lesser divinities) are invoked for arbitration or vengeance, such an invocation can be practised anywhere – with the understanding that the *abosom,* as spirit beings, can hear and act accordingly.[13] Yet, the Akan deem it necessary to have shrines and priests for the *abosom.* If God is Spirit and is everywhere, does this then imply that God does need a priest?

Besides, there is some evidence that an attempt had been made to erect a shrine for God, though no such shrines exist at present. The question as to why such shrines do not exist is debatable. Nevertheless the examples cited lead us to conclude: There is more to answer to the question why God is not worshiped like the other divinities. It is not a sufficient reaction to state the fact that God is spirit and exists everywhere and therefore, does not need a priest.

Therefore, although it is admitted that the Akan presently do not have a priest or priesthood institution for God, we argue that such an absence does not warrant a conclusion that God does not need a priest to serve as an intermediary. In this regard the contentions mentioned above only partly answer the question as to why God, unlike the lesser divinities, does not have a priest to serve as intermediary agent.

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[13]   This raises the issue whether *abosom* are regarded as omniscient or not. This is an interesting issue but it has to be pursued elsewhere.

b) Does the *okra* in human beings negate the need for intermediary?

Amongst the Akan there is a contention that every person has direct access to *Onyame* by virtue of possessing *okra* (soul). This is expressed in an old Ashanti maxim: *Obi kwan nsi obi kwan mu* (no man's path crosses another's), meaning that everyone enjoys a direct path to the Supreme Being. Thus, there is no priest or priestess who has sole access to *Onyame* as is the case with the lesser divinities (Opoku 1978:30).

Admittedly, the Akan believe that individuals have *okra* that enables them to contact God directly. As is obvious in libation rituals, the Akan do invoke *Onyame* and fellowship with Him/Her. Nevertheless, as suggested by the myth of God's withdrawal, the guilt of human sin has marred the relationship between God and human beings. Thus, it can be said that human beings do certainly not enjoy adequate fellowship with God on the basis of their *okra* due to the sins of humankind that caused God's withdrawal from humankind.

5.3.9 Conclusion

Just as the Akan assert that everyone enjoys this direct path to the Supreme Being, the Akan recognise that *Onyame nnpe bone* (God hates sin) and, at the same time, that *bone bata nipa ho* (sin is very close to humankind). To the Akan, sin has negative implications for a healthy relationship with God. Sin therefore demands *afodie* (sin sacrifice). These observations continue to beg the question why the Akan do not offer such sacrifices to *Onyame*. This question leads us back to the requirement that God should have a priest to offer such sacrifice. And such a person who may serve as a priest for *Onyame* has to be sinless in accordance with the institutional rule of priesthood. No human priests have been able to meet such a requirement within the context of traditional Akan religious experience. This would account for the absence of such a priesthood and sacrifice, at least in practice.

5.4 Jesus as *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique Priest)

5.4.1 Introduction

To begin with I focus again briefly on the traditional Akan myth of *Onyame*'s self-withdrawal and the absence of a priesthood for *Onyame*. In light thereof I contend that, in traditional Akan religion and culture, no suitable mediator has been identified that could restore the relationship between God and humanity. On this basis, my constructive proposal is that the term *Nyamesofopreko* may be employed to portray Jesus Christ as God's unique priest, i.e. as one who, for the first time, could fulfil this mediating role since he is professed to be a person

124

without sin. The concept of *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest) entails two main ideas, namely a) the need for such a mediator between God and humankind and b) the uniqueness of Jesus Christ to play such a role.

In section 5.4.2 I will explain and justify the use of the term *Nyamesofopreko.* In section 5.4.3 I will then develop a constructive proposal on the need for Jesus as Mediator between God and humankind. I will also offer an explanation as to why Jesus Christ may be seen as a unique Priest amongst Akan Christians. In section 5.4.4 I will also consider various objections which may be raised in response to this proposal. This will be followed by a brief conclusion in section 5.5.

5.4.2 Explaining the term "*Nyamesofopreko"*

In constructing this Christology, I have coined the term *Nyamesofopreko* by combining three Akan terms, namely *Nyame* (Supreme Being), *sofo* (priest/pastor) and *preko* (unique), in order to suggest that the message of Jesus Christ responds to the need for a mediator between the Supreme Being and human beings, and to suggest that Jesus Christ is indeed unique in this regard.

a) *Nyame*

The Akan term *Nyame* denotes the Supreme Being or God. This is the shorter form of the terms *Onyame* or *Onyankopon*. There is no cultural or linguistic difference between the three terms *Nyame, Onyame* and *Onyankopon.* Danquah's suggestion that these three terms apply to three different persons is widely rejected by Akan scholars as speculation. The Akan section of the Jehovah Witnesses has also suggested that there are differences between *Nyame* and *Onyankopon,* alleging that the former is a lesser divinity and the latter is God. However, such an assumed difference is influenced by the biblical concept of God and gods, and it is unfounded within the Akan context.

The name *Nyame* or *Onyame* or *Onyankopon* is exclusively used for the Supreme Being. It is singular and does not in any sense express a divine assembly (Ryan 1980:162 and Sarpong 1974:10). *Onyame* is also thought to be unique and different from all the other spirits or divinities. Thus, the *abosom* (lesser divinities) are never referred to as *Nyame* or *Onyame or anyame;* neither has *Nyame* or *Onyame or Onyankopon* ever been placed in the category of the *abosom* (Sarpong 2002:97).

On this basis Ryan rightly argues that it is wrong to place *Onyame* (Supreme Being) and

abosom (the lesser divinities) in the same class and refer to them in terms of God and the gods as if they have the same nature. Ryan rightly observes that no authentic dialect of the Akan language exists that yields an adequate equivalent of the Semitic and Greco-Roman pair named God and gods (Ryan 1980:164). In this respect, it can be concluded that the name *Nyame* as "implanted" in the coined term *Nyamesofopreko* solely refers to the Supreme Being that the Akan duly recognise as the ultimate Being.

b) *Sofo*

The term *sofo* is the old name for a custodian or representative of the *tete abosom* (lesser divinities). Christaller (1933:467) defines an *osofo* as a "priest, one who officiates in the service of a fetish, or who performs religious ceremonies …" The term is distinctively different from the term *okomfo,*[14] popularly translated as fetish priest. However, the nature of the work of *osofo* is somehow akin to that of *okomfo* ("fetish" priest). More precisely, it is akin to that of *obosomfo* (chief custodian of a shrine) who normally serves as the chief priest in the shrines.

The term *obosomfo* is a combination of two terms: *obosom* (lesser divinity) and *fo* (a suffix connoting belonging). Combining the two terms, *obosomfo* means one who is an adherent to a cult of a lesser divinity. If the term is applied in the singular sense as in the present context, then the *fo* refers to the one involved as the head of the group; chief priest. If the applied context is plural as in the case of *asorefo* (those who belong to a church), then it simply denotes members of a lesser divinity cult. Another term which may be used interchangeably with *obosomfo* is *okomfo-hene* or *okomfo-panin.* The term *(o)hene* means chief and *(o)panin* is an elder. In this respect, the two terms have the same meaning: the head or chief priest.

The three persons: *osofo, obosomfo* and *okomfo* are all active servants of deities at Akan shrines. Traditionally, the term *osofo* is employed for officiating (lay) people or active servants of deities at an Akan shrine who act on the instruction of the chief priest (*obosomfo*) or of the possessed *akomfo* (traditional priests and priestesses).

The Akan distinguish between *obosomfo* and *osofo*. In a given shrine, whereas there may be many *asofo* (priests) there should be only one *obosomfo*. The *obosomfo* is the chief priest, and the *asofo* are the servers of the shrine. Nevertheless, in a case of an *obosomfo* dying, one of

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[14]   The word *okomfo* is derived from the term *akom* meaning a prophecy or a revelation. *Akom* is popularly associated with possession, and the possession dance performed by the *akomfo.*

the *asofo* can replace that *obosomfo* as the chief priest. Thus, in some sense, *asofo* serve as juniors or priests under apprenticeship.

There are also differences between the *obosomfo* and *okomfo*. The *obosomfo* (chief priest) undertakes religious transactions and as such acts as a priest. *Obosomfo's* main function is to offer sacrifices, libations and oversee the management of the entire shrine.

The *akomfo* (plural of *okomfo)* are the possessed and dancing prophets and prophetesses (or priests and priestesses) who perform publicly. The *okomfo's* main task is to interpret the oracles of the fetish and to prophesy as well as perform magical acts under the influence of a lesser divinity or dwarfs.

Indeed all the three terms *obosomfo*, *okomfo* and *osofo* can be rightly translated as priest. Whereas there may be many *asofo* and *akomfo* in a given shrine, there is only one *obosomfo* in such a shrine. Usually, there would be a number of *asofo* and *akomfo* who work under the *obosomfo* the chief priest of the shrine.

On the current usage, Ghanaians normally identify religious heads (God's ministers: Roman Catholic priests, Protestant bishops, pastors and even Moslem imams) with the term *sofo.* The full form of the term *sofo* is *osofo.* Indeed, the first denomination to apply the term *osofo* to religious leaders was the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (Ekem 1994).

Notably, the title *sofo*, is used in the Akan translation of the Bible for a priest of the Judeo-Christian faith. However, Ekem (2005:117)[15] disagrees with such a translation. According to Ekem, the term *asofo* is traditionally employed for lay people who officiate, or for active servants of deities at the Akan shrine who are Akan traditional priests and priestesses. Ekem admits that the functions of *asofo* are, undoubtedly, priestly in nature. He insists that *asofo* are not first-hand recipients of divine instruction, but executors of it. Hence, technically speaking, the *asofo* are not priests.

Ekem (2005:119) contends that if the author of the Letter to the Hebrews is to be understood correctly, Jesus exercises his high priesthood not so much in the physical as in the metaphysical realm (Hebrew 9:11). Ekem argues that the Akan spiritual universe is mediated metaphysically through the *akomfo.* Thus, from the standpoint of traditional Akan understanding, the function of *okomfo* rather than *osofo,* seems to approximate the type of

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[15] John David Kwamena Ekem, holds a Doctorate in Theology from the University of Hamburg, Germany. He serves as a translation consultant for the Bible Society of Ghana, and is currently a lecturer at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra. He is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church of Ghana.

priestly Christology that is advanced by the author of Hebrews. He poses the question: if Jesus exercises his high priesthood in the metaphysical realm, how is this related to the *asofo* acting as earthly executors of divine instructions? To Ekem, the role of *asofo* in traditional Akan understanding cannot be compared in any way to what is being proclaimed about Jesus Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews.

Ekem maintains that the term *okomfo* is more appropriate to translate the Judeo-Christian concept of priest than the term *osofo* as seen in the Akan-Twi translation. Thus, by opting for *osofo*, the Bible translators have not done justice to the ministry of Jesus as the high priest of God. Ekem further argues that it will be theologically inappropriate to describe Jesus as *Sofo panin (high* priest*)*[16] in the Akan religious world-view as He is portrayed in the biblical translation (Ekem 2005:120).

Discussing the possible reasons why the Akan Bible translators opted for *osofo* instead of *okomfo,* Ekem points to "fetish associations" of the term *okomfo*. To buttress his claim, Ekem cites Damuah[17] who took the combined title *osofo-okomfo* as a description of his new leadership role. Ekem sees Damuah's new title as an appropriate description of Damuah's new leadership role. He contends that one is inclined to view Damuah's interesting title as an effort to resolve the ambiguity characterising the use of priestly titles in traditional Akan spirituality. To Ekem, the title combination, *osofo-komfo,* is probably meant to underscore the fact that the *okomfo*'s role cannot be ignored in any serious endeavour with the traditional Akan reality (Ekem 2005:119).

Having turned down the title *osofo* as an appropriate one, Ekem suggests another title: *Ntamugyinafopanin* (*Ntamugyinafo* means mediator/intercessor; *panin* means most senior/highest) which could be literally translated as "Highest Mediator". He contends that it is a neutral title, and that, it also sufficiently embraces both roles – *osofo* and *okomfo.* He

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[16] The question that one may ask regarding the title *Sofopanin* is: Who are the junior priests that justify the title "high priests"? The Akan do not have a priest for *Onyame*. Thus, to make Jesus a high priest would presuppose the existence of junior priests for *Onyame*. But such priests do not exist within the Akan context. One may explore the possibility of appropriating/considering the priests of the lesser divinities as junior priests for *Onyame*. The assumption for such an exploration will be the theory of intermediary. The intermediary theory maintains that the lesser divinities are the "mouth pieces" or ministers of the Supreme Being in the African traditional religious experience. If we are to accept this theory, the priests of the lesser divinities then become the priests of the Supreme Being. This will lead one to accept the existence of the junior priests for *Onyame* – which would pave the way for the acceptance of Jesus as the high priest within the Akan context.

[17] Rev. Fr. Vincent Kwabena Damuah was an ex-Roman Catholic priest from Wassa Amanfi traditional area in the Western Region of Ghana. He founded the Afrikania Religion as an attempt to demonstrate the authenticity of traditional African religious values.

argues that the main advantage with this title is that it focuses on the element of mediation which is essential for understanding the function of a "hiereus" or "archiereus" (chief priest) in Hellenistic thought (Ekem 2005:120).

Ekem (2005:120) concedes that *Ntamugyinafo* does not specify the type of mediation unless clarified in context. Nonetheless, he insists that the term portrays a self-sacrificing high-priest as sketched by the author of Hebrews in his Priestly Christology.[18]

Analysing Ekem's proposals, it must be noted that one needs to exercise caution when categorising the *okomfo* as priests and *asofo* as non-priests, as Ekem contends. As Ekem has rightly noted, strictly speaking, some of these *asofo,* particularly the junior ones, are not first recipients of the divine instructions. Rather, it is their duty to ensure that all the divine directions relayed by the *akomfo* are carried out meticulously. However, in most cases the *osofo*, particularly, the chief-*osofo* who is the *obosomfo* has direct contact with the deity. Some also double as *okomfo or obosomfo-komfo*.

In the late thirties and forties, Field (1960:88) observed and clarified the distinction between the *obosomfo a*nd *okomfo* when she noted that the *abosomfo* as a rule were not practicing spirit-possession dancing. Instead they offered dignified prayer and other rites, not only on behalf of the individual but also with regard to the entire community who sought help when sick or in trouble. The *abosomfo's* style of worship never took on the form of drama as did the services of the *akomfo*; however, they are also equally first recipients of divine instructions.[19] Thus, in this sense the term *obosomfo* adequately translates the term "priest".

Nevertheless, one may want to differentiate between *obosomfo* and *osofo;* but the differences are not always clearcut. This is the case because there may be some *obosomfo* who is a not *okomfo,* yet he /she may be a firsthand recipient of divine instruction. In such a case, that *obosomfo* may be part of the category of *osofo* yet he/she is firsthand recipient of divine instruction.

Besides, the categorisation of the *akomfo* as priests and the *asofo* as non-priests may be questionable as well. Viewing critically the functions of the *okomfo* and the *asafo*, it may be

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[18] Ekem notes that the crux of the matter should lie rather in investigating whether it is possible for Jesus, the Christ, to dwell in the Akan spiritual universe as *Sofopanyin* par excellence through whom spiritual blessings are mediated to the community of faith. He admits that it would, nonetheless, require a painstaking theological-linguistic investigation to determine the extent to which this Christianised title can assume authenticity within non-Christian Akan circles. Ekem however declines to deal with the issue further for he indicates that it ranges beyond the scope of his present discussion. He recommended future research do be be devoted to it.

[19] The *abosomfo* only entered the state of spirit-possession within the temple or the confines of its courtyard.

more appropriate to refer to the *akomfo* as prophets and the *asofo* as priests. Such groupings may reflect the Old Testament notion of priests and prophets. With respect to this, one may distinguish between an *osofo/obosomfo*, as one who undertakes religious transactions and in this, acts as a priest, and *okomfo*, whose main task is to interpret the oracles of the fetish and to prophesy as well as perform magical acts under its influence, thus a prophet. The prophets are seers, whilst the priest's (*osofo*) function is to offer sacrifices and oversee the entire fetish establishment.

Nevertheless, the term *obosomfo* may also be unappropriate. It has specific connections to the lesser divinities as the name *abosom* denotes. As Ekem concedes, the "fetish associations", of the term in the present understanding amongst the Akan make it an inappropriate term to associate with Jesus. The term has been demonised beyond Christian application; in fact, it stands in antithesis with the name of Jesus in the current Ghanaian understanding.

Another concern may deter us from using *okomfo* as a title for Jesus. The combination of *Nyame* and *komfo* (that is *Nyame-komfo-(prekope)* seems to have another meaning which creates a negative impression for the person of Jesus. The Akan refer to someone suffering from epileptics as *Nyamekomfo.* On the basis of the negative implication that the combinations of *Nyame* and *komfo* have, to refer to Jesus as *Nyamekomfo* may lead to a conclusion that Jesus was an epileptic.

One may also look critically at the situation of Damuah as Ekem seeks to use it as a basis to negate the usage of *osofo* as priest. Here, would it not be more correct to say that Damuah just wanted to identify himself with the traditional priest and thus employed the term *okomfo* as a way of receiving more adherents from the traditionalists. Perhaps Ekem might have read more into Damuah's intention when he wants us to believe that Damuah took the title *okomfo* in addition to the *osofo* to settle for a theological inadequacy of the term *osofo.*

Moreover, Ekem's suggestion of *Ntamugyinafopanin* (*Ntamugyinafo*) also gives a wrong impression. The term *panin* (senior, most/highest) suggests the existence of some junior *Ntamugyinafo* (mediators) between God and humankind according to Akan belief. However, as Ekem himself duly admits, the traditional Akan do not have any priest for God. Yet it takes the presence of junior priests to render a term "senior priest" meaningful. With regard to the term *Ntamugyinafo* (mediator), it may also not be as appropriate as Ekem himself points out, because it is (too) abstract and does not specify the type of mediation, unless clarified in context.

c) *Preko*

The Akan term *preko,* the shorter form of *prekope,* could mean "at once" or "unique". An Akan member can say: *Prekope na obe pie ho* (he/she suddenly came to the scene). In this context, *prekope* means "at once". An Akan can also say: *Woye me wofase prekope* (he/she is my real or unique nephew/niece). Whether the reference is to "real" or "unique", depends on the context. If the emphasis lies on differentiating the speaker's own sister's (same mother) son or daughter from another relative's children, then the *prekope* would mean "real". The term used to make one's intention clear is *nimpon,* though one is equally right to say *prekope.*

Equally, an Akan could say: *woye me wofase prekope*, referring to one of his/her real nephews/nieces. Although, the rest of the speaker's nephews and nieces are from his /her "real" sister (same mother), using *prekope* in this sense makes the referent a unique nephew or niece. One uses such an emphasis when one wants to show in a metaphoric sense how the referent is "the one and only" reliable nephew or niece. Another term for such an emphasis is *soronko*. For example an Akan may say: *wo ye me wofase soronko* (he/she is different amongst other nephews and nieces). This begs the question why *prekope* is used instead of *soronko*. Accordingly, one may refer to *Nyamesofosoronko* rather than *Nyamesofopreko.*

Nyamesofosoronko, while connoting that Jesus is unique, also suggests that there may be many existing priests for *Onyame* and that Jesus is one (unique) amongst them. Accordingly, the notion is that Jesus is the high priest for *Onyame.* However, within the Akan context it would be inappropriate, to refer to Jesus as the high priest of *Onyame.* Amongst the Akan, *Onyame* does not have a priest. Although there is a hint that an attempt was made to institute priesthood for *Onyame,* for some reason it failed. Thus, to name Jesus the high priest of *Onyame* is to make a statement which is likely to create the wrong impression: There has to be another valid lower priest to justify the presence of a high priest. Nonetheless, the idea of a high priest is foreign to the Akan culture and worldview. In this respect, *Nyamesofosoronko* may not be appropriate for our context.

Nyamesofopreko is preferred here because the term *prekope* interpreted as unique, eliminates the presence of other "valid lower priests", thus making the referent – Jesus – the only qualified priest of God. A popular TV advert sounds: Ariel *yi fi prekope* (Ariel removes dirt at once). In this context, the term *prekope* recognises other powdered soap but the presence of Ariel powdered soap makes the rest "not up to the job", thus inferior or, more so, fake. *Prekope* in this sense creates a strong impression of "one and only one".

Observably, in the system containing lower priests and a high priest, the lower priests are duly

recognised. They are recognised as valid priests who serve under the high priest. However, when one uses the term *prekope* in such a context, it usually downplays the other priests by contrasting their position to that of the high priest. Unlike, *soronko,* it serves not only to demonstrate the positive side of the one upon whom the emphasis is placed. By implication it downplays the functions of the others. In respect to this subtle difference, *Nyamesofopreko* is preferred to *Nyamesofosoronko* to translate the concept of God's unique Priest.

d) Conclusion

In light of the above mentioned problems associated with the other terms, I deem the term *Nyamesofopreko* as a relatively more adequate one to express the notion, of Jesus as Mediator between God and humankind.

The other common terms close to the term *Nyamesofopreko* may be *Nyamesofo* and *Nyameprekope.* The former usually refers to Christian ministers. The latter is an Akan Christian theological term that any preacher may allude to in reference to Jesus' uniqueness.

Indeed, Jesus Christ may be seen in this way as a unique priest because, a) there have not been any such priests before, at least not in the Akan religious experience; b) he is unlike any of the other priests or other lesser divinities – because he is fully human as well as fully divine; c) his work as Mediator differs in scope and approach.

5.4.3 The concept of *Nyamesofopreko:* **The uniqueness of Jesus' priesthood**

Based on the discussion thus far, I may suggest here that the role of Jesus as Mediator between God and humankind may be better interpreted in Akan context in terms of that of a priest. Nonetheless, there is no priest or priesthood institution for God in the Akan context. This may suggest the need for Jesus as Mediator and explain why Jesus Christ may be seen as a unique priest within the Akan context.

a) The myth of God's withdrawal and the need for Jesus as priest (Mediator)

Within the Akan context, the myth of God's self-withdrawal gives us the clue to understand the impact of sin with respect to human relationships with God. The myth shows similarities to the biblical account of the fall of humankind as narrated in Genesis chapters 1-3. With the assumption that the passage in the Genesis account serves as a revelation of human alienation from God, the myth may help Akan Christians to infer some continuity between their African heritage and their Christian faith.

132

It is clear from both the myth and the biblical accounts that every person had direct access to *Onyame* but the broken relationship through the disobedience of human beings has marred such access. In the case of Adam and Eve (representatives of the first humans on earth), it was wilful disobedience to God's commandment not to eat a specific fruit. Similarly, in the case of the Akan old lady, it was deliberate disobedience to use a long pestle (as against the normal short ones) with malice aforethought to nag *Onyame*.

It may therefore be inferred here that, like Adam and Eve before the fall, the old lady had direct access to God before the incident of God's self-withdrawal. Thus it can be deduced both from the biblical account and the Akan tradition that God did not originally create human beings as sinners but human beings became sinners by their own choice.

Moreover, in the biblical narratives, Adam and Eve were condemned to die after eating the fruit. Similar to the biblical accounts, the consequence of sin according to the myth is not only human alienation from God (spiritual death) but also entails death (physical death). In the myth, the children of the old lady could not obtain the one mortar required to reach God anywhere. Their grandmother, that is the old lady, told her children "Take one from the bottom, and put it on the top to make them reach." Thus her children removed a single mortar and all spilled down and fell to the ground, causing the death of many people. It may also be deduced from the myth that evil cannot escape punishment; death was the consequence of their sin (Pobee 1979). Of course, the myth raises an issue whether the sin of the old woman might have had repercussions for all human beings or not.

This leads us to the question whether one's sin affects others in society. In the myth, the old lady started alone, but later invited others in her attempt to be on equal footing with God. This made the helpers partake in the sin of the old lady. Amongst the Akan, it is also believed that one's sin can anger the lesser divinities and the ancestors and thereby can cause misfortune to the entire community. Nonetheless, the Akan also believe in an individual's responsibility for his/her own wrongdoing – i.e. sin.

In the biblical account of the fall as well as the myth of God's self-withdrawal there is a further notion that sin without reconciliation has fatal consequences. Such an idea is very clear to any traditional Akan as exemplified by the relationship between the lesser divinities and human beings. It is believed strongly that no one can offend any lesser divinity and walk free – unless that person seeks reconciliation. However, as may be deduced from the myth, the old woman and her people pretended that nothing had happened. Similarly, in Genesis, Adam

only shifted the blame back to God: "the woman you gave me …" Nevertheless, Adam was eventually punished.

The need for a mediator between God and humankind could be derived from the myth of God's withdrawal. Nevertheless, without the biblical revelation of the person and the work of Christ, the Akan people could not adequately have seen the consequences of sin and thus the need for a mediator in this regard. Thus, within the context of the myth of self-withdrawal, Akan Christians may see Jesus as *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest) through the knowledge of Christ's person and works. In this respect, the myth may help Akan Christians to infer some continuity between their African heritage and their Christian faith.

b) Jesus is unique because he alone serves as Mediator between God and humankind

Firstly, the uniqueness of the mediatorship of Jesus pivots around the belief that he alone serves as God's priest; also there have not been any such priests before, at least not within Akan context. Thus, Jesus is proclaimed unique because he alone serves as Mediator between God and humankind.

In the previous discussion, I have noted that God can use anybody as His intermediary. Thus we have those intermediaries that God employs for *Nyamedwuma* (God's work) and also those that serve as *Nyamebofo* (God's messenger). Moreover, there are those who become "God" to others, in some situations – in other words they become a saviour to others in a given situation. Yet, there is no institution of priesthood or priest who serves as a mediator between God and humankind. Notably, there is no such institution or priest in any of the African societies.

Of course the traditional Akan religious experience, as the notions of *Nyamedwuma* and *Nyamebofo* illustrate, have a sense of occasional (limited) "priesthood of all believers" in varied degrees. Nevertheless, no Akan has claimed the office of God's priest due to the presumed requirement of a sinless life. And this is exactly what Jesus, though implicit, stakes his claim. This is also explicitly affirmed by the biblical writers and the church fathers. In this respect, I may suggest here that, in the first place, Jesus alone serves as Mediator between God and humankind because of his sinless life.

Jesus' sinlessness qualifies him as not only a situational or an occasional intermediary. It makes Jesus a regular and a permanent and even an eternal (according to Christian belief) Mediator between God and humankind. Thus, whereas all people may qualify in degrees to act as occasional mediators between God and humankind, it is only Jesus who could be

regarded as *Nyamesofopreko;* holding the office of God's Mediator not only occasionally but truly eternally, seeing that he lives forever.[20]

c) Jesus is unlike any other priest; he is truly human and truly God

The second connotation ascribed to Jesus as God's unique priest is that he is unlike any other priest, particularly the priests of lesser divinities. He is both fully human as well as fully divine.[21] The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, in what must have been a profound shock to non-Christian Jews, applies the title "high priest" to Jesus when Jesus does not even form part of the priesthood family.[22] Nonetheless, the author of Hebrews indicates that it is not sufficient only to prove the priesthood of Jesus as a justification for his role as Mediator between God and humankind. He also points out how, in such a proposal, Jesus' divinity would not be compromised (cf. Hebrews 7:3).

In order to project Jesus as a priest, the author of Hebrews did not appeal to a Greco-Roman precedent. Rather, he found within the biblical tradition a precedence of one person, Melchizedek, who held both positions as king and priest. The author differentiates the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is labelled as universal, from the Aaronic priesthood, which was regarded as particular. Psalm 110 is the scriptural key to what the author of Hebrews professes with regard to Melchizedek's position. To the author, Melchizedek represents the Son of God, and the Son remains a priest for all time (7:3c) because he lives forever (1:8-9).

Since the Bible makes no mention of Melchizedek's parentage, the author contends that Melchizedek has no mother, no father, nor genealogy (7:3a). The author constructs an argument from silence, yet accords Melchizedek a status of humanity and divinity concurrently. With this contention, the writer of Hebrew avoids what was to be known later as the "heresy" of adoptionism.[23]

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[20]   For all the attack on Christianity by non-Christians in Ghana, particularly the Akan traditionalist and the Moslems, there is no dispute on the sinless life of Jesus.

[21]   I will return to this in more detail in chapter 6.2.

[22]   Two points are important in light of the approach adopted by the author of the letter to the Hebrews. First is the "nature" of the comparison. Second is the "direction" of that comparison. First, in Hebrews chapter 7, Melchizedek is said to "resemble" the Son of God, which means that the two are similar, but not identical. The second point is that, the author of Hebrews does not allege that the Son of God is like Melchizedek, but that Melchizedek is like the Son of God (7:3c). The author spots the traits of Christ in Melchizedek in the way that one can discern the shape of a person in his shadow or in his reflection in the mirror. The book of Hebrews considers Melchizedek to be an earthly shadow that the risen Christ casts back on Old Testament Scripture.

[23]   Nonetheless, it may be anachronistic to argue that the author's aim then was to avoid the heresy of

d) Jesus' priesthood is unique because his work as a mediator is different in approach and scope

Thirdly, the work of Jesus is different in its approach and broader in scope compared to the work of a traditional African priest. One way of exploring the work of Jesus Christ is to distinguish between his state of humiliation and the state of exaltation. With reference to the state of humiliation, one may mention his incarnation, suffering, cross and descent into hell. With reference to his state of exaltation, one may also mention his resurrection, ascension, sitting at the right hand of the Father and the expectation of the ("second") coming of Christ (*parousia*). These concepts are different from the traditional Akan understanding of mediation. In this sense the mediation of Christ is different in approach from mediation in traditional Akan context.

Moreover, if the author of Hebrews is to be understood correctly, Jesus exercises his high priesthood not so much in the physical as in the metaphysical realm (Hebrew 9:11). The implication of this ministry with regard to the earth is his unceasing intercession for the Christians before God.

As I have already argued, the role of the lesser divinities and the ancestors should not be understood as that of mediating between human beings and God. In this regard, the roles fulfilled by the intermediaries within Akan society has a limited scope of operation as compared to that of Jesus. In respect to the relationship between God and humankind, Jesus may be regarded as sole Mediator. Indeed, in this sense Jesus may truly be regarded as *Nyamesofopreko* amongst the Akan Christians.

5.4.4 Some possible objections and responses to the notion of Jesus as *Nyamesofopreko*

a) Is the image of *Nyamesofopreko* not substantially independent of the title *sofo?*

The purpose of this section is to justify the usage of the title "priest" as accorded to Jesus in the sense of *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest). Such a justification has become necessary seeing that I have criticised positions that view Jesus as proto-ancestor and as greatest ancestor. My contention against an ancestor Christology is that, the title "ancestor" as accorded to Jesus in terms of "Christ our ancestor" is substantially independent of the title "ancestor" as understood within the traditional African context. Such a problem emerges, particularly, when one attempts to project Jesus into a different class of ancestorhood, thereby modifying the term ancestor far beyond its traditional meaning.

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adoptionism which was formally denounced much later on.

136

On the basis of my criticism against an ancestor Christology, one may raise the question: Can the same objection can be used as retort against the image of *Nyamesofopreko*? For it may be conceivable that the image of *Nyamesofopreko* would be somewhat unlike those of the traditional priests – seeing that Jesus' uniqueness distances him substantially from the traditional Akan priesthood.

Obviously, such a position raises the following question: Who would this *Nyamesofopreko* then be, and how does such a person relate to the traditional Akan priests? Indeed, presenting Jesus as a priest and at the same time disassociating him from a traditional priest, creates the dilemma of rendering the Christological title independent of the traditional image.

But I argue here as follows: One may not regard Jesus as proto-ancestor substantially independent from him being traditional ancestor. However the same cannot be said of the image of *Nyamesofopreko* and the priests of the lesser divinities.

Within the traditional African context, the term "priest", unlike "ancestor", is somehow generic. Thus, one may be referred to as priest, when one mediates between human beings and the lesser divinities or between human beings and God. Generally, the term "priest" refers to any human being who mediates between human and spirit beings.

Thus, Jesus, who is truly human as well as truly God according to the Chalcedon formula, is in a position to mediate between God and humankind and may therefore be described as the priest of God. Thus, Jesus may indeed be regarded as a priest within the traditional Akan context, but then not as priest unto the lesser divinities, but unto *Onyame* – the Supreme Being – instead.

Seeing Jesus as a priest in this way distinguishes him from the priests of the lesser divinities, not only in terms of a priest's functions but also in terms of status. Of course, this would indicate that Jesus cannot be regarded as similar to the priests of the lesser divinities. However, this does not necessarily imply that he cannot be regarded as a "priest" within the traditional Akan context. Moreover, by modifying the term *sofo* (priest) with *Nyame* and *preko* (*Nyame-sofo-preko*), I have drawn a distinction between the term *Nyamesofopreko* and the phrase "priests of the lesser divinities". Although the term *Nyamesofopreko* and the phrase "priests of lesser divinities" represent two categories, the concept of priesthood could nonetheless apply to both cases.

One may retort that it is also possible to distinguish between two categories of ancestors; namely ordinary ancestors and ancestors accorded with black stools. However, the distinction

between these two groups of ancestors is based on the positions those persons occupied in their lives. Such a distinction therefore does not necessarily invite a generic use of the term "ancestor", whereas the term "priest" could be used in such a generic sense.

b) Can *mamfrani* (a foreigner) represent the Akan before God?

In an attempt to present Jesus amongst the Akan as Mediator between God and humankind, another important question has to be addressed: Can *mamfrani* (a foreigner) represent the Akan before God? In light of this question Pobee (1979) also asks: "Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation?" On the same issue, Bediako also commented as follows: "Up to now, our churches have tended to avoid the question and have presented the Gospel as though it was concerned with an entirely different compartment of life, unrelated to traditional religious piety". He continues: "As a result, many people are uncertain about how the Jesus proclaimed by the Church saves them from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview."

Bediako also rightly points out that, if the Akan Christians fail to interpret the person and the work of Christ within the context of their worldview and culture, many Akan Christians will continue to operate at two levels; half African and half European, but never belonging properly to either.

Remarkably, both Pobee and Bediako are Akan, thus addressing the question is not merely an academic exercise. It is also of real practical concern for Akan Christians. This question is also hugely important for the purposes of this thesis, in that, if Jesus cannot be accepted amongst the Akan, how then can he represent the Akan before God as priest?

Notably, both Pobee and Bediako are of the view that the solution of this problem lies with the idea of viewing Jesus as an Akan ancestor. Nonetheless, Bediako contends that Pobee approaches the problem largely through Akan wisdom, sayings and proverbs, and thereby does not deal sufficiently with the religious nature of the question. Bediako argues that Pobee has thus underestimated the cross-cultural conflict that the issue entails.

In his own response, Bediako attempts to illustrate how Jesus could be an Akan ancestor – and could therefore be accepted amongst the Akan. Bediako contends that the early Jewish Christians had a similar problem and that the Letter to the Hebrews was written to answer such a question. He suggests that Akan Christians may turn to the author of this Letter to the Hebrews for guidance in this regard.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews contends that Jesus serves as the high Priest, though Jesus did not emerge from a priesthood family. The author appeals to the person of Melchizedek, who served as a Jewish priest before the establishment of the formal (Levitical) priesthood institution amongst the Jews. Thus the author appeals to a notion that is referred to as a universal priesthood – as opposed to the local priesthood for which Jesus is evidently not qualified. As Bediako views it, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews confers high priesthood onto Jesus on the basis of his universal significance, not his particular significance.

Bediako notes that, Aaron was the first high priest and his successors had to come from his particular family line. However, according to the author of Hebrews, Jesus is a high priest following the order of Melchizedek, who was a priestly king at the time of Abraham, the original and greatest ancestor of the Jews. The author buttresses his/her point by noting that, Abraham gave tribute to Melchizedek by paying his tithe to him. Therefore, in the Jewish tradition, there is also, beyond the tribal lineage of Aaron, a high priest who functions on an universal level.

Building on the analogy of Melchizedek from the Letter to the Hebrews, Bediako (2000:31) concludes that the nature of Jesus as true God and true human places the priesthood of Jesus in a different category compared to the Levitical priests or the traditional Akan priests of the lesser divinities.

For Bediako, if Jesus is to be considered a universal high priest, as the author of Hebrews argues, then Jesus can carry out the duties of a high priest – perform the sacrifices and function as a mediator – for all of humankind.

Following the exposition in Hebrews, Bediako believes that Jesus did not only perform the ritual of a regular animal sacrifice, but that he, out of free will, sacrificed himself. For Bediako, Jesus is the universal Lord and Saviour, and as such, he also belongs to the Akan. This makes Jesus' accomplishment significant for each human person and every human context and all human cultures.

Analysing Bediako's approach, necessary questions need to be posed: On what grounds does Bediako relate the Letter to the Hebrews to Akan culture? Will the Akan be able to accept Jesus as a universal ancestor or priest on this basis? Can one simply claim that Jesus is a universal priest and that the Akan should therefore accept him? To the author of Hebrews, Jesus was a universal priest in the order of Melchizedek but in which order recognised by the Akan could Jesus be regarded as a universal ancestor or priest?

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews provides some grounds for the Jewish Christians to accept another recognised priest beyond the formal priesthood institution. Thus, one would expect that Bediako should do in the Akan context what the writer of the Hebrews has done in the Jewish context with regard to Melchizedek and Jesus. However, Bediako has not demonstrated clearly why Jesus could be regarded as the universal ancestor in the Akan context. His analysis appears to say: Jesus has been proven to be a universal priest to the Jews; thus the Akan should accept him as their priest as well.

However, to the Akan, Jesus is not Akan. Thus the question still remains: Can *mamfrani* (a foreigner) represent the Akan before God? The inadequacy of Bediako's proposal regarding this question, necessitates another approach to the issue.

Amongst the Akan, as already indicated, apart from the primary way, namely by being born from an Akan woman, one can also become an Akan by receiving a call to serve as priest to a lesser divinity amongst the Akan community. To the Akan, one does not need to be an Akan member to become a priest amongst the Akan. In fact, it is the prerogative of the "deity" to choose its own priest. From the evidence of traditional priesthood and present experience of traditional priesthood ministry, the lesser divinities chose their priests from amongst the Akan or from the non-Akan in an arbitrary manner. Some people even became priests amongst the Akan before they had mastered the Akan language – and acted as priests through an Akan interpreter.

Remarkably, as soon as a lesser divinity had chosen a non-Akan for its priest, this person would be "naturalised" in status as an Akan. There are some instances where some non-Akan traditional priests became chiefs in several towns and villages, although it is strictly forbidden to allow any non-Akan to become a chief over the Akan. [24]

Nonetheless, apart from a "call" from a deity to become its priest amongst the Akan, one has to be born from an Akan woman before one qualifies to be an Akan.

On this basis, we may infer that Jesus received a call from *Onyame* (duly recognised as the deity amongst the Akan) to become His priest. Therefore Jesus has acquired the legitimacy to be seen as an Akan. [25] In this respect, the question of why the Akan should follow Jesus who

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[24] *Okomfo* Anokye a traditional priest was not an Ashanti but he is one of the most respected personalities amongst the Ashantis. Notably, the Ashantis would not even allow an Akan who is not true Ashanti to become a chief amongst the Ashantis. Yet, even though Anokye was not an Ashanti, he became a paramount chief because of his priestly status – a position the Ashantis would not grant a non-Ashanti under any other situation.

[25] This is the case because a priest for a lesser divinity in Akan does not need to be an Akan. It is the

140

is not an Akan (as Pobee poses it), need not be regarded as a serious problem in the way of constructing a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology.

5.5 Conclusion

From the descriptions and analyses of the Judeo-Christian and Akan traditions, it is evident that both human and spirit beings serve as mediators between God and humankind in different capacities. Nonetheless, in the Christian tradition, as interpreted by the first seven ecumenical councils, the mediator between God and humankind is the person of Jesus Christ – who is truly human as well as truly God.

In the traditional Akan context, the mediators between God and humankind are human beings themselves – through *okra.* In this respect, if one presents Jesus as *Nyamesofopreko* – the Mediator between God and humankind, there must be an explanation as to how such a term adequately expresses the Nicene/Chalcedon confessional formula of the person of Christ as "truly God" (*vere Deus*) as well as "truly human" (*vere homo*).

In as much as respect is accorded to the traditional priests within the Akan community, there is no suggestion that divine status is attributed to a priest or any human being. This appears to be a problem for the image of *Nyamesofopreko* as it seeks to express the Nicene affirmation of the person of Christ who is truly human as well as truly divine.

As already noted, the author of Hebrews demonstrated that it is not an adequate assertion to prove only the priesthood of Jesus to justify his role as Mediator between God and humankind. The author of Hebrews also points out how in such a proposal, Jesus' divinity would not be compromised. On this basis, the question that now has to be addressed may be posed as follows: On what grounds could one account for the Chalcedon affirmation of the person of Christ as truly human and truly God within the context of traditional Akan belief? Pursuing an answer to this question will be the focus of the next chapter.

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prerogative of the particular divinity to appoint his/her priest from anywhere it suits the divinity.

CHAPTER 6

The person of Christ as Mediator in the Akan context

6.1 Introduction

One of the fundamental aspects of the Christian confession of faith as formulated by the Council of Chalcedon (451) is that, Jesus Christ is "truly God" (*vere Deus*) as well as "truly human" (*vere homo*) and that the relationship between these two claims may be understood in terms of the one "person" and the two "natures" of Jesus Christ. These are the core Christian confessions that a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology would seek to reinterpret within the Akan context. The proposal of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology is an attempt to contribute from within the Akan context to the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is also an attempt to make a contribution to a wider ecumenical Christianity, for example in terms of the notion of the catholicity of the church, taking root in different contexts but remaining recognisably Christian.

The chapter is divided into three major sections, following the pattern of chapter 5. In the first main section (6.2), I have offered a brief description of the most important Christological decisions of the seven ecumenical councils of the patristic period, with specific reference to the decisions of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). These decisions led to considerable controversy in the subsequent history of Christianity. However, a detailed discussion of post-Enlightenment debates on Christology would go well beyond the scope of this thesis. It would have to suffice here to merely note famous distinctions such as those between an ontological and a functional Christology,[1] Christology "from below" and "from above",[2] the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith,[3] and so forth.

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[1] For the proponents of functional Christology, Christ's divinity is explained as functions of his humanity while Nicene Christology also affirms that Jesus is "of one essence with the father". A fully-fledged functional Christology made its appearance in the early and mid-seventies, particularly in the publications of Cullmann (1975), Küng (1976) and Robertson (1973). Remarkably, functional Christologies hardly escape the "heresy" of degree Christology. The proponents of degree Christology usually define certain characteristics to be human qualities and then argue that the significance of Jesus consists in his possessing a large, even unique degree of these qualities. The major publications in this area came from the Roman Catholic theologians such as Schoonenberg (1977), Schillebeeckx (1982) and Küng (1980). Major publications from Protestant theologians who also abandoned Chalcedon include those by Flesseman (1972) and Robinson (1973).

[2] One of the features of Christology "from above" is that the *Kerygma* – the proclamation of Christ by the church – forms the basis for comprehending Christ's eternal person and work. By contrast, Christology "from below" aims to ground what it has to say about Jesus primarily in the anthropological or, more generally, in that which has to do with time rather than with eternity. A Christology from below is strongly influenced by a Kantian view of time. The eternal features of Jesus' reality are thus explained as functions,

These debates clearly indicate that the decisions of Nicea and Chalcedon are open to diverging interpretations. In fact, the divine status of Jesus Christ is widely contested in Western Christological discourse in the post-Enlightenment period, for example in the context of inter-faith dialogue[4] and in the highly publicised proceedings of the Jesus-seminar.[5] Moreover, the way in which these decisions are formulated with the help of categories derived from Greek metaphysics has often been noted and criticised in African discourse on Christology.[6] Nevertheless, the *Nyamesofopreko* Christology which I am developing in this thesis seeks to remain true to the core intuitions of Nicea and Chalcedon. A brief description of these decisions within their own historical context will therefore have to suffice here.

In the second main section (6.3) I will explore the position and status of mediators in the

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epiphenomena or projections of his humanity. In the twentieth century, this approach to Christology has been associated especially with Rudolf Bultmann, and Emil Brunner in his early book *The Mediator* (1942). Perhaps the most instructive example of a contemporary "Christology from below" is that of Wolfhart Pannenberg *Jesus – God and man* (1968). For further discussions on Christology "from above" and "from below", see Gunton (1983), Johnson (1981), Pannenberg (1968, 1964), Peters (1975), Placher (1975), Shults (1999) and Tupper (1973).

3   The quest to discover the historical identity of Jesus came to be known as the "search for the historical Jesus." Underlying this search was the expectation that the real Jesus would prove to be different even from the Christ who appears within the Scriptures, and who is in some sense the product of the theologising of Paul and others. Amongst the more famous renditions of "early lives of Jesus" were those produced by David Strauss and Ernst Renan. Increasingly, the early Jesus was depicted as basically a good man, a teacher of great spiritual truths, but not the miracle-working and pre-existent Second Person of the Trinity. Perhaps the best known and the most influential picture of Jesus is that of Adolf von Harnack. In many ways, von Harnack's work represents the pinnacle and the end of the search for Jesus. He notes that the four Gospels do not provide us the means to construct a full-fledged biography of Jesus, for they mention very little about Jesus' early life. However, the issue of theological legitimacy sparked off another, so-called "second quest" for the historical Jesus. Firstly, its proponents contend that there is a danger in posing too sharp a discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Secondly, they argue that history reappears as a potential threat to faith: it may not be able to prove faith, but it may once again cause embarrassment to the believer who takes its findings seriously. The so-called "third quest" for the historical Jesus also commenced in the closing decades of the twentieth century. What distinguishes this "third quest" from the first and the second, is the conviction that any attempt to build up a historical picture of Jesus of Nazareth should start from the fact that he was a first-century Jew operating in a first-century milieu. For detailed discussions, see: Dunn 2003:78-79, Strauss (1879), Renan (1856), Harnack (1957), Tyrrell (1910), Schweitzer (1964), Kähler (1964) and Käsemann (1964).

4   For the debates on incarnation and religious pluralism, see the following publications: Hick (1973, 1982, 1985), Goulder (1979), Green (1977) Cupitt (1979), Knitter (1985), Pinnock (1988) Mackey (1979) and Hillman (1989).

5   Some scholars who have subjected Jesus to scrutiny in their private studies and disclosed their conclusion in closed academic circles are now waging their battle through the public media. One group that has been forefront of this endeavour names itself "The Jesus Seminar." It was formed in 1985 to examine all the sayings attributed to Jesus in the New Testament and other early Christian documents. The Jesus Seminar has on the surface a simple academic purpose: "to assess the degree of scholarly consensus about the historical authenticity of each of the sayings of Jesus." However, the Jesus Seminar has an agenda other than the academic one. They contend that the Jesus whom people know is the mythic figure. They want to liberate the people of the church from the dark ages of theological tyranny by liberating Jesus. John Dominic Crossan and Robert Funk are the co-founders of Jesus Seminar. For further discussions, see Funk (1988, 1993) and Kloppenborg (1990). For an Evangelical critique of "Jesus Seminar", see Wilkins (1995).

6   See Pobee (1979).

traditional Akan context. However, there is no human institution or priest or spirit being who mediates between God and humankind. From within such a context I argue that the role of the lesser divinities and the ancestors should not be understood as one of mediating between human beings and the Supreme Being. In section 6.3 I will nevertheless argue that there are resources available in the traditional Akan view of humanity that may be employed to reinterpret the status of God's unique priest (Jesus Christ) as one who is truly human as well as truly God.

In the constructive part of the chapter (section 6.4) I will then employ this analysis of the four constituent entities of being human to offer a proposal on how Jesus Christ may be understood as indeed fully human and fully divine within the Akan context – which may also be significant to the wider African and ecumenical contexts.

6.2 The person of Christ as mediator in Christian (Nicene) tradition

My intention here is not to engage in any comprehensive review of Nicene Christology. An exhaustive account of the person of Christ in Christian theology would need work on a vastly larger scale than what can be offered here. All that I shall attempt in this section is to sketch the (Nicene) Orthodox Christian beliefs concerning the person of Christ as defined by the creedal statements of the ecumenical councils from the 4th and 5th centuries. I will focus on the first four general councils of the Church (held at Nicea, 325; Constantinople, 381; Ephesus, 431; Chalcedon, 451) at which the basic outlines of Christian teaching about God and the person of Christ were established. My sources for this discussion are Pelikan and Hotchkiss (2003) and McGrath (1994). They also include the somewhat older works of Bettenson (1863), Lohse (1966), Pelikan (1971), Kelly (1977), Stevenson (1981) and Chadwick (1982) that I had access to.

6.2.1 The Council of Nicea (325): The question of Jesus as truly God

The main agenda of the Council of Nicea (325) was to discuss Jesus' divinity. The theological issue at stake, or seemed to be, was the status of the "Logos" and His relation to the Godhead (Kelly 1978:224). The controversy arose from the difficulty of combining the divinity of Christ, the incarnate *Logos*, with the unity in God. Particularly, the Arian view of Christ as creature collided with the tradition of describing Jesus as true God. At the beginning of the problem statement, the Trinity as such was apparently not directly at stake. But, in the course of the controversy, it became clear that one cannot discuss Christology without entering into

debates on the concept of God (Kelly 1978:223).

Prior to the Council, there were some notable sects which had already denied the full divinity of Christ. The Ebionites taught that Jesus was not God, but a human prophet promised in the Old Testament.[7] In the third century, Sabellius also stressed monotheism to the extent of declaring that *Logos* was a function of God the Father rather than a separate Person, but his view had comparatively few adherents. Another group, called the Adoptionists, taught that Jesus was an ordinary human being by nature but was adopted as God's Son because of the exemplary and dedicated life that he lived (Kelly 1974: 40). Origen also explicitly taught that the Son is subordinate to the Father (Pelikan 1971:198).

The most immediate issue that led to the Council of Nicea was the controversy of Arius, an Alexandrian monk. The issue at stake was the status of the "Son" and his relation to God the Father (Pelikan 1971:200, Chadwick 1982:129). Arius accused Bishop Alexander of deviant teaching. That is, proclaiming the Son and the Father to be co-eternal.

Arius contended that Jesus was divine, but that he was less divine than God the Father. For Arius, because the Son is "Son", he is "begotten", therefore he is *gen(n)etos*, but God is by definition *agen(n)etos*. The Son is therefore not, in any strict or proper sense, God. Thus the Son cannot be co-eternal with the Father (see Gunton 2001:39-41).

Arius also contended that "the Son had a beginning, but God is without beginning." He therefore explicitly rejected the idea that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father and insisted that the Father is "different in ousia" from the Son.

Alexander (the Bishop of Alexandria) challenged Arius over this view, and this led to some controversy. The precise details of Alexander's position are somewhat obscure in the account which Arius gave in his accusation letter concerning Alexander (see Stead 1978). However, the broad shape of Alexander's position is clear enough. He held that the Father and the Son are co-eternal. The Son, though "begotten" (*gennetos*), in no way came into existence later than the "unbegotten" (*agennetos*) Father. The Son co-exists with the Father and emanates from the Father.

After the death of Alexander, Athanasius became Bishop of Alexandria. Nonetheless, Arius' controversy led to the first ecumenical Council held at Nicea in AD 325. It was moderated by Emperor Constantine himself (Kelly 1978:230- 232, Pelikan 1971:193).

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[7] The Ebionites represented a Jewish form of Christianity which acted as a potent force in the apostolic age (Kelly 1978:139).

In his response to Arius' views, Athanasius argues as follows: Firstly, Arianism undermined the Christian doctrine of God by presupposing that Jesus is not eternal and thereby virtually reintroducing polytheism. Secondly, Arius' view made nonsense of the established liturgical customs of baptising in the Son's name as well as the Father's, and addressing prayers to the Son. Thirdly, and most importantly, it undermined the Christian idea of redemption in Christ, since only if the Mediator was Himself divine could humankind hope to re-establish fellowship with God. Kelly (1978:233) contends that considerations like these may well have carried weight with the Council. After some deliberations, the Council arrived at a decision which affirmed the full divinity of Christ. The views which directly affected the full divinity of Jesus were therefore declared as heresies by the Council.

The Council declared the Son to be co-essential with the Father (Stevenson 1981:22). The key concept used to maintain the full divinity of Jesus was the Greek term *homoousios*. The characteristic Nicene emphases are: "true God from true God, begotten, not made, *homo-ousios* with the Father". The term does not stand alone, nor can it be adequately understood if it is isolated from its background and treated simply by itself.

Together, *ousia* and *homoousios* stress that the Son of God is himself authentically God, that is, genuinely Son rather than a created being. He is, not "made" but "begotten"; his being derives from the being of the Father himself. He therefore shared the same essence with the Father (Kelly 1978:236). The phrase co-essential with the Father or "*homoousios* with the Father" recapitulates and focuses all the positive and negative affirmations in the Council of Nicea (Kelly 1978:236, Pelikan 1971:201).

The Council of Nicea formulated its teaching by drafting a new Creed which was to become the standard for orthodox faith. What we now know as the Nicene Creed is a later compilation which most likely dates from the Council of Constantinople of 380/1. However, this includes material from the earlier creed of Nicea. This earlier creed includes the following clauses:

> We believe in one God … and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as unique (*monogenes*), that is from the *ousia* of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, *homoousios* with the Father, through whom all things were made …

The rejection of Arius' Christology is then to be found in the canon which immediately followed the Creed:

> And those who say, "There was once when he was not," and, "Before being begotten, he was not," and that he came into being from nothing (*ex ouk onton*); or who declare that the

Son of God is from some other hypostasis or *ousia* (sc. than the Father's), or that he is a creature or changeable or alterable: the catholic Church anathematizes[8] (Bettenson 1963).

Arius was finally condemned and excommunicated. However, in the later years in the East, Arianism came to prevail.[9] Nonetheless, the Western church in general was more loyal to the definition of Nicea and regarded Athanasius as a defender of true doctrine (Kelly 1978:238).[10]

6.2.2 The Council of Constantinople (381): The question of Jesus as truly human

Alongside the question of Jesus' divinity, a diametrically opposite Christological view known as docetism emerged which denied Jesus' humanity. Docetism has its roots in the Greco-Oriental assumptions about divine impassability and the inherent impurity of matter (Kelly 1978:141).

However, the main controversy that led to the Council of Constantinople was the Appollinarian controversy. The agenda of the Council of Constantinople (A.D.381) was to assert Christ's humanity without denying his divinity. The theological issue at stake was the status of the "Logos" and His relations to the Christ's humanity (Kelly 1978:224). The controversy arose from the difficulty of combining the intellect and will of *Logos* with that of Christ's human intellect and will.

On the one hand, we have the notion of the *Logos* which is fully divine in nature; on the other hand, Christ's human nature which is fully human in nature. If one assumes, as the Council of Nicea did, that the Logos has become flesh, then, it logically follows that either there are two

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[8]   The Council rejected Arius' position most categorically, and left no loophole which would permit him and his allies to subscribe to the creed while maintaining their former position. As Arius had already rejected the notion of *homoousios*, the creed offered itself as a suitable instrument for this purpose. This at least he could not accept without genuinely shifting his ground. This suggests amongst other things that the use of *homoousios* at the Council of Nicea was primarily negative: it was a means of excluding Arian theology. Its positive meaning was never really explored clearly.

[9]   Constantine's son, Constantius who became the emperor embraced the views of the excommunicated presbyter Arius. Desiring unity above all else, Constantius accepted the views of Arius as evidence of orthodoxy. From 350 to 361 Constantius controlled the whole of the Empire and set about vigorously opposing Nicene orthodoxy. Arius was readmitted to communion two years after the Council of Nicaea and was elected bishop of Constantinople. Athanasius, who succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandrian in 328, was sent into exile for refusing to readmit Arius to the Alexandrian church (Stevenson 1966:1). As emperors of various persuasions succeeded one another, Athanasius was forced to flee his diocese no fewer than five times. The thoroughgoing Arians surfaced and succeeded in gaining wide approval for their beliefs at a series of councils. At the Second Council of Sirmium, in 357, the Arians had the terms removed that were offensive to them. At the same time, however, as a result of the very triumph of extremism, there emerged a moderate party under the leadership of Ancyra rallied around a compromise formula *homoiousians* "of like substance".

[10] The council of Nicea was widely regarded as a watershed in the development of Christian teaching concerning Christ. It connected many of the previous discussions about Christ's nature, some irreconcilable. Before long, it had become a standard of what was acceptable as "orthodox" in the greatest part of the Church in East and West (Kelly 1978).

natures (in the person of Christ) or one nature absorbs the rest of the other nature.

Followiing the latter view, we may then have a kind of "hybrid" in the person of Jesus. Apollinarius who was Bishop of Laodicea (ca.310-ca.390) and a strong supporter of *homoousion* theology held such a view. Apollinarius maintained that the Logos occupied the place of Christ's human spirit – performing the functions of intellect and will.

Such a view was not quite as new; Origen held a similar belief. According to Origen, it was the nature of the *Logos* which predominated in Christ. His conception occured from the *Logos's* indwelling, and his whole life was under the direction of the *Logos*. The human soul was, in Origen's view, totally suffused with and caught up in the divine wisdom, goodness, truth and life. As Origen saw the matter, the *Logos* had in effect taken over the role of the governing principle of the Christ (Kelly 1978).

However, a group of three theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and the Gregory of Nazianzus) and also Athanasius rejected the proposed view of Apollinarius. Athanasius contended that rejection of a normal human psychology in Christ clashed with the biblical picture of a saviour who was limited in knowledge, and who suffered and underwent every kind of human experience. It was thus held that in Apollinarius' view, Jesus was not truly human, for his will was absorbed by the Logos.[11]

Uppermost in the concern of Apollinarius' opponents was the advocacy of Christ as Saviour – his mediating role between God and humankind. In this regard, Gregory Nazianzus wrote: "If anyone has put his [sic – or her] trust in him without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved" (Stevenson 1981:98).

In 378 Apollinarianism was condemned at a council held in Rome – during the pontificate of Damasus (and with the support of the powerful Emperor Theodosius I). Synods in the theological centres of the East also followed with condemnation; at Alexandria in 378 and Antioch in 379.[12]

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[11] Apollinarius' suggestion did not entail a new idea. With the widespread reaction against Origen's most distinctive thesis (viz that Christ's human soul was the point of union between the eternal Word and humanity) in the East, the prevailing idea was a conception of the absolute unity of the Word with the man Jesus. Malchion and other key bishops in the East advanced the idea that Christ's humanity did not include a human soul, but that all the functions of soul in his constitution were performed by the Word incarnate (Kelly 1978:158).

[12] In A.D. 380, Emperor Theodosius issued an edict requiring his subjects to profess the orthodox faith of Nicea. He also raised Gregory Nazianzen to the patriarchal throne of Constantinople.

In May 381, Theodosius I called for a second ecumenical council to address the various Christological questions in a more formal way. The council was held in Constantinople. Some of the questions addressed by the Council can be posed as follows: Could Christ be said to be truly human without less being implied about his divinity than Nicea had already stated? How does the Spirit relate to the Father and to the Son (Kelly 1978:223)?

After much deliberation, the Council formulated a revised creed and the formula known today as the Nicene Creed emerged:

> We believe in one God, the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ the only –begotten Son of God begotten from the father before all ages, light from light true God from true God begotten not made, of one substance , with the father through Whom all things came into existence, who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the father and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end .

> And in the Spirit the Lord life –giver, who proceeds from the father who with the father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, who spoke through the prophets in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins, we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. *Amen.*

At the Council of Constantinople (381) the Nicene faith was reaffirmed, and the various "Arianising" deviations were placed under a ban. Undoubtedly, the condemnation of Apollinarius' view first and foremost emphasised the true humanity of Christ. Nonetheless, the Council also promulgated what came to be known as the doctrine of Trinity (Stevenson 1981).[13]

Together, the Council of Nicea and Constantinople taught that Jesus was fully divine and also fully human. These Councils however did not clarify how one person could be both divine and human, and how the divine and human were related within that one person.

6.2.3 The Council of Ephesus (431): The question of Christ's two natures in one person
The Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381) legislated on the questions of Jesus Christ's deity and humanity. However, the debates about the *precise nature* of Christ's divinity and humanity began to surface.

The first major controversy on Christ's two natures combined in one person, concerened

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[13] Also see Bettenson (1956).

Apollinarianism, started by Apollinarius.[14] The second major controversy and also the immediate event that led to the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus concerned Nestorianism. Nestorius was Bishop of Constantinople from 428. He emerged from the Antioch school. He opposed a theological and devotional slogan *theotokos* – St Mary as the God bearer or "Mother of God".

Nestorius was concerned with the thought that God might be seen to have had a new beginning of some sort or that God suffered or died. To Nestorius, none of these could befall the infinite God. Therefore, instead of the God-man unity, he taught that there was the Logos, and the man, whom the logos assumed. He favoured the term Christ-bearer (*Christotokos*) as a summary of Mary's role. Or perhaps, Mary should be named both God-bearer and Man-bearer to emphasise Christ's dual natures. Nestorius was accused of teaching a double personality pertaining to Christ: two natures and two distinct persons.[15] Nestorius' main antagonist was Bishop Cyril of Alexandria.

This controversy led to the third ecumenical Council which was convened at Ephesus in 431).[16] So violent was the controversy that the Council of Ephesus could not reach a doctrinal formula. It took two further years before the two sides struggled their way through to a common formula.

At the Council of Ephesus, the Fathers wanted to maintain Cyril's basic Christological idea as expressed in his second letter to Nestorius.[17] According to the Council Fathers, this means that Jesus Christ is one and the same who is eternally begotten of the Father and was born of Mary, in time, as a man. The Council's concern here was exactly the same as had already been decisive in Nicea: God himself meets us in Jesus Christ.

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[14] The major historical controversies on the notion of Christ's two natures in one person are: Apollinarianism, *Nestorianism*, Eutycheanism, Monophysitism and Monothelitism (see Cameron 1978).

[15] Nestorius denied the charge but the term Nestroianism had always been linked with his teaching. Nestorius was condemned and finally sent into exile at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Yet he lived long enough to see the substantial triumph of his beliefs at Chalcedon, but the Nestorian heresy had started. Many Eastern churches remained Nestorian, notably the Persian church. Nestorians never fully reunited with the Orthodox Church and there remain Nestorian Christians to this day.

[16] Two main orthodox views were held concering Christ's person; the views of Alexandria and Antioch. A conflict between these two different views ensued for 200 years in the eastern Empire. However, in the western part of the Empire, Tertullian had already formulated a basic doctrine of Christ's person stating that Christ has two natures in a single person; His divine nature and his human nature were both resident in a single person. This old idea became the basis for a compromise between the Antioch and Alexandria schools, but only after the church had split a couple of times and some bishops were exiled and died.

[17] The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed speaks first of the eternal Son of God consubstantial with the Father, and then goes on: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven. He was made flesh and was made man."

Nonetheless, a new item were added by the Ephesus decision pertaining to the identity of the one subject who from eternity resides with the Father and who in time has become human. Therefore both what is divine and what is human must be predicated to Jesus Christ.

Thus we can and must say that Mary is the mother of God (*Theotokos*). In this respect, the Council of Ephesus formulated that Christ has two natures in one person as against the assumed view of Nestorius, that, Christ has a double personality: Two natures and two persons.

Another issue that came up was the question whether Jesus' humanity is to be worshipped. The Council maintained that Jesus' humanity is not to be worshipped as if it were a different subject – only together with the *Logos* but both are glorified in single worship. The Christological orthodoxy formulated at Ephesus was therefore less theoretical or doctrinal. Correct prayer and correct liturgical worship became the yardsticks and criteria for correct belief (Kasper 1976).

6.2.4 The Council of Chalcedon (451): The limits of the doctrine of the Person of Christ

The most important event in all the controversies concerning the person of Christ was the Council of Chalcedon, held in 451. The Council promulgated a Christological doctrine known as "hypostatic union". In short, this doctrine states that two natures, one human and one divine, are united in the *one person* of Christ (*unio personales*). The Council further taught that each of these natures, the human and the divine, was distinct and complete.

The Council of Chalcedon was the largest council and was the last one acknowledged as "Ecumenical" by all branches of the church (excluding the Nestorian and Monophysitism churches). This Council re-condemned Eutyches, condemned Diocorus, declared Flavian a martyr, and supported the Tome of Leo and Cyril of Alexandria's second letter to Nestorius. The Council also (for reasons that had more to do with asserting their authority) wrote up a new creed.

The immediate event that led to the Council of Chalcedon was the controversy over Eutycheanism. Eutyches (375-454), an archimandrite (monastic superior) from Constantinople was not satisfied with the prevailing climate after the condemnation of Nestorius. He began to teach a form of what would later be called monophysitism, namely that Christ has one nature rather than two after the incarnation – therefore the God-man was to be seen as a single being (where the superiority of the divine over the human nature is emphasised).

Eutyches would not acknowledge the human nature of Christ but only that "his body is consubstantial with ours". He believed that the humanity of Jesus was absorbed by the divinity in the same person. Based on such a contention, Flavian (449) bishop of Constantinople, summoned Eutyches to a synod in November 448. At the synod, Eutyches was questioned on his contentions. He neither denied nor retreated from his claims. Instead, he maintained that his doctrine was orthodox and expressed the faith of Cyril, Athanasius and Nicea.

However, the inquirers believed that his doctrine led to a different kind of humanity for Christ than our humanity. The Fathers therefore maintained that such a view will lead to the conclusion that Christ could not save us because he was not fully human. Eutyches was therefore condemned.[18] Afterwards, the Council framed a new creed known as the formula of Chalcedon. The core of that statement reads as follows:

> Therefore following the holy fathers we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same son, our lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood , truly God and truly man consisting also of a reasonable soul and body of one substance (*homousious*) with the father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects apart from sin: as regards his Godhead, begotten of the father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin the God bearer (Theotokos); one and the same Christ, son Lord, Only begotten, recognized in two natures without confusion, without change without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only begotten God the Word lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, And our lord Jesus Christ himself taught us and the creed of the fathers was handed down to us (Bettenson 1963:51-52).

The Chalcedonian Creed is regarded as orthodox by the mainstream church. It became a point of reference for all other Christologies. However, there were again some controversies. The first major controversy after Chalcedon was around monophysitism. This controversy came about because several sectors of the church, especially the Egyptian churches, never accepted the decisions of Chalcedon. They maintained that Christ has "one nature" after the incarnation, hence the name monophysite. These groups eventually moulded into separate churches that did not recognise the formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451).

While the controversy with monophysitism was still pending, another controversy referred to

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18   Flavian sent the news to Pope Leo of Rome so that he could comment. Leo wrote back a sophisticated and orthodox reply condemning Eutyches and expounding on the doctrine of Christ. This document became known as the Tome of Leo. However, the rule of this council was later reversed against Flavian and Leo. It was nevertheless later adopted at Chalcedon as an orthodox statement.

as monothelitism also came up. Monothelitism refers to the doctrine that Christ had only one will. This is contrary to Chalcedon's confession that Christ possessed both a human and a divine will. The supporters of monothelitism accepted the doctrine of two natures, nevertheless, and tried to help bridge the gap between orthodox and monophysite views – by proposing that Christ had only one will. Thus, their position became akin to that of monophysites: "one nature" after the incarnation in one person. However, this view was also condemned by the Third Council of Constantinople (the Sixth Ecumenical Council, 680-681).[19]

6.2.5 Conclusion

The Chalcedonian Creed which states that Christ was true God and true human in two natures but was one person (also called the hypostatic union) did not put an end to Christological debates. Nevertheless, it did clarify the terms used and became a point of reference for those who adhered to the Chalcedonian formula.

6.3 The person of intermediaries in the traditional Akan context

6.3.1 Introduction

Amongst the Akan, both spirit and human beings serve as intermediaries in their various capacities. In the relationship between God and humankind, it is assumed by the Akan that God may occasionally use ordinary human beings or a spirit being to provide care, support and protection for other human beings. However, no human institution or priest or spirit being exists who particularly mediates, at least in a formal way, between God and humankind. Thus, from within the Akan context, there is no mediator between God and humankind; except in the general sense of applying the term "mediator". Nevertheless, there are resources available

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[19] Kasper (1976) notes that the immediate sense of the Chalcedon definition is that, it makes a distinction of the two natures, without which Jesus' mediatorship would be illusory. At the same time, the intention is to go beyond Ephesus and not merely maintain the unity of the one subject in Jesus Christ but to give it conceptual expression as a unity in one person and hypostasis. He notes that despite this aim, the dogmatic formula of Chalcedon has met with not less, but even more criticism than the Nicene Creed. He particularly points to the two most important objections: (a) the charge that Chalcedon has replaced the biblical and early church Christology which started from Jesus Christ. Instead they regarded Christ from a double point of view, namely, according to the flesh (*sarx*) and according to the spirit (*pneuma*) – an abstract formula entailing the unity and distinction of divine and human nature; (b) to speak of two natures is in any case problematic, because, on the one hand, the term "nature" cannot be applied equally to God and humanity, and on the other, an ethical or personal relation is thereby misinterpreted in a physical sense. While conceding to the legitimacy of the issues raised against Chalcedon, Kasper however contends that the Council's confessional definition does not express any metaphysical theory about Christ, but contents itself with Christological negatives which safeguard the mystery.

in the traditional Akan view of humanity that may be employed to reinterpret the status of God's unique priest as one who mediates between God and humankind.

6.3.2 *Okra* in human beings: The only mediator between *Onyame* and human beings

In Akan anthropology, an entity called *okra* provides the immediate link between God and human beings. *Okra* may be regarded as an entity seeing that *okra,* in the Akan thought-form, is believed to be a rational, relational and self-aware being. The Akan believe that *okra* pertains to the nature of God in human beings; and it is only human beings who are endowed with *okra* (Wiredu 1992).

An Akan will rarely, if ever, make contact with *Onyame* through a traditional priest or any lesser divinity or ancestor. It is not within the practices and the operations of the priests of lesser divinities to present themselves as representers of *Onyame*. Within such a context I argued in previous chapters that the role of the lesser divinities and the ancestors should not be understood as one of mediating between human beings and the Supreme Being.

When a traditional Akan wants to offer thanksgiving and worship to *Onyame* (God), he/she would usually offer it directly to *Onyame* – by setting up *Onyamedua* (literally, God's tree) *and* offer the sacrifice on it to God. Moreover, an Akan may also occasionally worship his/her *okra* – which is believed to be the nature of God in human beings. This is done through a ritual called *akradware* (soul washing). From this, it is already evident that the most important and maybe the only mediators between God and humankind within the traditional Akan context, are human beings themselves through *okra*. Thus, I will in this section focus on a human being as the only possible mediator between *Onyame* and human beings.

6.3.3 The Akan concept of being human

In this section, I will offer a description of the four entities that constitute being human, namely *okra* (soul), *sunsum* (spirit/personality), *ntoro* (fatherhood-deity) and *mogya* (blood). The purpose here is to lay a foundation to help reinterpret the status and position of God's unique priest as truly human as well as truly God.

a) *Okra* (soul)

Of the four components that constitute a human being, the *okra* (soul) is of fundamental importance. It is believed to be the core part of every human being. According to traditional Akan belief, this part is provided directly by the Creator before any human being comes into the world (Christaller 1933:254, Opoku 1978:95, Gyekye 1987:85, Wiredu 2001:299,

Sarpong 2002:91, Pobee 1979:88). It is believed to be the part of God residing in every human being which makes one a living human (being). It is thus described as a spark of divinity and sharing an antemundane existence with *Onyame* (Opoku 1978:95, Gyekye 1987:85, Wiredu 2001:299).

The Akan believe that *okra* obtains leave from *Onyame* before it comes into the material world as a human being. When *okra* becomes "flesh" through the normal human birth process, it is said that *okra* has become *teasefo* (human being). The term *teasefo* is unique to human beings.[20]

According to the traditional Akan belief, before *okra* becomes *teasefo* (a human being), *okra* would stand before *Onyame* to narrate the course of life it may want to take as a human being. *Onyame* may affirm what an individual *okra* opted for as its proposed human life after posing some questions to the *okra.* Thus, the Akan refer to human destiny as *nkrabea,* literally, a place where one said farewell to *Onyame*. The Akan myth of "the dialogue between *Onyame* and *okra"*, as composed in "high life music" by Nana Kwame Ampadu, illustrates this belief.[21]

Okra is thus the bearer of one's destiny, and the realisation of this destiny on earth is referred to as *obra or abrabo* (life) (Pobee 1979:88, Gyekye 1987:85). Such a destiny is unalterable at least in theory (Opoku 1978:95). Thus Akan also refer to human destiny as *hyebea,* literally, a place where one's destiny is affirmed by *Onyame.*[22] It is believed that, after *Onyame's* affirmation, one's destiny becomes unalterable. Thus, the saying goes: *nkrabea* or *hyebea nni kwatibea* (destiny is unalterable).

The bearer of human destiny, individual *okra* – as a rational, relational and self-aware being,

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[20] One may draw a distinction between *okra* which is believed to be a self-aware, relational and a rational entity, yet not *teasefo* (human being), and *okra* which has become *teasefo.* The Akan world thus comprises of human beings, the ancestors and those who exist (as *okra*) but are yet to become human beings.

[21] In the myth, there was a woman named Yaa Manua who always complained against God that the latter had made her infertile. To show the woman that it was rather the children in the form of *okra* who decided by themselves what their destiny on earth should be (that includes where and to whom they want to be born), God one day opened the "spiritual eyes" of the woman. Yaa Manua then had an opportunity to listen to the dialogue between *Onyame* and *okra* who was about to become a living human being – *okrateasefo* (through normal birth process). In this particular case the *okra* to arrive was to be born by Yaa Manua. Through the dialogue, the woman saw that the birth, the life and the death of someone are antecedent to the discussions one had with God as *okra,* before one became a human being. A Ghanaian musician, Kwame Ampadu has put this myth into music. The Yoruba have a similar belief – as described by Idowu (1962:170).

[22] Some Akan scholars identify two interpretations of the Akan concept of destiny. One view of destiny pertains to that which one opted for by oneself. The second view is that of a destiny that God Himself assigned to individual *okra*. Notably, *the* burden of the argument rests on the different interpretations of the two key terms *nkrabea* and *hyebea.*

with a specific course of life, *may* be regarded as a constituent agent of reason governing the world.[23] Interestingly, Idowu has also expressed a similar view of what being human comprises of amongst the Yoruba in Nigeria.[24]

By virtue of possessing *okra,* a divine element, every person has an intrinsic value, the same in each, which one does not owe to any earthly circumstance. Thus, *okra* relates an individual human being to God uniquely and also relates individual human beings to one another. Associated with this value is the concept of human dignity and of kinfolk. These imply that every human being is entitled in equal measure to a certain basic respect, as well as nearest and dearest relations. Thus follows the Akan saying: Everyone is the offspring of God; no one the offspring of the earth (Wiredu 2001:301).

For the Akan, *okra* is a guardian spirit or protector which guards the person and gives him or her advice. In this role, *okra* is a separate entity from the "person" and it may fail to guide and protect him or her; hence the expression, *Ne kra apa n'akyi* (his or her *okra* has failed to guide him or her; his or her *okra* has neglected him or her). In another expression, an Akan will say: someone's *okra* has taken flight from him or her, leaving that person pale with fear (Opoku 1978, Sarpong 2002:91).

When a person's *okra* protects him or her (*Ne kra di n'akyi*) and gives good advice, causing his/her undertaking to prosper, it may become an object of worship. *Okra* then may be given thanks and offerings, just like a deity or spirit, in a ritual called *akraguare* (washing of the

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[23] A belief in predestination, expressed in terms of the concept of *okra,* seems to suggest that the Akan experience some anxiety about human helplessness in certain situations. However, it also expresses the Akan conviction that human existence has meaning. It suggests, for instance, that human beings are not set on a purposeless mission in this world, rather that they have a mission to fulfill, a message to deliver – which is the meaning of their existence – and that this mission has been fully endorsed by the Creator. Nonetheless, the problem remains of the apparent contradiction between the belief in predestination and the attribution of responsibility to human beings for their actions. If destiny, as understood in the Akan context, is what one (*okra*) opted for and is only affirmed by *Onyame*, then one is logically responsible for his/her human actions. The concept of *nkrabea* expresses the Akan conviction that human life must be freed as much as possible. One may thus infer the idea of "supremacy of human freedom" against any form of tyranny and despotism. The idea is that, if *Onyame* would allow one to determine the life one wants to live as a human being, amidst human despondency towards evil, then a strong lesson follows that human freedom must not be curtailed, so long as it does not infringe on another's freedom. Thus, from the traditional Akan perspective, one may infer that, ethics must have its foundation on issues which only infringe on another person's freedom. Of course there is a connected question of why God allows evil destiny to be part of human life. The traditional Akan do not have a myth or belief about "paradise lost" whereby only good exists. The Akan beliefs only point to the time when *Onyame* was much closer to human beings. The concept of *nkrabea,* which expresses human freedom, entails good and evil simultaneously.

[24] For a discussion of Akan, Mende and Yoruba concepts concerning human beings, see Opoku (1978). Sawyerr (1986) has also offered a discussion and comparison of the three views.

okra[25]) (Rattray 1923:153, Opoku 1978:96).

One Akan maxim, expressed as an epigram, is that, *onipa wu a, na onwui* (when a human being dies, he is not really dead). What is implied by this is that something resides in a human being – *okra* that is eternal, indestructible, and that continues to exist in the world of spirits (*asamando*). The *okra* is an element unique in a human being; animals do not possess *okra* (Opoku 1978:95). Animals and some plants, however, have a kind of spirit which the Akan call *sasa* and which they believe the power of human beings can control.[26]

The *okra* (soul) of a human being according to the notions of the traditional Akan already existed and perhaps one's *okra* (soul) is that of another family member or other person who is already dead (Rattray 1959:153). This accounts for the Akan belief in reincarnation (Sarpong 1974:39).

The final departure of *okra* from the body signifies death. At death, as the Akan believe, the *okra* leaves the body gradually until the person expels his last breath; but *okra* can be called back just before death, to be communicated with. After its final exit from the body, *okra* is believed to return to God to give an account of its earthly existence (Opoku 1978:96). It may then be allowed to return to the world through re-incarnation, or made to remain with God.[27] To the Akan, *okra* continues to live even after its departure from the body[28] (Opoku 1978:95).

Besides the belief of *okra* in human beings which is the spark of *Onyame's* nature, there is also an indication that *Onyame* has *Okra*. This is the case because it is believed that one can occasionally become possessed by the *Okra* of *Onyame*. Amongst the traditional Akan, as noted by Meyerowitz (1958:27), particular religious experiences in some years back were explained in terms of possession by the *Okra* of *Onyame*. From this, we may infer that it is possible for the *Okra* of *Onyame* to dwell in human beings.[29] Nevertheless, the Akan do not

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[25] This is normally done on the day that person is born.

[26] Human beings too posess *sasa*. The Akan will explain the remorse that might drive the murderer to confession or to suicide as an operation of the *sasa* of the murdered person upon the murderer. To avoid the vengeance of the *sasa*, one would have to perform certain rituals called *sasa duro* (antidote to the vengeful spirit).

[27] The phrase "remain with God" may refer to either the abode of God or *asamando* (the dwelling of the ancestors) or the same place if the abode of God is the same as the dwelling of the ancestors.

[28] Every *okra* obtains a *kradin*, a name which is given to a child according to the day of the week on which the child is born. For example Kwaku is the name given to a child born on Wednesday, Yaa – Thursday, and Kofi – Friday. In addition to the *kradin*, each child receives a characteristic spirit corresponding to the spirit-deity which is believed to preside over that particular day. For example, a child born on Thursday is believed to be eager for battle: one born on Friday may be called *Okyini* (wanderer).

[29] The suggestion here is that, there is a possibility for two *okra*, *okra* in human and *Okra* of *Onyame,* to dwell together without confusion. We will return to this later in the discussion of the two natures in one person of

regard a human being as a divine being. The *okra*, which forms part of human nature, is but a spark of God's nature. God is the *Okra,* and the human being posesses the spark of God's nature. Analysing the role and function of *okra,* it is already evident that *okra* as a divine element, yet also a distinct entity*,* is regarded as the intermediary between a human being and *Onyame.*

b) *Sunsum* (spirit/personality)

The second component of a human being is that of *sunsum.* It is an intangible element in each human being which accounts for his/her character (*suban*), disposition and intelligence (Rattray 1923: 154, Opoku 1978). It is the *sunsum* which individualises a child.

It is only individuals who possess *sunsum*. In symbolic terms, a family, a community or tribe, or a nation may also posess its *sunsum*. The Asante nation, for example, has a *sunsum* which is taken to be enshrined in the *Sika Dwa*, (Golden Stool), believed to be brought down from the skies by *Okomfo Anokye* – during the reign of King Osei Tutu, founder of the Asante nation. The Golden Stool is therefore greatly revered and tightly guarded, for what befalls it, good or bad, affects the Asante nation. However, such corperate *sunsum* entails nothing more than a collective *sunsum* of the leaders in that community, believed to be symbolically joined together to constitute the corporate *sunsum*.

In contrast to the *okra* which is always constant and unchangeable, the *sunsum* is subject to change, for it is capable of being trained from the state of being "light" (*ne sunsum ye hare)* to a heavier weight (*ne sunsum ye duru* [literally, his *sunsum* is heavy]), or in other words, he is courageous, spirited or brave.

The *sunsum* is believed to be able to leave the body while a person is asleep, and may not return for some time. However, the final departure of *sunsum* signifies the death of the person. It is also supposed to be the "dramatis personae" in dreams, and the part of human being which is open to attack by witchcraft. The *sunsum* of a witch for instance is believed to leave the body to perform misdeeds which are associated with witches. In this regard, a "heavy" or strong *sunsum* is believed to be an effective antidote against witchcraft. This belief is conveyed by the Akan saying: *"Wo sunsum ye duru a, obayifo ntumi wo"* (if you have a heavy *sunsum*, the witch cannot overcome or attack you). The *sunsum* is the entity that protects and gives guidance, thus the saying: *Me sunsum edu* (*sunsum* is heavy); my *sunsum* is strong; my *sunsum* stands at my back. Such expressions are constantly heard within

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Christ in section 6.4.

158

contemporary Akan society.

Another difference between *okra* and *sunsum* is that the former remains within a person and is not apparent, whereas the latter is clearly reflected in the appearance of the person and in the qualities peculiar to that person's individuality, especially to his or her moral qualities.

After death, *sunsum* may return to *Onyame*. The suggestion, particularly by Opoku, that *sunsum* died with the person may not be sustained in terms of traditional Akan thinking. As rightly argued by Gyekye (1987:91), if *sunsum* entails a spirit entity, then it is an element which does not die.

Again, as one views the role and functions of the *sunsum* in human beings, it would not be wrong to regard *sunsum* as an entity. To the Akan, *sunsum* is more than an active force. It is regarded as a rational, relational, self-aware and distinct being in itself.

c) *Ntoro* (fatherhood-deity)

The third component of the human being according to Akan belief is the *ntoro* (Rattray 1923:155). The Akan believe that each child possesses a similar *ntoro* as that of the father (Opoku 1978: 98). The general belief is that the child inherited it from his/her father. It is transmitted from a father to his children and helps to account for the inherited characteristics of each person. It is the *ntoro* which moulds the child, making him/her what he/she is: kind, stupid, eloquent, clever, and fluent in speech, lazy or hardworking. This aspect may perhaps be partly compared with the role played by a person's genetic predispositions.

Actually, some of the functions of *sunsum* and *ntoro* overlap, yet the Akan recognise the distinction between the two as Opoku (1978: 98) rightly maintains (see Pobee 1978:88). The distinction between *sunsum* and *ntoro,* gains weight on the basis of the Akan belief that the three, *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro,* share information and interact in distinct ways (Gyekye 1987).

To the Akan, before a child attains puberty, his/her father's *ntoro* acts on behalf of him or her, but after puberty, the child's own *ntoro* takes over and assumes greater control (Opoku 1978). The belief with regard to the concept of *ntoro* helps to build a spiritual bond between a father and his child which balances the relationship between the child and its mother. This is very important in a matrilineal society such as amongst the Akan, where the father does not form part of the family comprising the mother and children.

The *ntoro* is considered to be instrumental in the conception of the embryo in the womb. However, *ntoro* is more spiritual in nature, a being which originates from God himself. A

proof that this is the traditional belief given in the myth of the origin of the first *ntoro* ever bestowed upon the Akan – the *Bosommuru ntoro*. The following myth illustrates this:

> Very long ago one man and one woman came down from the sky and one man and one woman came up from the earth. From the Sky God (*Onyame*) also came *onin* (a python), and it made its home in the river now called *Bosommuru*. At first these men and women did not bear children, they had no desire to, and conception and birth were not known at that time. One day the python asked them if they had no offspring, and being told they had not, he said he would cause the woman to conceive. He bade the couples stand face to face, and then he plunged into the river, and rising up, sprayed water upon their bellies with the words *kus kus*, and then ordered them to return home and lie together. The woman conceived and brought forth the first children in the world, who took *Bosommuru* as their *ntoro*, each male passing this *ntoro* on to his children. If a *Bosommuru ntoro* man or woman sees a dead python (they would never kill one) they sprinkle white clay upon it and bury it (see Busia 1954:206).

From the myth above, it could be deduced that *ntoro,* though associated with human fatherhood, is a spiritual entity that originated from God. It was God who sent the python that caused humans to produce offspring. However, it is noted that the pregnancy did not take place without a human male contributing sperms.

Further, the Akan believe that *ntoro* is associated with water deities, thus all the *ntoro* have *bosom* (water deity) as a prefix to the *ntoro* (Opoku 1978:78). From this, we may infer that *ntoro* is a facet associated with God, which both human beings and the water deities share with God. In this respect, to translate *ntoro* as physical being, obscures its true identity. It is a component God provided for procreation. To the Akan, *ntoro* symbolises fatherhood. We may infer from this that human beings have only a spark of this nature seeing that they are created in the image of *Onyame*.

(d) *Mogya* (Blood)

Mogya makes up the fourth component of a human being. It is translated as the blood which the mother gives to the child. This mother-child bond is a biological one. Every Akan belongs to a clan, and is bound to the clan by a blood relationship called *abusua*. This *mogya* received from the mother procures a child its status and membership in the mother's *abusua* (a clan), also referred to as *nton*. At the same time, it spells out every member's obligations as a citizen in the Akan matrilineal society (Opoku 1978:99).[30] Thus one becomes an Akan and fully human being irrespective of anything else. Of course one must reside in a human body.

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[30] All members of the same abusua consider themselves to belong to the same blood group (mogya kro - one blood). One who belongs to the mother's lineage, has the right to inherit the property of the lineage because all the members of the lineage share a common blood. They are therefore forbidden to marry each other.

Amongst the Akan, it is believed that blood is thicker than the *ntoro.* Consequently, people who belong to the same blood – one mother – are believed to enjoy greater affinity, than those only from the same father. Also, as the Akan proverb has it, the chick followed the hen, and not the cockerel. In such an arrangement, the father is seen as a "stranger" amongst his wife and children. Thus, to the Akan, all that is required to show your identity as an Akan is that your mother is an Akan, irrespective of where the father comes from and even the nature of the father. The Akan believe that *mogya* descends to Mother Earth at death.

According to the Akan, a human being is formed when the *ntoro* of the father co-operates with the *mogya* of the mother at the moment of conception. When the baby is born, it becomes *okrateasefo* (human being). I will return to this in more detail in section 6.4.

6.3.4 The relations between the four entities of human being: *okra, sunsum, ntoro* and *Mogya*

Firstly, we will consider the relations between *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro.* Deducing from the attributed interaction of *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro* in human beings, one may infer that the three are inseparable yet distinct entities.

The assuming working relationship between *okra, sunsum* and *ntoro* is clearly set out in the case when a woman commits adultery. According to the traditional Akan belief, if a man's wife commits adultery, the husband's *okra* will inform his *ntoro* which will then let the *sunsum* know and this last entity will nag the woman; thus the expression: *Me kunu sunsum akyere me* (my husband's *sunsum* has caught me). It is believed that if a woman fails to confess such unfaithfulness to the husband, she may fall ill and die.

Logically speaking, this classic example may be taken as a strong indicator of three spiritual entities which are added to *mogya* to yield four components in human beings. Any contraction of the three entities to be reduced to less than three, betrays the interactions between them. Moreover, adding other entities to increase to more than three, in addition to *mogya,* may also somehow introduce non-core additional entities.

From this belief we may infer that the three (*okra, sunsum and ntoro*) are inseparable yet distinct entities. We may also infer a harmony between the three entities. They relate and work together in perfect harmony. Moreover, there is no sense of subordination – in terms hierarchical – between them.[31] Added to this, the Akan also believe that one's *okra* or *sunsum*

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[31]   I will return to this notion in my proposal of the two natures of Jesus and also the doctrine of Trinity in section 6.4.

may temporarily leave the body and return later. Nevertheless, it is held that the three entities are inseparable.

Secondly, we also consider the relationship between *okra, sunsum, ntoro* as they relate to *mogya* (blood). In Akan anthropology, a person is made up of two principal entities or substances: one spiritual (non-material: *okra* is inseparable from *sunsum* and *ntoro*) and the other material (*mogya* or body) (Wiredu 2001:299, Meyerowitz 1949:86, 115). *Mogya* (blood or body), though depending on the o*kra* (soul), is also an entity in its own right. This is the case since the *okra* can leave the body, (temporarily though), while the *body* can act in the full capacity of a person. The blood or body (*mogya*) is the part which perishes when one dies, but *okra*, *sunsum and ntoro* (soul, spirit and one's personality) are believed to survive death.

There is a fundamental assumption amongst the Akan concerning the unity of the human personality. The Akan sometimes speak as if the relation between the immaterial (that is, *okra* plus *sunsum and ntoro*) and the material (*mogya*), are so close that they comprise an indissoluble or indivisible unity – though they are distinct entities. The condition of the *okra*, *sunsum and ntoro* depend upon the condition of the body. When the *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro* are enfeebled or the *sunsum* injured by evil spirits, ill health results. Poor conditions of the body affect the condition of the three components of human life as well.

Based on this description and analysis, one may infer that, to the Akan, *okra, sunsum* and *ntoro* are distinct entities yet inseparable ones. The three together with *mogya* (blood) form a fully fledged human being. It is believed that the permanent absence of any one of these connotes the death of such a person. To the Akan, one is a human being only when one possesses all these three components together with *mogya.*

6.3.5 Conclusion

Within the context of traditional Akan anthropology, human beings may be conceived to be located in space as well as in time. In terms of the concept of *okrateasefo,* there is a suggestion of the self-differentiation of the divine omni-spatiality. The relations between the *okra* (eternal) and *teasefo* (time) – thus *okrateasefo* (human being) suggest not juxtaposition but interpenetration. This is not a matter of descent but of co-presence in time and in space. There is then a suggestion of a simultaneous interaction of the temporal and eternal. It represents a way of expressing an understanding of humanity, which avoids the suggestion that human beings cannot relate to God.

From the Akan anthropological perspective, then, one can understand human nature as

necessarily open to a dimension of transcendence. Thus the view of an entirely closed off, self-contained material order, which forms the presupposition of much post-Kantian Western theology, becomes questionable within the Akan context. In this respect, we are, at least, beginning to see cracks in the view that holds the spatial co-presence of two different entities to be inconceivable.

If African theologians are to remain true to the Nicene definition of the person and work of Christ, we must seek for an interpretative framework which suggests that this life is both fully temporal and yet is the space wherein the eternal is present. This is what the traditional Akan worldview, without falling prey to pantheism,[32] offers us. In this way, we can come to understand Jesus as a unique instance of humanity open to God. However, this is not a suitable basis for our understanding of the divine status of Jesus. Such a view alone cannot express the Chalcedonian Christology adequately. The reason is that the ultimate end of such an approach may be similar to degree Christology, for human anthropology will be made basis of Christ's divinity. The significance of Jesus then consists in him possessing a significant, even unique, number of human qualities. Nevertheless, this may provide a clue to work with.

6.4 The Mediator between God and humankind: The incarnation of God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko*)

6.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I want to draw on an Akan understanding of *okra* in order to explain that Jesus Christ is truly divine as well as truly human. The traditional Akan refer to the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings. The latter is viewed as the sparks of the former. One may point to the spark and the fire as the qualitative difference between *okra* of human being and the *Okra* (of *Onyame*). However, whereas the Akan regard the *okra* of *Onyame* as divine, human beings are not regarded as such (not even as semi-divine), only as embodying sparks of the divine. The idea of the *okra* of *Onyame* is not an inference from the notion of *okra* in human beings – the latter serving as basis for speculation about the former. Rather, it is a distinct traditional Akan belief by itself.

In this respect, the Akan concept of *okra* may be understood in terms of the relationship

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[32]   In the context of the traditional Akan worldview, the rationale of the eternal is in some way distinct from that of the temporal context – we can understand neither the one nor the other on their own terms. In this respect, the charge of pantheism or near-pantheism cannot be sustained.

between a fire and the sparks, or a mother and her children. On the other hand, when *okra* becomes flesh (human), the relationship is then seen by the Akan in terms of the relationship between Creator and creation and the contrast between the universal and the particular. The traditional Akan does not only refer to *okra* in human beings as a distinct yet integral part of being human; but similarly of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. Thus in the Akan thought-form, there is the *Okra* of *Onyame* (similar to the Greek concept of *Logos*) which is distinct yet inseparable from *Onyame*.

Based on the above discussion, one may infer that *okra* entails an eternal absolute Being which unfolds its nature in individual human beings. On the one hand, *okra* may be regarded as Being itself. On the other hand, *okra* (in human beings) may also be regarded as the sparks emanating from Being itself. The Akan concept of *okra* thus suggests the possibility of a union of the concrete with the universal. The concept of *okra* may therefore enable one to speak of Jesus and his relation both to God and to humanity.

On this basis, and also with respect to the status attributed to Jesus as "truly human" and "truly God", I propose that the status of God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko*) may be interpreted as the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (Being itself).[33] This proposal may also enable one to understand Christ's incarnation, his true divinity and true humanity, and his two natures combining in one person.[34]

Okra as an anthropological concept will help our understanding of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (the dynamic equivalent of *Logos*). The reason is that the Akan speculate less about the *Okra* of *Onyame* than about *okra* in human beings. Nonetheless, the Akan usually infer the nature and operations of the *Okra* of *Onyame* from the *okra* in human beings, and this may be used as a mode of interpretation. As the traditional Akan have already established such a mode of interpretation – usually inferring the nature and activities of the *Okra* of *Onyame* from the *okra* of human beings, I will in this thesis follow the same mode of interpretation. Thus, where original speculations about the nature and the activities of *Okra* of *Onyame* are not clear enough to articulate any meaningful proposal, I will indicate such a lack of originality

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[33] From the point of view of Nicene Christianity, every statement about Jesus taken independently from his relationship with God, only results in a gross distortion of the person of Christ; for the economy of Jesus Christ reveals the triune God. Thus, any viable Christological concept must both distinguish Jesus Christ from God and identify him with God and humanity at the same time.

[34] *Okra* links individuals to one another and to God. *Okra* in human beings may then, on the one hand, be regarded as a mediator between oneself and Being itself. On the other hand, it may also be regarded as the objective foundation of morality from which a theory of human solidarity can be built within the Akan context.

and make inferences from the belief about *okra* in human beings. In keeping with this, the argument of this section will be structured in two main parts. In section 6.4.2, I will offer a brief characterisation of *okra* as a Christian theological concept. Then in section 6.4.3, this will be placed in juxtaposition with (Nicene) Christian views on the person of Christ. This will be followed by a brief conclusion in section 6.4.5.

6.4.2 The characterisation of *okra* as a Christian theological concept

The Akan concept of *okra* expresses how the "one" (*Onyame*) and the "many" (human beings) are related. The concept is embodied with principles defining human solidarity and freedom. However, I do not intend to offer a coherent and systematic exposition of the Akan concept of *okra* here. Although such an undertaking would be very interesting, it would go far beyond the scope of this thesis.

In this section I only intend to outline some characteristics of *okra* – as far as this may be relevant for the argument of this chapter. Such perspectives are primarily my own reconstruction and adaptation within a Christian context, derived from the traditional Akan thinking on how *okra* may be understood. These characteristics would provide a basis for reinterpreting the person and the work of Christ within the contemporary Akan context.[35]

Such a metaphysical approach is not alien to the Judeo-Christian tradition; Christian theology is greatly enriched through the Greek concept of *Logos* and Jewish personification of Wisdom.[36] *Logos* is also a common term used by Philo of Alexandria. The work of Philo gives evidence of his attempt to unite Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. A similar observation may be made with regard to Western Christological discourses. Obviously, both the New Testament writers and the church fathers who contributed to the ecumenical councils relied on the non-Jewish concepts to communicate the Christian message. Thus the introduction of *okra* as an African (even an ecumenical) Christological concept would be in line with methodological practices in Christian theology.

a) *Okra*: An absolute Being which unfolds its nature in individual human beings

In the Akan thought-form, *Onyame* stands as a rational, eternal and absolute Being. The Akan do not regard, and never have regarded *Onyame* as their tribal god. Rather, *Onyame* is seen as

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[35]   Pobee (1979:88-91) interprets the person of Christ on the basis of Akan anthropology; however, he applied it only to Jesus' humanity. As an advocate of functional Christology, one would not expect Pobee to express the divinity of Christ in ontological terms.

[36]   In the last centuries before Christ, Wisdom was hypostasised as personified intelligence and this became a dominating tenet in Jewish theology.

the Supreme Being whose benevolence extends to all people. *Onyame* is regarded as an invisible rational life. The creation of the universe is attributed to *Onyame* and He/She is regarded as the governing principle of the universe. According to the Akan belief, *Onyame* has *okra* and so do human beings*;* the latter's *okra* emanates as sparks from the former's.[37]

The *okra* which forms the core component of an individual human being is regarded as rational, self-aware and relational. It is also believed that *okra* accounts for the nature of God which God imparts on every human being. Alongside with this belief, one may further infer that *okra* is an eternal absolute Being which unfolds its nature in individual human beings.

The Akan concept of *okra* shows some similarities with the Greek concept of *Logos* which underpins much of Christian theology, particularly Western Christian theology. On the one hand, there is the concept of the universal *Logos* which may be regarded as the dynamic equivalent of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. On the other hand, the notion of the human soul was regarded as a particular manifestation of the universal *Logos*. This is similar to the Akan notion of *okra* in human beings.

Platonists believe that the individual human soul participates in the divine *Logos*. Both the universal *Logos* and the human soul, in the Greek thought-form, maintain mutual awareness of one another, thus combining God and humanity. The Akan notions of the *okra* in human beings and the *Okra* of *Onyame* also point to such mutual awareness – on the basis of the analogy of sparks and fire.

Nonetheless, the later Greek concept of the "impassability of God", particularly that of Aristotle, expresses complete separation of the concrete and universal. However, it is with respect to such a Greek concept of the "impassability" of God that Christian theologians introduced the concept of incarnation. This has been maintained ever since, despite the many conceptual confusions and subsequent conflicts which have followed Christianity since then. Akan Christians need not accept the Greek doctrine of impassability of God. Nevertheless their concept of *okra* provides a coherent framework to interpret the Christian doctrines of God and humanity in a way that allows their interpenetration.

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[37] The Akan believe that *Onyame* has *Okra*. Such an assertion gains ground in the Akan interpretation of certain phenomena as being "possessed by the *Okra* of *Onyame*" (Meyerowitz 1958:27).

b) *Okra*: An invisible rational vitality (IRV) which expresses how the "one" (*Onyame*) and the "many" (human beings) are related

The variegated world with its multiplicity poses the problem of how the one and the many are related. From the theistic point of view, this problem may be addressed with reference to the Creator and creation. Thus this complex world with its multiplicity of features is the product of one single cause. With respect to human beings, the concept of *okra* does not only account for the idea of such a single cause, but also explains how the one source and the many products are related.

In Christian theology, the concept of *okra* may be explained within the context of the doctrines of God, humanity and creation. Specifically, the Christian concept of *imago Dei* expresses this idea; God relates to the individual human beings through His/Her nature (or o*kra*) the *imago Dei* (humans representing God's image in the world).

c) *Okra*: The embodiment of ultimate reality (*Onyame*) and the governing Reason of the world

Within the context of the Akan traditional religion, *Onyame* – the governing Being – has revealed itself in individual human beings in the form of *okra*. In terms of the Akan belief, *okra* is the bearer of each individual's human destiny as already explained in 6.3. From this point of view, one may infer that *okra,* as the nature of God which unfolds its nature in the phenomena of individual human beings, constitutes the governing reason of the world.

In Stoicism, the concept of *Logos* expresses the ordered and teleological oriented nature of the cosmos. It can thus be equated with God and with the cosmic power of reason, of which the material world is a vast unfolding unit.

In the mystery religious sects, *Logos* takes on a special sense as sacred history, or holy doctrine, or revelation. *Logos* denotes a creative potency, the guide and agent of knowledge, increasingly represented as a doctrine of revelation. It is God's creative power, and as such it orders and governs the visible world. It is distinctive inasmuch as the *Logos* is specifically the *logos tou theou.*

Logos is also personal, and its origin and mode of operation are described in images taken from the sphere of procreation. In the Hermes-Logos theology, *Logos* is personified as Hermes (also Pan, Isis, etc.). Hermes serves as a mediator or herald of the divine will and also as the great force of conception.

Nonetheless, in the Greek thought-form, there is no suggestion that *Logos* may be understood

as a locus of incarnation. Instead, *Logos* was interpreted in terms of an equation of the revelatory and cosmogenic principle with a deity, i.e., its hypostatising as a god.

In Christian theology the *Logos* becomes flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ is thus regarded as a person functioning within the conceptual framework of *Logos*. On this basis, if Jesus would be regarded in terms of the *Okra* of *Onyame*, one may also expect that he would manifest all the attributes of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. In this particular case, Jesus may be regarded as the embodiment of ultimate reality (*Onyame*) and thereby the governing reason of the world.

d) *Okra*: The bearer of individual destiny and universal history

On the basis of the traditional Akan culture and worldview, one may see world history as a drama in which individual human beings participate in a unique way. This drama is ultimately being controlled by *Onyame*. No individual human being is a mere spectator in the world but an actor, playing a part in the drama of *Onyame*. In this drama, the Akan believe that the *okra* obtains permission from *Onyame* before it arrives into the material world to play its part. In this regard, *okra* is regarded as the bearer of one's destiny. To establish the Akan idea of universal history, one may refer to the total sum of such human destinies, embodied in the individual *okra* and managed by *Onyame* – all of which constitute world history.[38]

Expressing it differently, the traditional Akan believe that *okra* in the human being is the bearer of a person's destiny. Based on this belief, one may infer that, if there is the ultimate *Okra (Okra* of *Onyame)* from which the *okra* in human beings derives its existence, such *Okra* of *Onyame* may be regarded as the bearer of the universal destiny.

In Christian theology, particularly within the context of the doctrine of atonement, Christ is regarded as the bearer of universal destinies and history. Thus, if Christ is regarded as the *Okra* of *Onyame*, there would be an adequate conceptual framework to interpret not only the person but the work of Christ as well within the African Christian context.

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[38]   If the universal history is being controlled by *Onyame,* as is assumed within the Akan context, would the Akan affirm with G.W. Leibniz that "This is the best possible world"? Or affirm with F.H. Bradley that "This is the best possible world and everything in it is a necessary evil"? Indeed any application of the theistic paradigm requires an explanation of evil in the world. Another connected question is: Does history, which is assumed to be under God's control, steer towards a purpose? For Hegel it does, for Christianity it does, and of course for the Akan as well. But what is the Akan view of the purpose of universal history? These questions may be interesting to pursue but reach beyond the scope of this thesis.

e) *Okra*: The essential link between God and oneself

Amongst the traditional Akan, the first role that *okra* fulfills as a link between God and humankind is that *okra* serves as the bearer of one's destiny. Secondly, it is through *okra,* as the Akan believe, that human beings have access to God. Thirdly, after death, it is believed that the human *okra* returns to God to give an account of one's existence on earth. Therefore, *okra* is an invisible rational vitality (IRV) which serves as an essential link between the Supreme Being and human beings as well as between individual human beings. *Okra* thus links each individual human being to God, to one another and all human beings together in one universal family. On this basis, *okra* may not only be regarded as the link between God and humanity but also the locus of human solidarity under the motherhood of God.[39]

A similar connotation is also evident from the Greek concept of *Logos.* We see this in the speculations of hermeticism on creation and revelation, in which the *Logos* is portrayed as the son of God, the demiurge, who plays the role of an intermediary, as an image of the deity of which humanity itself is an image. For Philo, the divine *Logos* is also a mediating figure which comes from God, forms a link between the transcendent God and the world, and represents humanity as a high priest and advocate before God (Kleinknecht 1986:507).

The concept of the *imago Dei* in Christian theology is similar to the Akan concept of *okra*. Also, the analogy of "stem and branches of a tree" that Jesus applied according to the Gospel of John (15:1-8) illustrates the relationship between the *Okra* of *Onyame* and that of human beings. If Jesus would be seen as *Okra* of *Onyame,* there would be adequate grounds to explain the Christian spirituality within the Akan Christian context. This is especially pertinent in terms of the need to abide in Christ through the spiritual nourishment of prayer.

f) *Okra*: An object of worship

Another interesting characteristic of *okra* is that, although it is an invisible rational vitality (IRV) which is regarded as an intrinsic part of one's being, *okra* is nevertheless regarded as an object of human worship. *Okra* is projected to be outside of and something greater than oneself; something that may be venerated and worshipped.

One may pray to one's *okra* for further life, strength and protection for oneself and one's people.[40] This is not just a matter of self-talk or murmuring to oneself. Rather, such act of

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[39] Such a notion illustrates the Akan attribute to *Onyame* as *Onyame baatanpa* (God the excellent mother).

[40] The usual occasion for such worship is when one comes to believe that his or her *okra has* protected him or her and has rendered good advice, causing one's undertaking to prosper. In such rites, one may give thanks

prayer is envisaged as a subject praying to an object. Usually, one will set a simple "temple" for one's *okra* to make such subject-object worship meaningful.[41] Note that one would not worship someone else's *okra* but one's own *okra.*[42]

If the individual *okra* is believed to be an object of individual worship, one may logically infer that the *Okra* of *Onyame* should be an object of universal worship. From this, one may further infer that, if Jesus is regarded as the *Okra* of *Onyame,* there would then be a basis, within the Akan context, to accord him universal worship. Furthermore, the concept of *okra* may give one a conceptual framework to express the Christian notion of Jesus being God, yet offer prayers to God. If one can offer prayers to one's *okra*, then Jesus being the *Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate may also be able to offer prayers to *Onyame.* Indeed, the Western worldview lacks such subtle intricacies hence the difficulty of accepting that Jesus being God can pray to God in a subject-object manner. Obviously, there is a limit to the knowledge one can acquire in this way. This is largely dependant on one's conceptual apparatus acting as a filter and organiser of the received data. Although the Enlightenment worldview suggests that such a notion is implausible, this does not necessarily mean that it cannot be retrieved.

g) *Okra:* **The nature of** *Onyame* **(God)**

In the Akan thought-form, *okra* is an IRV from God that relates individual human beings to God. As sparks from the *Okra* of *Onyame, okra* in the individual human being shares in the nature of God and thus relates individuals to *Onyame* and also to one another. Based on these beliefs, one may suggest that *okra* may form the constituent nature of *Onyame* or constitute the essence of *Onyame.*

From the Akan anthropological perspective, we can then understand through *okra* why all human nature is regarded as necessarily open to a dimension of transcendence.[43] It is indeed an interesting way of perceiving humanity, avoiding suggestions that humanity is a closed-off

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and offerings to his or her *okra,* just as one would offer a deity or spirit thanks and offerings. The Akan refer to this ritual as *akradware* – washing of the *okra* (Rattray 1923:153, Opoku 1978:96).

[41] For details of *akradware* (soul worship) see section 6.3.

[42] However, when one dehumanises another human being, an Akan will rebuke that person with a statement: *wobra Onyame* (literally, you have grossly oppressed God). Here the suggestion is that one cannot oppress another human being without offending God.

[43] Nonetheless, there is an indication in the myth of God's self-withdrawal that such access has been marred due to humankind's sin against God. To what extent such a relationship is damaged is not clear and may be subject to debate; yet there is no discussion on this issue in Akan literature. Perhaps, one might argue that the myth of God's self-withdrawal may have the single focus of explaining why the sky, which is regarded as God's abode (not identified with God) is so far removed from the earth, the abode of the human beings. However, on the basis of the myth, the fact still remains that the Akan have a sense of the marred relation between God and humankind.

reality, in no way capable of a relationship with God.[44]

Nonetheless in terms of Akan beliefs, there are clear-cut structural differences between *Onyame,* who is regarded as the Creator, and human beings who are regarded as creatures. Just as the Christian concept of *imago Dei* does not necessarily turn human beings into divine beings, in the Akan thought-form, the analogy of "substance and sparks" i.e. fire and sparks does not prefix divinity to human beings. The concept of *okra* (in a human being) only suggests that some divine entity is in human beings but this is entirely different from the suggestion that human beings are divine or semi-divine in themselves.

It is to be noted that the Father Origen proposed a theory in which he viewed humanity as basis for Christ's divinity. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

It is indeed questionable whether the Nicene notion of Jesus' divinity could be based on such grounds. If all that Jesus had was *okra* – a divine spark like any other human being – then Jesus' uniqueness would consist in him being a unique and perfect human being. In this respect, *okra* (spark of God's nature) forms the basis of Christ's divinity.

When Jesus is seen as an ideal type of such humanity, he then becomes some kind of divine fulfilment of *imago Dei* to represent the rest of humankind. With such an approach, one may argue strictly "from below". Jesus may then be regarded as being of one substance with us as touching humanity. He would then be like us in all things apart from sin. However, such a view is hardly equivalent to the Nicene formula "of one substance with the Father" (Gunton 1997:126). Thus such a view only safeguards the humanity of Christ.

Moreover, within the context of this view, the temporal order may be regarded as absolute; by itself divine. Thus, it may become impossible to distinguish the order of salvation from that of creation. Jesus then becomes the saviour only in terms of a divinised evolution.

To overcome this problem, and to reformulate the Nicene formula of the divinity of Jesus adequately in the Akan context, I will draw from the Akan concept of the *Okra of Onyame*, which all other *okra* originate from. That is to say, the *Okra* of *Onyame* may have become incarnate in *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest).

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[44] In this way, the proponents of "degree" and "functional" Christologies proposed that we can conceive of Jesus as a unique instance of humanity open to God. This is indeed how far Rahner's (1978) anthropological basis for Christology could reach (see Gunton 1977). Rahner might have been influenced by Origen's incarnation theory in this regard. Several Christologies have been built along this line of thinking – whereby humans could ascend to become divine. Someone might also wish to apply the Akan concept of *okra* to follow suit.

h) *Okra:* **The nature of being human/of human beings/humanity**

In the Akan thought-form, the concept of *okrateasefo* simply denotes that the divine spark (*okra*) has become a human being (*teasefo*). Thus, *okra* as a divine spark has the capacity to become a human being without any confusion with human nature. However, in this proposal I suggest that not only the divine spark should be seen as the embodiment of human flesh, but also the *Okra* of *Onyame*. Such an idea may be expressed as the *Okra* of *Onyame,* being the incarnation of God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko*).

The Greeks speculated that the sacred *Logos* had union with a deity in whom the initiate is also *logos tou theou*. Thus, gods like Osiris and Hermes are personifications of the *Logos* or the sons of God. Nonetheless, historically *Logos* was not regarded as a unique being; not as the only-begotten One who became one unique human person (Kleinknecht 1986:507).

It is only in the New Testament, particularly in the prologue of the Gospel of John, where we find *ho logos* in the absolute. In 1 John and the Gospel of John, *Logos* is the historical Christ in a dynamic equation. The identity of Jesus and *Logos* emerges here as the kernel of all New Testament sayings that apply *Logos* in a specific sense; the new aspect is the pre-existence of the *Logos* and its emergence in history. Pre-existence as the distinctive theme in John 1:1ff. is now placed thematically at the head and expressed through the term *Logos.* In John 1 the basic idea is explained in terms of the eternal glory in flesh, that exists in the historical Jesus.

There is also an interesting development of the concept of *Logos* in Origen's thoughts. He expounds a theory that there is a world of spiritual beings, including human souls, that pre-existed from all eternity (see Kelly 1978:155; Chadwick 1982:105). He used this as a key to expose the incarnation of Christ.

According to Origen, one of these souls, the one destined to be the soul of the man Jesus, in every respect a human soul like the rest, was from the beginning attached to the *Logos* with mystical devotion; with love and desire for justice.

He postulated that all the other souls, by the misguided exercise of their free will, fell away from the *Logos,* to whom they ought to have adhered. But this unique soul, according to Origen, as a result of its adoring contemplation, became inseparably united with the Logos. He noted that this is to be conceived of as union, and not mere association, and that such union was a complete one.

Origen explains that since this soul, while cleaving to the Logos, properly belonged to a body, it formed the ideal meeting point between the infinite Word and finite human nature. So when

it was born from the blessed virgin with pure flesh created by the action of the Spirit, God-head and humanity were inextricably united. Origen then contends that it was natural for this special soul to be designated God's Son, in union with the flesh with which it was conjoined. With this theory of the mediating role of Christ's human soul, Origen expounds his doctrine of the incarnation.

On the other hand, he also insists on the duality of Christ's natures, referring to Christ's manhood and even to his hypostasis as man and his hypostasis as only-begotten Son. With the traditional teaching as his starting -point, Origen was thus able to explain the rationale for the incarnation in terms of his philosophy. However, such an insight is not adequate to express the divine status of Jesus as defined at the Council of Chalcedon.

The Father Clement also contends that the Logos "has come to us from heaven" and "entered into" or "attached" Himself to human flesh. Clement explains that in becoming incarnate and making himself visible, the Logos has begotten Himself, that is, He created His own humanity. From this, Clement argues that Christ is both human and divine – alone both God and man. He has "clothed Himself with a man", so that he is God in the form of a man unsullied (Kelly 1978:154). Justin in his discussions of Logos in the Christian context also questions why one should shy away from believing that the Logos could be born of a virgin if the Logos has been active in all human beings, imparting to them whatever goodness and knowledge they possessed.

From within the Akan context, one may also question why the *Okra* of *Onyame* cannot become *teasefo* (a human being), seeing that the sparks of *Okra Onyame* have been active in all human beings, imparting to them whatever goodness and knowledge they possessed. In the Akan thought-form, *okra* is indeed destined to become a human person – nothing human is alien to *okra.*

The crucial difference between the proposals of Origen, on the one hand, and Clement and Justin, on the other hand, is the meeting point for Christ's incarnation. For Origen, Christ's soul (while cleaving to the Logos) formed the ideal interface between the infinite Word and finite human nature. For Clement and Justin, the Logos itself serves as interface between the infinite Word and finite human nature. In my proposal here, it is not any form of *okra* (which emanates as spark) that serves as meeting point of incarnation. Instead, it is the *Okra* of *Onyame* that becomes *teasefo* (a human being).[45]

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[45] Nonetheless, while Origen's view runs the risk of degree Christology, Clement and Justin' views are also

i) *Okra* as co-presence of time and eternity

According to Gunton (1997:158), the dynamic interrelationship between the temporal and the eternal realm is less sustained in contemporary Western theological discussions. However, for the traditional Akan, the very beginning of theology lies in conceiving of human nature as being necessarily open to a dimension of transcendence. In this way, one can come to view humanity as being open to God.[46] But the Akan do not regard such a transcendent dimension as a means whereby a human being could ascend to become divine.

In the Akan belief, the *okra* which originates from the *Okra* of *Onyame,* is destined to become human and when it does, the *okra* then becomes *okra-teasefo* (a human being). However, when there is any suggestion that the *Okra* of *Onyame* has become *okra teasefo* (human being), or became a historic person in particular, then there is indeed an instance of the co-presence of time and eternity. This may be similar to what Nicene Christianity[47] would term "incarnation". In the Nicene tradition, incarnation is regarded as the event in which the two orders are brought together in the historical realm. The outcome represents the movement of the love of God into time. Such an experience is uniquely found in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Akan context, such an idea can be adequately expressed by the notions of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (eternal) and *teasefo* (time). This is in fact a crucial aspect of the proposal offered in this thesis, namely that the *Okra* of *Onyame* – from which all human *okra* originates – has become a historic agent in the person of Jesus Christ as the *Nyamesofopreko.* In the person of the *Nyamesofopreko*, one can speak of the co-presence of time (*teasefo*-human being) and eternity (*Okra* of *Onyame*).

Thus we may draw from the Akan concept of *Nyame-kra-teasefo* as the basis of Christ's incarnation. On the one hand, the term *teasefo* when used to refer to Jesus, guarantees his co-humanity with the rest of humankind. On the other hand, the phrase *Okra* of *Onyame* also adequately expresses Jesus' divinity. The proposal is based on the Akan concept of being human, with a counterbalancing emphasis on the (divine) *Okra* of *Onyame.*

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prone to the heresy of docetism. There is therefore a need to demonstrate how a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology could avoid these two extremes and their associate heresies.

[46] This is exactly what a number of Western theologians– for example Rahner and Pannenberg– would contend.

[47] The Council of Chalcedon (451) fomulated that Jesus was fully divine and fully human in two natures without confusion, without change (contra monophysites), without separation, without division. Both natures are united in one person and one hypostasis.

j) *Okra* in relationship: Distinct yet inseparable from *Onyame*

Amongst the Akan, it is believed that *okra* is of the very same substance of *Onyame* yet distinct by itself – as the Akan do not use the terms *okra* and *Onyame* interchangeably. In the Akan belief, *okra*, particularly in reference directly to *Onyame,* denotes *Onyame,* yet *okra* does not exhaust the content of *Onyame*. In the Akan thought-form, such intricacies exist both to distinguish *okra* from *Onyame* as well as to identify it with *Onyame.* This proposition correlates with the notion of *okra* residing in human being. To the Akan, *okra* is believed to be inseparable from being human, yet *okra* is distinct enough to be approached in prayers and even accorded worship.

In addition to *okra,* there are also two invisible rational vitalities (IRV's) namely, *ntoro* and *sunsum* which may be regarded as the constituents of *Onyame*. Although these three IRV's *okra, ntoro* and *sunsum, are* inseparable, each may be regarded as distinct in itself. Thus, in terms of the traditional Akan thought-form, one must distinguish *okra* from *Onyame* as well as identify it with *Onyame.*

By comparison, the doctrine of Trinity was prompted by the need both to distinguish Jesus Christ from God and to identify him with God. This was deemed crucial in order to avoid the heresies of modalism and tritheism. One may argue that the Akan concept of *okra* expresses such a necessary distinction and identification adequately. It may therefore provide the categories required for a reconstruction of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in an African/ecumenical context.

k) *Okra* as an invisible rational vitality in a relationship: Distinct yet inseparable from *sunsum* and *Ntoro*

Amongst the Akan, it is believed that *okra is* distinct, self-aware and relational. In addition, *okra, sunsum* and *ntoro* may be regarded as IRV's, since these three are believed to be invisible and also acting on one another in a rational and harmonious manner. Thus, of the four vitalities that constitute a human being, with the exception of *mogya* (blood) which the Akan view as purely physical, I contend here that the three namely *okra, ntoro* and *sunsum* are indeed IRV's.

In Akan thought (affirmed amongst Akan scholars), the suggestion that *okra* originates from *Onyame* is unanimously accepted. Nonetheless, there is an ongoing debate between Gyekye and Wiredu on whether *okra* can be translated adequately as "soul" or not. Wiredu maintained that amongst the Akan, it is believed that a person can spiritually "observe" and communicate

with *okra.* On this basis, *okra* would entail a quasi-physical entity. Gyekye, by contrast, argued that, within the Akan context, the connotations attached to such a spiritual "observance" of *okra* if any, do not necessarily entail observing something of a physical or a quasi-physical nature. Amongst the Akan, rarely, if ever, has anyone made an attempt to describe what *okra* in the material form looks like. With Gyekye (1987), I therefore maintain that *okra* is an invisible rational vitality (IRV).

Similar debates are raging about the contention that *sunsum* is an invisible vitality. The debates centre on the question of whether *sunsum* is derived from one's father or from *Onyame.* Gyekye (1987) and Opoku (1975) may be right to affirm that *sunsum* is also derived from *Onyame*. Since Akan scholars generally maintain that *sunsum* does not die, it may be regarded as an invisible being. As Opoku maintains, and as is succinctly argued by Gyekye, Busia and Danquah might have mistakenly identified *ntoro* with *sunsum.* In the Akan belief, the two entities are not identical. As Opoku and Gyekye rightly maintain, it is generally believed amongst the Akan that *okra* and *sunsum* originate from *Onyame* and *ntoro* and *mogya* come from the father and the mother respectively.

However, having argued that *okra* and *sunsum* are invisible beings, the issue that has to be addressed here is the claim that *ntoro* is an invisible being. The important question in this regard may be posed as follows: If *mogya* comes from the mother and *ntoro* from the father, and the two are held to be the determining factors of human conception, why could *mogya* be regarded as physical and *ntoro* as invisible?

In response to this question, I first concede that amongst the Akan, *ntoro* has been generally associated with the human father. It is believed that *ntoro* is what the father contributes towards the conception of a human being. Thus *ntoro* is considered to be instrumental in the conception of the embryo in the womb. However, I argue here that although *ntoro* is associated with the human father, this does not necessarily preclude one from viewing *ntoro* as both a physical and a spiritual vitality. In the Akan thought-form, when one moves beyond the surface, *ntoro* is more than physical; it entails an invisible rational vitality that has a *physiological* dimension in a form of DNA via spermatozoa.

The first reason is that, according to the Akan, *ntoro* does not die. After someone dies, that person's *ntoro* will go into his/her sons. When one does not have sons, it will go into one's brother's sons (anyone of them if there are more than one). Obviously, a living creature that does not die, would belong to the realm of spirits.

Secondly, as already indicated, amongst the Akan, if one's wife commits adultery, it is believed that the three – *okra*, *ntoro* and *sunsum* work together to punish that unfaithful wife.[48] It is believed that the man's *okra* will inform his *ntoro* and the *ntoro* will inform his *sunsum* to nag the woman; the woman might then die if she refuses to confess her infidelity. Obviously, this belief places *ntoro* in the category of the other two (*okra* and *sunsum)* as an invisible vitality.

Thirdly, from the "myth of *ntoro*", as explained in 6.3, it could be deduced that *ntoro,* though associated with human fatherhood, is an invisible vitality that originated from God. Furthermore, the Akan believe that *ntoro* is associated with water deities, thus all the *ntoro* have *bosom* (water deity) as a prefix to the *ntoro* (Opoku 1978:78).

From this, we may infer that *Ntoro* is a component associated with God, which both human beings and the water deities have in common with God. In this respect, to translate *ntoro* as physical entity would obscure its true identity.

For the Akan, the three dimensions, *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro,* stand at par with each other. Thus their order of arrangement is arbitrary; the arrangement does not connote any sense of superiority of one over the others. The Akan do not assign any superiority to any of the three invisible vitalities or interpret them in terms of ontological subordination.

These three invisible rational vitalities provide us with terminology that may be applied to reformulate the Christian doctrine of Trinity within an African context. This would provide the necessary foundation for any sound Christology. Pannenberg (1977:36) rightly notes that while Christology must begin with the man Jesus, its first question must relate to his unity with God.

Nonetheless, as Mugambi (1998:158) has noted, the notion of Trinity is not clearly articulated in African Christianity. This poses a major challenge for African Christian theologians. He points out that many African Christians identify Jesus with the Holy Spirit and draw no distinction between God, Jesus and the third Person of the Trinity.

As it is necessary to explain the divinity of Jesus within the framework of a triune God, I suggest, with respect to the discussions of 6.3, that the notion of God the Father may be interpreted witin the Akan context as *Onyame Ntoro*, God the Son as *Onyame Okra* and God the Holy Spirit as *Onyame Sunsum.* I will return to this proposal in chapter 8.

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[48]   Interestingly, there is no internal "watchdog"-system for the unfaithful husbands.

l) Conclusion

Based on the above characteristics of *okra*, one may infer that the Akan concept of *okra* may be regarded as the dynamic equivalent of the Greek concept of Logos. Thus the purpose of this comparison is to explore the similarities as well as differences between the two.[49] Such a comparison may help to assess the applicability of *okra* as a Christological concept.[50]

There appear to be more similarities than differences between the two concepts. Both Logos and *Okra* may be regarded as metaphysical realities. Logos expresses the ordered and teleologically oriented nature of the cosmos. In Akan thought *Okra* entails the embodiment of the ultimate reality (*Onyame*).

Both Logos and *Okra* suggest how the "one" the (ultimate reality) and the "many" (human beings) are related. Thus both the conceptions of Logos and *okra* suggest the notion of "Being-itself". Moreover, both Logos and *okra* may be regarded as the governing Reason of the world.

Further, both Logos and *okra* are regarded as the presence of transcendence within the immanence reality. Logos is regarded as indicating the presence, that is, the immanence of God. Amongst the Akan, *okra* (which characterises the nature of God) forms the core component or inner essence of an individual human being. Thus, each individual human being uniquely represents the presence of God in time. In this respect the Akan believer would state that everyone is a child of God.

Furthermore, both Logos and *okra* are regarded as mediating invisible vitalities between ultimate reality and humanity. For Philo the divine Logos is a mediating vitality which originates from God. Logos thus forms a link between the transcendent God and the world, and represents humanity as a high priest and advocate. *Okra* may also be regarded as the link between oneself and *Onyame* (God). Both Logos and *okra* are regarded as being of the same nature as God yet distinct in person from God. Both Logos and *okra* are objects of worship. Both *okra* and Logos are believed to be pre-existent and eternal.

There are some differences between the two as well. According to the traditional Akan belief,

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49   As *okra* has been rendered as soul and equated with *nefesh*, it is necessary to explain *okra* against the background of these two terms.

50   It will be rather interesting if a similar and more detailed comparison could be undertaken within Yoruba context. Gbadegesin's (1998:148-168) analysis of the Yoruba concept of human being will be an invaluable aid in such a project. One may also consult Idowu's analysis of the Yoruba concept of a human being. For the similarities and differences between the Akan and Yoruba concepts of human being, see Gbadegesin 1998:158-159. Gbadegesin has also indicated some major differences between Wiredu and Gyekye (see Wiredu and Gyekye 1992).

okra entails an invisible vitality which is rational, self-aware and relational. However there are no such attributions to Logos, at least not in pre-Christian references to the Logos. Another difference is that, whereas the concept of *okra* contains divine and human connotations – in the analogy of substance and spark – the same cannot be said about the concept of Logos, at least not its pre-Christian usage.

By comparison, the Akan concept of *okra* shares the New Testament idea of the pre-existence of the Logos. On this basis, and also with respect to the status attributed to Jesus as "truly human" and "truly God", I propose that the status of God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko*) may be interpreted as the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame*.[51] This proposal may also enable one to understand Christ's incarnation, his true divinity and true humanity, and his two natures in one person. On the basis of this assumption, I have, and will continue, in this thesis, to use upper case for the first letters of the three terms, namely *Ntoro*, *Okra,* and *Sunsum* when I refer to the nature of God. I will use lower case; *ntoro, okra* and *sunsum* when referring to human beings (except for a heading or at the beginning of a sentence).[52]

6.4.3 A Christological application of the concept of *Okra*

In this section, I want to draw on an Akan understanding of *okra,* as characterised above, in order to explain that Jesus Christ is truly divine and truly human and that he possesses two natures in one person, as formulated by the Council of Chalcedon (451). My intention is to protect this proposal, as much as possible, from the heresies condemned by the four ecumenical councils. I have intentionally left some key questions unanswered from the main argument; I will address these questions in section 6.4.4.

a) *Okra* of *Onyame:* The basis for a proposal of Jesus' divinity

I have previously made a distinction between the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings. Such a distinction is based on the traditional Akan thought-form. It is highly important and crucial to the proposed understanding of Jesus' divinity. For each of the two categories of the concept *okra,* namely *Okra* of *Onyame* and *okra* of human beings, suggests a different understanding of Christ's divinity. On the one hand, when the interface between eternity and

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[51] From the point of view of Nicene Christianity, every statement about Jesus taken independently from his relationship with God, only results in a crass distortion of the person of Christ; for the economy of Jesus Christ reveals the triune God. Thus, any viable Christological concept must both distinguish Jesus Christ from God and identify him with God and humanity at the same time.

[52] It would also be interesting to compare the Akan concept of *okra* and the Christian doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

time is taken as the *okra* of human beings, similar to what Origen proposed, the end product of one's proposed Christology would be functional or degree Christology. On the other hand, when the *Okra* of *Onyame* becomes this interface, one could move closer to the Nicene view of the person of Christ. My key point here is that the divinity of Jesus is defended in this thesis on the basis of it being the *Okra* of *Onyame.*

In terms of the traditional Akan beliefs, particularly the concept of *okra* as discussed in sections 6.3 and 6.4.2*,* the *Okra* of *Onyame* must be regarded in terms of its oneness with *Onyame:* therefore of the same nature as *Onyame,* but also as a distinct entity by itself. *Okra* is also regarded as pre-existent vitality that is eternal, rational, relational, and self-aware. There is no myth, maxim or story that claims that *Okra* had a beginning, will ever cease to exist or be annihilated.

In this respect, if Jesus is regarded as the *Okra* of *Onyame,* he may be seen as an invisible rational vitality (IRV) which pre-existed with *Onyame* before he became *teasefo* (a human being). Thus the *Okra* of *Onyame* as the incarnation in the person of *Nyamesofopreko* may be regarded as one who is eternal and pre-existed with God from the very beginning. Moreover, the person of *Nyamesofopreko* may be regarded as one who is *homoousios* with *Onyame* (God), yet a distinct rational vitality by itself.

On this basis, if we may regard the person of *Nyamesofopreko* as the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame*, the necessary conclusion would be that *Nyamesofopreko* is of "one substance with *Onyame*". In this sense, the Akan concept of the *Okra* of *Onyame* is similar to the usage of the word Logos as a Christological concept.

Such a proposal avoids running the risk of the "heresy" of modalism, for, as already indicated, *Okra* is one of the three IRVs, namely *Ntoro*, *Okra* and *Sunsum* which form the nature of God. Of course this raises a pertinent question that needs to be addressed in this regard. It may be posed as follows: What happens to *Onyame* in the case of Jesus' death; does it imply that God Himself is dead? I will return to this in section 6.4.4.

One advantage of this proposal is that *Okra, Sunsum and Ntoro* are rational, relational and self-aware vitalities. Another advantage is that these three IRV's are believed to cooperate harmoniously for a common good as already noted in section 6.3. In this proposal, the concept of *Onyame* is not one "substance" which can be observed in three or more different forms, nor an abstract noun such as love. Moreover, the three are not inanimate objects. Rather, they are three distinct IVR's that stand in permanent relations with each other. This guarantees a

Christology that is directly based on the notion of triune God.

Furthermore, such a construction also avoids the heresy of tritheism. For, in the traditional Akan thought-form the three invisible rational vitalities – *Ntoro*, *Okra* and *Sunsum* – are inseparable though each remains a distinct entity, especially pertaining to human beings. The proposal, therefore, does not succumb to the conceptual flaw of divine assembly.

b) *Okra* of *Onyame* became "*teasefo*" (human being): A proposal for Jesus' humanity

As I have already discussed the divinity of Jesus on the basis of the *Okra* of *Onyame*, I will focus in this section on the *Okra* of *Onyame* becoming *teasefo*. In terms of Akan belief, when the *okra* of human beings become *teasefo* (flesh), the designated term for that is *okra-teasefo*. In order to reinterpret the person of Christ in the Akan context, I have also in this thesis proposed the idea that the *Okra* of *Onyame* (the dynamic equivalent of Logos) becomes *teasefo* (human being). In this regard, Jesus becomes: *Okra* of *Onyame* (in human flesh) *teasefo;* simply *Nyamekra-teasefo.* The difference lies with the qualification *Nyame.* Thus we have Jesus as (*Nyame*) *okra-teasefo* and other human beings as *okra-teasefo*.[53]

When an Akan uses the term *teasefo,* she/he refers to all the constituents of a human being, namely *mogya*, *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro*. The term *teasefo* therefore means "human being" in the Akan language. This may be similar to the Greek concept of flesh (*sarx*), which denotes the total human being- body, soul and spirit. The Akan, however, use the term *teasefo* and its cognate term *okra-teasefo* interchangeably.[54]

The Akan term *okrateasefo* is a combination of two words: *okra* and *teasefo.* With its formal use, the terms *okra* and *teasefo* denote divine spark and human being respectively. *Okra* is regarded as a living being. Likewise the Akan term *teasefo* describes a living being. However, *okra* is not regarded as human until it is embodied within human flesh and thus becomes *teasefo* or *okrateasefo*.

In the Akan thought-form the *Okra* of *Onyame* is regarded as divine, yet it has to become *teasefo* (human being) before it can express adequately the Nicene/Chalcedonian view of Christ as truly divine as well as truly human. Nonetheless, Jesus becomes *Onyame okra*

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[53] I have purposely hyphenated the terms in order to help the non-Akan readers to understand their composition.

[54] The term *okrateasefo* is only meant to emphasise the *idea* that *okra* is the core component of a human being. Both terms okra*teasefo and teasefo* are exclusively used for human beings, and it connotes *okra* that has become human being – *teasefo*. Commenting on the term *okrateasefo,* Gyekye (1987:86) notes that the combination of the terms *okra* and *teasefo* appear to be tautologous yet signifies concrete expression.

teasefo (truly God and truly human), distinguished from other human beings who become *okrateasefo* (truly human with a spark of God's nature). Jesus therefore would be regarded as *Nyamekrateasefo* (God the *Okra* [son] incarnate).

Such a distinction becomes necessary as the traditional Akan do not regard human beings as divine. In a way every human being receives *okra* from God – but that does not imply that human beings are divine in the same way that Jesus may be regarded as the bearer of the *Okra* of *Onyame* – particularly in his attributed status.

The Akan saying: *Akoko kra ne Abubro de nnse* (literally, the *okra* of the fowl and that of the dove are not the same) may throw some light on such a distinction. In the Akan belief, only *Onyame* (God) and human beings possess *okra*; animals are not endowed with *okra.* The Akan however, in a proverbial sense, attributed *okra* to such birds to illustrate the uniqueness of individual *okra* in terms of the mission a human being is to pursue on earth. The context of this proverb does not specifically delineate one person's *okra* as unique. However, it does suggest a broad context in which the uniqueness of Jesus as the bearer of the *Okra* of *Onyame* may be affirmed. If Jesus, therefore, was to become the bearer of universal salvation, indeed, the *okra* of fowl (other human beings) and that of the dove (Jesus) may not be the same.

Nonetheless, a connected question that needs to be addressed can be posed as follows: If the *okra* of Jesus and that of other human beings differ – in what way would Jesus then be fully human in all respects except regarding sin? In other words, if my *okra* is somehow of a lesser status than that of Jesus, is he not then elevated above me also as a human being? An associated crucial ethical question is: Would this Akan saying, by making a provision for Jesus' uniqueness, not also serve as basis for personal discrimination in terms of "heavy" and "light" *okra* of human beings?

The Akan saying as quoted above connotes the uniqueness of individual *okra* depending on someone's mission in the world. A traditional Akan may find it not too difficult to accept the true humanity of Christ, even if one maintains that Christ is also truly divine (the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame*). To the Akan the determining qualification for being human is to be born of a woman. I will discuss this issue in detail in section 6.4.4.

The concept of the O*kra* of *Onyame,* that is *Nyamekrateasefo,* therefore expresses Jesus' full divinity adequately while at the same time guarantees his humanity with the rest of humankind.[55] In this proposal, one may say, the *Okra* of *Onyame* enters the human realm;

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[55]   It is necessary to pose a Christology that does justice to the two aspects of the biblical picture of Jesus.

indeed he was already in human beings in the form of *okra* (sparks emanating from the *Okra* of *Onyame*).

In his discussion of the true divinity and true humanity of Christ, Justin questions why one should shy away from believing that the Logos could be born of a virgin. If the Logos has been active in all human beings, he indeed imparted to them whatever goodness and knowledge they possessed (Kelly 1978). Similarly, one may also ask: Why can the *Okra* of *Onyame* not become *teasefo* (human), seeing that the sparks of *okra* have been active in all human beings?[56] To the Akan the determining qualification for being human is to be born from a woman.

Seeing that Jesus is truly human, his humanity may be meaningfully expressed through his finitude, particularly his death. The Akan in many ways affirm that, death is the lot of every human being. The Akan sayings and proverbs eloquently express this fact: *Obiara be wu* (every person will die); *Onipa ba, obra twa wuo* (for a person that is born of a woman, life should end in death). [57]

In Akan society, a person also indicates that he/she is a human by showing a dependence on some power beyond oneself. Prayers usually symbolise such dependence, seeing that prayers within the Akan society are addressed to the spirit beings – God, ancestors and lesser divinities. Thus Jesus' prayers would, within the Akan society, as professed in the biblical writings, be the concrete expressions of his total dependence on God and therefore of his true humanity.

Moreover, amongst the Akan, as in the biblical world, Jesus' finitude was demonstrated by his finite knowledge. An Akan is conscious of his/her finitude, as is clearly articulated in the maxim *obi nnyim adekyee mu asem* (one does not know what the next day has in store for him/her). Consequently the claims that Jesus lacked knowledge about the "parousia" would impress the Akan, as it did the biblical writers, that Jesus was finite and therefore a genuine human being (Pobee 1978).

Thus, the second aspect of Jesus' nature that we will consider is what might be termed his true ordinariness, at least in terms of the impression that many of his contemporaries had of him ("Is not this Joseph's son?"). If Jesus' human excellence is stressed in the wrong way, one forfeits the sense of solidarity: that Jesus was a human like ourselves.

[56] The possibility of such an idea could be seen in the Akan conceptuality for at least two reasons. Firstly, the idea that *okra* can become human is not an exception but a norm in Akan anthropology. *Okra* is not just active but has been intrinsically part of all human beings. Thus the idea that either *okra*-spark or the *Okra* of *Onyame* has become a human being, raises no unusual enquiries within a traditional Akan context.

[57] Pobee (1979) contends that, in traditional Akan belief, the doctrine of Jesus' omniscience is not only false, but also obscures the humanity of Jesus.

c) *Onyamekra-teasefo* as the two-fold natures of *Nyamesofopreko:* **A proposal for Jesus' two natures in one person**

My proposal for Jesus' two natures in one person is based on the concepts of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (*Nyamekra)* and *okra* of human being. In the previous proposals for the divinity and humanity of Christ I have postulated that God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko)* possesses two natures, namely being truly divine as well as truly human. In this section, I make a further claim that these two natures exist in one person, without confusion between the two or subjugation of one to another. With such a proposal, a epistemological question needs to be addressed: Is there any conceptual link between a historical event and an eternal reality within the Akan context?[58]

Within the context of the Akan thought-form, *okra* (spark of the eternal) and *teasefo* (time) connote the possibility that the concrete forms a unity with the universal realm. Thus, when *Okra* of *Onyame* is assumed to become human, then, there is a suggestion of a meeting of two orders: eternal and temporal. Such a framework provides the necessary grounds for a proposal of Christ's two natures in one person. For on the one hand, the *Okra* of *Onyame,* unlike the *okra* of human beings (sparks), is assumed to be fully divine. Thus the *Okra* of *Onyame* may constitute the full divine nature of Christ.

On the other hand, the term *teasefo* embodies *mogya*, *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro* – the full constituents of a human being. Thus, we may assume that *teasefo* also constitutes the full humanity of Christ.[59] Nonetheless, taking this approach, we may be confronted with a heresy similar to that of Apollinarianism. A connected question can be posed as follows: How does one account for the human *okra* of Jesus if the *Okra* of *Onyame* entails the incarnation of the person of Jesus?

Faced with a similar question Origen, following Socrates and Plato, proposed a theory that the

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[58] The success of this proposal largely depends on how I will be able to express the affirmation of Chalcedon against the various heresies that the Council condemned. The major historical controversies on the notion of Christ's two natures in one person are: Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutycheanism, monophysitism and monothelitism.

[59] In his argument on the scriptural basis for the two natures in one person, Kasper (1976) first concedes that it would be historically wrong to seek the fully-developed two nature doctrine in the Scriptures, not even from the Johannine writings – which come close to the ecumenical dogma. However, he insists that if one considers the fact that the flesh in the context of John 1:14 denotes soul and spirit as constituents of a fully human being in the Hellenistic worldview, then, we have flesh, together with soul and spirit on the one hand. On the other hand, if we take our departure from Logos, then we consider two natures in the person of Christ. Kasper contends that it then logically follows that either there are two natures or one nature absorbed the rest of the other nature. He argues that, following the latter view, we may then have a kind of "higher breed" of Jesus' person. However, the Council of Chalcedon condemned the former view and affirmed the latter.

human soul permanently attaches itself to the Logos (akin to the *Okra* of *Onyame)*. With this theory, Origen could account for both a human will and a divine will in the person of Jesus.

As Origen views it, Christ's human soul acted as the point of union between the Logos and humanity (Kelly 1978:158). In his attempt to express both the divinity and the humanity of Christ in one person, Rahner also opted for the notion of the human soul as the point of meeting between the Logos and humanity. However, it is doubtful if such an approach can express the Chalcedonian notion of the person of Christ adequately (Gunton 1997:126).[60]

On the other hand, had Origen proposed that the Logos with the "attached soul" (which he proposed to be Christ's human soul) became flesh in the person of Jesus, it would have made a difference. The Logos (the dynamic equivalent of the *Okra* of *Onyame*), not the human soul (*okra*), would then have become the point of union between God and humanity. Thus in the person of Christ, there would be a co-presence of the Logos and the human soul.

The proposal in this thesis relies on the analogy of the relationship between fire and spark. The analogy distinguishes between the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings. It illustrates the relationship between God and human beings in terms of how "the one and the many" are related in the Akan thought-form.

The analogy thus naturally presupposes the co-presence of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (fire) and the *okra* of a human being (spark) in the person of Jesus. The idea that the *okra* (soul) of a human being is totally subdued by the *Okra* of *Onyame* at the meeting point, i.e. in the event of the incarnation, would render such an analogy inconsistent.

The traditional Akan believe that *okra* is by nature destined to become human, to die and return to *Onyame* as a distinct being. Even at death, and its subsequent return to *Onyame, okra* does not forfeit its distinctiveness. The context of the analogy of fire and the spark in reference to the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings therefore connotes that the two co-existed at any point of meeting. Otherwise, one would not interpret the analogy consistently. That is to say, at any given point of meeting, for that matter in the person of the historic Jesus, there was co-presence of the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of a human being.

One may point to a spark of a fire that is removed from its substance. Thus human beings

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[60] The notion of self-transcendence does not assist us much either with regard to another central area. That is where the significance of Jesus is linked from the beginning with the fact that it is through this particular human life that God's salvation becomes actual on earth. Here, too, the accent is often placed on the fact that Jesus functions as Saviour by means of his lowliness. Notions of self-transcendence actually obscure the heart of Christology.

could be endowed with the sparks of the *Okra* of *Onyame* without necessarily being endowed with the substance (fire) itself. However, where there is a substance that sparks, a spark co-exists with that substance. If there is a fire and its spark, the presence of the former may not necessarily put out the latter.

On this basis, between the two, namely the fire and the spark (Christ's human *okra* and the *Okra* of *Onyame*), there is "distinctiveness in oneness". That is, the *Okra* of *Onyame* – in Jesus – did not subjugate the *okra* of human – in Jesus. The human *okra* (spark) rather co-existed with the *Okra* of *Onyame* in the person of Christ. The analogy thus expresses the co-existence of the human soul (*okra*) and the divine being (*Okra* of *Onyame*) in the one person of Jesus Christ.

Amongst the Akan (as well as many other African societies) there is a belief that a lesser divinity can become human through the normal human birth process. With reference to such a belief, although such a person is a lesser divinity, it is not assumed that the nature of the lesser divinity in such a person would absorb the human faculties of that person. Such a person, assumed to be exercising his/her "supernatural powers", may be regarded as one who acts as an agent of the lesser divinity; yet at the same time as being truly human – as he/she was indeed born of a woman.

In keeping with my suggestion that the status of Jesus may be regarded as the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame*, the term *Nyamekrateasefo* will therefore imply that the *Okra* of *Onyame* has become a human being in the person of Jesus. The phrase "*Okra* became *teasefo*" is therefore similar to the phrase "the Word became flesh". According to Christian theology, it was the Word (Logos) which "became flesh" in Jesus Christ (1:14). Similarly, within a traditional Akan context, it is the *Okra* of *Onyame* that became *teasefo* (a human being).

6.4.4 Some key debates on Jesus' divinity and humanity in the Western theological discourse: Reflections from within the Akan context

My intention here is to reflect further on some questions which my proposal raises but which I could not discuss in detail in the main argument. The pertinent questions are as follows:

a) What happens to *Onyame* in the instance of Jesus' death: does this imply that God is dead?

In terms of the Akan belief, becoming a human (birth) and the cessation of a human's functions (death), only signify the termination of one's activities in one mode of life. Humans can only surmise what happens beyond death. Thus, the question of what happened to God

when Jesus died – if Jesus is regarded as God, betrays a materialistic view of a human being. It presupposes that death terminates all activities and that if Jesus is God and has died, then God's activities in the universe ceased. However, the Akan need not accept such a view of being human to the detriment of theirs. For, all worldviews are self-imposed conceptual frameworks to explain the universe in a coherent manner.

For the Akan death does not entail or necessarily constitute annihilation. Rather, it is believed that death brings a change of one's material being to one's non-material being. Thus, at death, there is in a sense a "continuing self" and it is believed that *okra* is the agent of that "continuing self" which links a person's past, present and future.

In the Akan thought-form, *okra* is one of the three vitalities *okra, sunsum* and *ntoro* that may be regarded as the nature of *Onyame* – the ultimate reality. In terms of the Akan belief, there exist some forms of *okra* that are of a human nature and some that are not (non-material). Nonetheless, it is believed that *okra i*s destined to become human, and to return to *Onyame* as a distinct being after the death of the human being concerned.

The Akan believe that *okra* in the form of a human being can temporarily leave the human body. Yet, such an occurrence would not necessarily spell one's death. It is believed that in the event of the temporary exit of *okra*, one only becomes anxious and sorrowful until the *okra* returns. It is only when the *okra* finally leaves the human body that someone would be dead.

The proposed exit of the *Okra* of *Onyame* from *Onyame* to become human flesh (incarnation) may be interpreted as a temporary exit of *okra*. It was a matter of time before the *Okra* of *Onyame* (likened to the temporary exits and returns of the *okra* of a human being) returned to *Onyame* after accomplishing its task in the world.

On the basis of this explanation, one may infer that, within the Akan context, the incarnation of Jesus as the *Okra* of *Onyame* only expresses the temporary exit of *okra* from its host – *Onyame*. Thus, the birth of Jesus or Jesus becoming human, does not necessarily entail the death of *Onyame* or the descent of *Onyame* to become human being.

With regard to the death of Jesus, one may suggest that his human *okra* returned to *Onyame* – that spelled his death. That is to say, it was certain that Jesus actually died like any other person. One may further speculate that when the human *okra* returned to *Onyame,* it was quickened back to human life,

In this respect, in the case of other human beings, one may talk about the final exit of *okra* to

Onyame that signifies death. In the case of Jesus, as he was the *Okra* of *Onyame*, Jesus might have rather surrendered his body to death in terms of a permanent cessation of its functions; as a human body is destined to death. However, since the *Okra* of *Onyame* did not finally leave the body of Jesus, there was the need that his body should be changed to another form of human body. This is what one may term as the resurrection of Jesus; thus the body of Jesus did not decompose.

Within the traditional Akan context, the death and the resurrection of Jesus may then be understood in the context of the Akan maxim: *Nyame boo owuo na owou kum Nyame; na Nyame na ote nanka oduro nti odii owou so nkonim* (God created death and death killed God; yet God who is all powerful – had an antidote for death). This maxim provides the sense of "God's death and resurrection." Thus, it provides the basis for the Akan to accept that Jesus may be regarded as truly God even though he died and was resurrected.

I have proposed that the incarnation took place by the direct action of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. I might add that it was done in conjunction with the *Ntoro* and *Sunsum.* One may also propose here that the resurrection took place through the direct action of the *Okra* of *Onyame* in corroboration with his *Ntoro* and *Sunsum;* thus the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, changed Jesus' body into another form which is incorruptible.

Here, I use the term "changed the body" to signify the idea that it was the same body of Jesus which did not decompose but was transformed into another form of human body. By contrast to the ancestors whose bodies obviously decay, the body of Jesus did not decompose, but was transformed. In this respect, if one contends that Jesus is an ancestor, one may be doing more harm to Christian theology by blurring the key distinctive difference between Jesus and other human beings.

This is a subtle element that Western notions of the incarnation and resurrection lack. Even the concept of Logos and its relations to God fails to answer the question: What happened to God at Jesus' birth and death, if Jesus is indeed regarded as God? It was the Christian emphasis that "the Logos was God" that brought the concept of Logos closer to the Akan concept of *Okra*. Nonetheless, unlike *Okra* and *Onyame*, the status of Logos in its relation to God is indecisive and created a point of dispute in theological discourse until the decisions of the Council of Nicea.

Moreover, I have already indicated that in addition to *Okra*, two other IRV's, namely *Ntoro* and *Sunsum,* constitute the being of *Onyame.* Such a belief obviously implies that the

incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the death of *Nyamekrateasefo* (the *Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate) does not exhaust the being of *Onyame*, seeing that all three constitute the being of *Onyame*.

These three entities are assumed to be inseparable. Therefore one might ask: Did these three, namely *Onyame Ntoro* (God the Father) *Onyame Okra* (God the Son) and *Onyame Sunsum* (God the Holy Spirit) become flesh and die? It certainly seems that way. However, it is assumed that it was rather a distinct act of the *Okra* of *Onyame* – that became flesh and died but in corroboration with *Onyame Ntoro* (God the Father) and *Onyame Sunsum* (God the Holy Spirit).

Again my worn out example of "the adulterous wife and the husband's nagging *sunsum"* may throw some light on this. When an adulterous wife is being condemned by her conscience for her infidelity, an Akan may say that *obaa no kunu sunsum akye no* (her husband's *sunsum* has apprehended her). However, according to the belief, the three work together but the *sunsum* exercise a distinctive act to apprehend the adulterous wife. Applying this to the context of incarnation and the death of Jesus, one may say that incarnation and death were distinct acts of the *Okra* of *Onyame;* yet it was fulfilled with the corroboration of the Father (*Ntoro)* and the Holy Spirit (*Sunsum).* This explanation somehow also answers the question of whether *Nyamekrateasefo* suffered and died for humankind with the *Ntoro* (Father) and the *Sunsum* (Holy Ghost).

In this respect, I may conclude that the incarnation and the death of Christ is not a case of the God descending to take on human flesh and to die. Instead, this is a case where the *Okra* of *Onyame,* in corroboration with *Sunsum* and *Ntoro,* acted to ensure the conception of a mediator who had the task of redeeming humankind. Thus God himself in the form of his *Okra* accomplished a special task as God's unique priest (mediator) – *Nyamesofopreko* for humankind. Based on this analysis, I may therefore say that neither the birth nor the death of Jesus denotes the death of *Onyame*.

b) Was Jesus conscious of his being as *Okra* of *Onyame* (his divinity) as a human being?
The question of whether or not Jesus was self-conscious as God incarnate leads to one of the most important debates in Christology. To some scholars, within the earlier strata of the Jesus tradition, there is substantive evidence that Jesus laid claim to speak with divine inspiration and authorisation as, in some sense, God's representative. But there is nothing of consequence to support the thesis that Jesus saw himself in some sense as God, or as the divine incarnation.

189

Nonetheless, some scholars object to this notion. They contend that while Jesus did not make an explicit claim to the status of divinity, ample references affirm implicitly that Jesus was self-conscious of his divine status.

The pivotal point of the argument is: If Jesus himself was not aware that he was divine, then, the divine status was attributed to him by his disciples after his death. If so, it then follows that Jesus is "divine" only in the judgement of his disciples; thus the claim of the uniqueness of Jesus' divinity is not based on a solid foundation. Of course, one may also accept the judgement of the disciples on the basis of an affirmation of God's revelation – whatever that may mean.

In terms of a post-Enlightenment framework, this would be a valid argument. However, the traditional Akan would see it differently. The Akan believe that the *okra* pre-existed with *Onyame,* and is eternal, not a mere idea in the mind of *Onyame* (God). To the Akan, *okra* entails an invisible rational vitality, conscious of its existence and the course of life it wants to take. Yet, when *okra* becomes *teasefo* (a human being) it forgets its previous existence. As the Akan say, *obi nim awie gye Onyame* (no one knows the end of a course of life, except God). Thus, to the Akan all human beings pre-existed before becoming human, yet no one knows exactly the course of his/her life. The Yoruba of Nigeria share a similar contention. According to the Yoruba belief, after "emi" bids farewell to God, it crosses a river, then forgets everything about its missions.

Similarly, Jesus also made a statement to the effect that no one except God knows when the world will come to an end. Thus to the Akan and also the Yoruba, whether Jesus was aware of his divine status (when he became *teasefo*) or not, does not necessarily rule out the notion that he was indeed the *Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate. To the Akan it is important that Jesus was aware that he shares the limitation of human beings, yet this does not subtract from his divinity.

c) How does one account within the Akan context for the virgin birth and sinless life of Jesus?

As is the case in several social institutions, the Akan matrilineage has an ideology that serves as its operational charter for procreation. Theory propounds that during mating, the mother provides the blood (biologists term this the egg), whilst the father provides the *ntoro* or spirit (that is to say, the biological sperm). The Akan distinguish between the *ntoro* and the *mogya* (blood) with regard to the nature of the born person (Assimeng 1989). The Akan believe that

both *ntoro* and *mogya* (blood which is believed to be transmitted by the mother as well as the father) are genetic factors responsible for inherited characteristics of a human being. According to this belief the child has the same *ntoro* as the father though.

With reference to the virgin birth of Jesus,[61] it can be said that a human (represented by the Virgin Mary) provided the *mogya* (blood) and *Onyame* provided the *ntoro*. In the usual procreation, the father provides the *ntoro.*[62] However, for a deity to provide the *ntoro* (personality) in the case of Jesus may not be something difficult to accept within the Akan context. The concept of the *ntoro* is often associated with water bodies. Every Akan *ntoro* is linked up with a water deity. Interestingly *Onyame* is also in some sense associated with the rain water that falls from the sky.[63] Thus when it is cloudy, an Akan would say *Onyame ani wofem* (literally, God's eye is down) or when it rains, the Akan will express it as *Onyame agu fem* (literally God has come down). *Ntoro* is also directly associated with *Onyame* as already indicated in 6.3.

For the Akan, a father would derive his *ntoro* (personality) from *Onyame*.[64] The association of *ntoro* with *Onyame* and the water-deities cautions one from rendering *ntoro* as just biological sperm. Though the Akan may think that *ntoro* can take shape as biological sperm, *ntoro* is also regarded as non-material (see 6.4.2).

Thus for God to provide *ntoro* to Mary for the conception of Jesus does not necessarily imply the mating of a spiritual being and a human being in the form of a *hieros gamos*: where Mary as the female element were to produce the human Son of God. In this regard, I may postulate that while all other human beings have their *ntoro* linked to one of the water deities, only Jesus possesses *Onyame* as his *ntoro* because he is *Nyamekrateasefo*.

On this basis the virgin conception of Jesus may be explained on the grounds that, because he is *Nyamekrateasefo* (*Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate), his *okra* is inseparable from the *Ntoro* and *Sunsum* of *Onyame*. Thus, Jesus did not need any human *ntoro* or *sunsum* to become *teasefo*

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[61]   The virgin birth of Jesus is one of the more disputed areas in both Gospel studies and Christian theology. For further discussions see Brown (1974: 44-45) and Houssiau (1981).

[62]   Notably, *ntoro* is linked up with water deities.

[63]   Nevertheless, the Akan do not identify *Onyame* with the sky.

[64]   It is also commonly assumed that some lesser divinities can incarnate themselves to be born into a certain family either to bless them or to punish them. In such instances, their personality would be that of the said lesser divinity. Such common stories of this nature abound in many Akan towns and villages. The Akan do not entertain any story of alleged birth taking place without the contribution of a man or woman. This is similar to the Eleventh Council of Toledo in AD 675, (DBS 533) which rejected the contention that, since Mary conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit was the father of Jesus.

(human). This presupposes that Jesus also has the *Ntoro* –personality of *Onyame*.

Amongst the Akan, the *ntoro* helps to establish a spiritual bond between a father and his child (Busia 1954:197). In this respect, we can contend that Jesus (only) having the *Ntoro* of *Onyame* could develop an intimate relationship with God which passes any human's relationship with God. Such an intimate relationship also helps Jesus to maintain a high sense of devotion to God. This may also account for the sinless life he lived. Thus, in terms of the Akan thought-form, if Jesus is assumed to possess the *Ntoro* of *Onyame,* it may be expected that he would lead a kind of life that reflects the nature of *Onyame*. The reason is that, to the Akan, one's life reflects the attributes which are traditionally attached to one's *ntoro.* The Akan regard *Onyame* as a perfect being, thus the saying: *Onyame nnpe bone* (God hates sin).

In this respect, while the *Ntoro* from *Onyame* to Jesus may account for Jesus' sinlessness, the "heavy" *Sumsum* which he derived from *Onyame* accounts for miracles and his resurrection. While the *Ntoro* of *Onyame* enables Jesus to lead a sinless life, his *Sunsum* helps Jesus at the same time to "charge" his *Sunsum* to become powerful all the time.

The Akan believe that, when one indulges in sinful activities,[65] it is said that *ne sumsum aye ha* (literally, his spirit has become light). In other words he/she has become restless. This is usually the case when one is being pursued by his foe, *"sasa"* (a vengefully spirit).

In this regard, one may say that a sinless life empowers one in the spiritual realm. This explains the reason why from time to time an Akan will offer a sacrifice as a sin offering to purify him- /herself and to strengthen his/her spirit. In Jesus' case, he does not need to offer such a sacrifice to purify himself in order to empower himself spiritually, the *ntoro* helps him to overcome sin. As a result, Jesus' *sunsum* are constantly being empowered, thus he always has "heavy" *sunsum*. The implication of one having a "heavy" *sumsum* is that one can overcome all forces. This may account for Jesus' numerous miracles and his widespread healing ministry.

More importantly, Jesus' virgin birth and his sinless life, which he derives from the *Ntoro* and the *Sumsum* of *Onyame,* might have accounted for his resurrection. Sin weakens one's *sumsum*, but Jesus received his *Ntoro* from *Onyame.* He could therefore overcome sin. Light *sumsum* is easily overcome by spiritual forces, but Jesus has the very *Sumsum* of *Onyame* thus, he overcame every force, including death.

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[65]   It also pertains to some cases when one becomes a victim of sinful activities.

The miracles and the resurrection of Jesus Christ may be understood in terms of his "heavy" *sunsum* (strong spirit) which enables him to overcome evil forces, including death. Probably, being the *Okra* of *Onyame* and also fulfilling the mission as bearer of humankind's salvation might also have contributed to Jesus' sinlessness. Nonetheless, Kudadjie (see Pobee 1979:90-93) has raised a concern about the claim of Jesus' sinless life as it relates to his humanity. Pobee (1979:90-93) has responded extensively to these concerns.

d) Does the attribution of sinlessness to Jesus render him not truly human in the Akan context?

If every human being, with the exception of Jesus, is a sinner (Romans 3:23), this evokes the question whether Jesus may be regarded as a full human being. This debate engaged John Pobee and Joshua Kudadjie within the context of Akan anthropology. It is unfortunate that Kudajie's views have to be derived from Pobee's response to him. This dialogue took place in the form of verbal communication and was later narrated in Pobee's book *Towards an African Christian theology* (1979).

Pobee notes that Kudadjie has suggested that, in the Akan view of humanity, unreliability, wickedness and evil, are important characteristics of human beings. Kudadjie cites the Akan saying: *Suro onipa* (fear human being), as an illustration of how the Akan conceives of the wickedness of a human being.

Pobee admits that such statements are uttered when someone does something wrong, and others do not only express their disapproval of the act but also of the view that it is but the lot of human beings to behave as such. Kudadjie argues that, if this is so, Jesus would then (granted that he did not sin), to the Akan, lack an important attribute of humanhood, namely wickedness, unreliability. In this sense one could therefore, not take Jesus to be truly man.

Pobee concedes that he is not sure about the phrases cited above, but suggests that it may express no more than the tendency of human beings toward unreliability and wickedness. He notes, "If so, then Akan man's [human] version of the biblical claim would be that Jesus, being flesh, was potentially capable of sinning but did not sin only because he consciously resisted sin" Pobee (1979:90-93). However, to Kudadjie, Jesus can be nothing more than a "sinner", seeing that all humans by nature are "sinners".

From the concession that Pobee makes – "as one would expect a mortal man to behave" the question that one can pose to Pobee is: Was Jesus a mortal man? If what is expected of every mortal would not apply to Jesus, is it not clear that Jesus lacks what it takes to be a full human

193

within the Akan context?

In the first place, Kudadjie reads more into the statement by concluding that Jesus could then not be regarded as true man. Such an assumption presupposes that the Akan believe that humans are sinners by nature; a kind of Adamic sin or original sin. Thus, every human cannot do otherwise but sin. Such a conclusion extends Akan thought beyond the content of the original thought-form.

Secondly, Pobee is right in maintaining Jesus had the potential to sin. However, his explanation that "as one would expect a mortal man to behave" without any qualification makes sin the lot of all human beings without exception. In this respect, Pobee's concession supports Kudadjie's assumption that Jesus fails to meet the standard of what (any) "mortal man is expected to behave". Therefore, Jesus could not be fully human as viewed from within the Akan context.

My response to Kudadjie is that the above statement meant to say that it is expected that "some or more or so many" will behave unreliably, wickedly, with evil intent to fail another. Thus the saying: *Suro onipa* (fear human being) from the Akan context is not open and closed but allows at least an exception. Jesus may be regarded as that exception. Of course this also raises another question as to why such an exemption should be limited to Jesus only.

In another discussion, Pobee contends that Jesus is fully human, yet he is more truly human than the rest of humankind. Pobee's posits that the rest of humankind has sinned whereas Jesus did not sin and this has marred the *imago Dei* in other human beings. In other words, whereas Jesus is truly human, the rest of humankind is not.

The pertinent question here is: By what criteria does one assess who is human? Before Jesus' time on earth there were human beings, and after Jesus there were human beings as well. How do we know that Jesus was human? Of course one has to compare Jesus to the community that accepted him. Thus, for Pobee to maintain that Jesus was more human than the rest of humankind, becomes logically incoherent; he dismisses the very criteria he uses to judge Jesus' humanity. In effect, the Jesus that Pobee proposes, is not truly human because he does not fit the description of a human being.

From my point of view, Jesus' sinlessness may be accounted for on the basis that he had his *Ntoro* (characteristic that determines one's behaviour) directly from a superior source, *Onyame.* In terms of Akan belief, the source of one's *ntoro* largely determines one's behaviour. Of course this also raises a question whether Jesus enjoyed a special advantage

over and above all other human beings – and whether his temptation was genuine?

My response is that, if it is assumed that one has the *Ntoro* of *Onyame*, it is not conclusive that that person cannot sin. Jesus came to a social world which constitutes both good and evil. Thus Jesus as a human could have sinned, but on the basis of the biblical evidence, we can assert that he did not.

In this regard, one may say that only Jesus, having the *Ntoro* of *Onyame,* could have developed an intimate relationship with God which surpasses anyone's relationship with God. Such an intimate relationship might have been the decisive factor that accounted for Jesus' elevated sense of devotion to God.

Nevertheless, this does not, to the Akan, render Jesus more human than the rest of humankind. Amongst the Akan no one is more human than others; yet the Akan recognise that some people have "heavy" *sunsum* while others have "lighter" *sunsum.* It is such differences with regard to human's inner constitution, that may denote the uniqueness of an individual person. Therefore, Jesus is unique not because he was a truer human than others, but his uniqueness was based on his inner constitution i.e. being the *Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate.

e) Is the difference between Jesus and the other human beings explained in terms of kind or degree?

In this chapter the divinity of Jesus is proposed on the basis of the notion of the *Okra* of *Onyame.* Jesus' humanity was described in terms of the *Okra* of *Onyame* becoming *teasefo* (human). His two natures in one person was also conceptualised as *Nyamekrateasefo* (*Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate). Thus, the Akan concept of *Okra-teasefo* or *Nyamekrateasefo* provide the basis to understand both Jesus' divinity and his humanity and also his two natures in one person. However, on the basis of such claims, one may pose a connected methodological question: Is the difference between Jesus and the other human beings explained in terms of kind or degree? Stressing the difference of degree to the exclusion of kind, runs the risk of a degree Christology. Stressing the difference of kind to the exclusion of degree, runs the risk of docetism.

On the one hand, if one regards Jesus as *okrateasefo,* then we may only view Jesus as one who is fully human. Thus, the difference between Jesus and other human beings should be conceived of in terms of degree; like us in all things – apart from sin. Jesus' significance then consists in the fact that he possesses a significant, even unique, number of human qualities.

On the other hand, if Jesus is assumed to have the *okra* of a human being and he himself is also the *Okra* of *Onyame,* the difference between him and any other human being may also be expressed as one of kind. The reason is that the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings are of the same substance, yet, in the traditional Akan belief, the latter is not afforded the capacity to grow in order to become like the former.

Thus, in the Akan thought-form the difference between Jesus and other human beings may paradoxically be expressed as both that of degree (being one substance) and of kind (lack of inherent capacity to become like the other).

One may contend that the analogy of fire and spark then fails to convey the Akan idea of the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings. The reason may be that a spark has the capacity to become a fire. However, the idea of such a capacity only emerges in the context of the existence of other things which the spark might come into contact with. Thus, a spark by itself does not have the capacity to become a fire.

f) The humanity of Jesus and that of other human beings: Do they differ?

Again, the Akan saying: *Akoko kra ne Abubro de nnse* (literally, the *okra* of a fowl and that of a dove are not the same) may cast some light on the distinction between the person of Christ and that of other human beings.

This raises an important question: If the *okra* of Jesus and of other human beings differ – in what way would Jesus then be fully human in all respects except sin? In other words, if my *okra* is somehow of a lesser status than that of Jesus, would he not then be elevated above me as a human being? An associated crucial ethical question is: Would this Akan saying, making a provision for Jesus' uniqueness, not also serve as a basis for personal discrimination in terms of the "heavier" or "lighter" *okra* of human beings?

The Akan saying quoted above, denotes the distinctiveness and uniqueness of an individual's *okra.* While the Akan rate the importance of individual *okra* on the same level; no one is more fully human than another. In essence, there is an affirmation of the distinctiveness of an individual's *okra* in terms of one's mission in the world. In this respect the Akan would say: *Obi kra ne Nyame no na obi nyina ho* (literally, when one was discussing one's destiny with God, no one else was there); in other words, each one discusses his/her destiny with God on his or her own.

This maxim implies that each person distinctly stands before God to discuss the part he or she

is to play in the drama of life. This is not imposed by *Onyame* but is born out of free will chosen by humans themselves. Thus when a traditional Akan finds life "tough", one would remark that: *Me nkrabea nye me meko na maba* (the part I am playing in the drama of life is tough for me; I wish I can come back). It is also meant to convey the message that each human being is distinctive and precious to *Onyame*. Thus no one has the right to exploit another human being as a means for his or her personal ends, irrespective of the circumstances.

On this basis, the answer to the associated ethical question is that there is no basis for one to discriminate in terms of the "heavier" or "lighter" *okra* of human beings. There is no hint of such a notion in the Akan thought-form. Instead, there is an emphasis on the uniqueness of a individual's *okra.*

In the Akan thought-form, a baby's mind (or brain) is not a passive *tabula rasa*; it has an inner, as yet undeveloped nature – which must largely determine that child's future and individuality. What does this inner nature comprise of? In modern terms one may refer to this with reference to DNA-strings. For the Akan, this inner nature is *okra* – an invisible rational vitality (IRV).

No one has any basis to claiming superiority as a person in terms of DNA while he or she is still alive. Since one does not know how one's life would end, this does not warrant any claim of having a superior DNA. What if the supposedly superior DNA carries a rare disease that will only surface during midlife or when life ends? One does not know what one's destiny entails; as the Akan would say: *Obi nim awieye* (no one knows the future).

On the basis of this analysis, a traditional Akan might not find it too difficult to accept Christ's true humanity, though his mission as the bearer of universal salvation warrants that he might have been endowed with inner vitality adequate to carry out his mission. Of course, this rests on the affirmation that Jesus alone and once and for all, was the bearer of *Okra* of *Onyame*. He is thus *Nyamekrateasefo* while other human beings are *okrateasefo*.

Could Jesus be regarded as more fully human than other human beings? In terms of Akan belief, the answer is an unequivocal "No!". To the Akan, the qualification for being human and thereby at par with other human beings is to be born of a woman irrespective of the composition of one's inner nature. The bottom-line of being human is to be born of a woman and to be endowed with a human body.

g) How does one delineate the person of Christ from other human beings?

How does one delineate the "two natures in one person of Jesus" as opposed to the "one nature of other human beings"? In other words, how could one differentiate Jesus from other human beings and at the same time guarantee his co-humanity with the rest of humankind?

Here, I draw on the Akan idea that all human beings have the spark derived from the *Okra of Onyame.* Therefore the *okra* in human beings cannot constitute a divine nature, seeing that the traditional Akan do not regard it as such. Neither can the inseparable three – *okra, ntoro* and *sunsum* – in a human being, constitute a divine nature; they just act as sparks that originated from the nature of *Onyame.*

The difference between the two can then be expressed as follows: "Fully human with a spark of divine nature" (*Okra, Ntoro* and *Sunsum*) against "fully human and fully God." To distinguish between the two, a capital letter and a small letter are used (in this thesis) to differentiate between the spark and the original invisible vitality. Thus, whereas other human beings are *okrateasefo,* Jesus is *Okrateasefo* or *Nyamekrateasefo.*

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the person of Christ is approached by means of two indispensable constituent foci, namely the Akan concept of being human and the nature of *Onyame* (God). *Onyame* is conceived of in terms of three constituent vitalities namely, *Ntoro*, *Okra* and *Sunsum*. This serves as the basis for my proposal for understanding, within the Akan context, the doctrine of Trinity. Needless to say, the doctrine of Trinity is pivotal to a Christology; one cannot give an adequate account of the divine saviour without it.

Correlatively, a human being is described as a being created in the image of *Onyame*. Thus, human beings are regarded as endowed with the sparks – *ntoro, okra* and *sunsum* – of *Onyame's* nature. Yet, they are not regarded as being divine, not even as a divine being. One of the tenets of the Akan belief is that *okra,* which is regarded as a core constituent of being human, is a spark of *Onyame's* nature.

In this chapter, the divinity of Jesus is proposed on the basis of the *Okra* of *Onyame.* His humanity was described in terms of the *Okra* of *Onyame* becoming *teasefo* (being human). Thus, the Akan concept of *Okra-teasefo* or *Nyamekrateasefo,* provides the basis to understand both Jesus' divinity and his humanity. This notion was further explained in terms of two natures in one person, without confusion or subjugation.

To sum up the proposal of this chapter: The person of Jesus is presented as being God's unique priest *(Nyamesofopreko)*; he is the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame.* The purpose of this incarnation is that the *Okra* of *Onyame* through the person of God's unique priest becomes the *Afomusuyideɛ* (sin and curse bearer) for humankind. This theme will be expounded in the next chapter, particularly section 7.4.

CHAPTER 7

Mediation as the work of Christ

7. 1 Introduction

Mediation is a prominent soteriological concept sprouting from the biblical roots and expounded during the subsequent history of the Christian tradition. Jesus Christ is portrayed in the Christian tradition as the Mediator of the broken covenant between God and humanity. As a mediator acceptable to both God and humanity, the work of Christ is altogether human and divine concurrently. The role of Christ as Mediator is mainly perceived through his death, resurrection, ascension, intercession and the parousia.

In this chapter I will focus on the death of Christ as a core Christological motif in order to explore a reinterpretation of Christ's mediatory work between God and humankind within the Akan context. The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part (section 7.2-3) deals with the work of Christ in the Christian tradition. The second part (section 7.4-7) focuses on the notions of mediation within the Akan context. The third, constructive, part attempts to re-appropriate the Christian views of mediation within the Akan context. This will be followed by a brief conclusion in section 7.5.

7.2 The work of Christ as mediator in the Christian tradition

7.2.1 Introduction

The work of Christ is traditionally discussed with reference to the doctrine of atonement. The atonement of Christ, however, has been understood in very different ways throughout the history of Christianity. In Christologies developed duirng the twentieth century, Gustaf Aulén's analysis of three main views (or "types") of atonement has become highly influential, although the details of his argument have also been severely criticised. In reviewing Aulén's analysis, I do not intend to engage in a thorough critique or comparison of the three theories he identified and discussed. Instead, the review is primarily intended as a model to engage with the Akan culture in order to make a constructive proposal with respect to the Christian doctrine of atonement in the Akan context. I will also briefly sketch the history of this Christian doctrine as background to the three main views of atonement that Aulén analysed. My sources for this discussion include the works of Kelly (1977), Lohse (1966), Berkhof

(1937) Mozley (1953) McGrath (1994) and Pelikan & Hotchkiss (2003).

7.2.2 A brief background to the three main views of atonement

This section entails a brief survey of the notions of atonement from the Patristic to the post Reformation period. All that I shall attempt to do is to describe the views of some key theologians on atonement briefly. Individual theologians are chosen for their representative character in connection to one of the three main views of atonement.

a) The Fathers

According to Justin, Christ redeems us by his own blood. Irenaeus (c. 130-200C.E) also postulates that all human beings are enslaved by the powers of darkness and that redemption implies freedom from these powers. Irenaeus moves a step further by introducing the notion of Christ's total identification with humankind through his life, death and resurrection. What we lost in Adam, namely, being in the image and likeness of God, we might regain in Christ (Kelly 1977). The view of Irenaeus anticipates the ransom theory of atonement.

Clement argues that if, indeed, Christ laid down his life for the sake of each of us, a life worth no less than the universe, then Christ demands of us in return that we offer our lives on behalf of each other (Mozley 1953: 95). Clement may be said to pre-empt the later Abelardian theory concerning "moral influence".

For Tertullian, Christ was "sent to die" and only by his death could our death as humans be destroyed. Tertullian is known for his use of the term *satisfaction,* though not with reference to the atonement itself, but to humankind's penitential effort to satisfy God through good works. The term "satisfaction" later on became a key word in Anselm's position on atonement dubbed the satisfaction theory.

On another development, Hilary of Poitiers (315-367 C.E) regards the death of Christ as a classic example of an innocent sufferer, paying the penalty of sins he had not committed. Hilary thereby introduced the thought of penal substitution which was later to occupy the sixteenth and seventeenth century reformers.

Origen (185-254 C.E) is identified in church history as the first Christian theologian to advance explicitly the "ransom theory" of atonement. He views the death of Christ as a ransom paid to the devil in exchange for human souls; forfeited on account of sin. Origen argues that when Christ offered his soul as a ransom for human souls, the devil could not withstand its perfect purity – having found it hazardous to enslave Christ's soul. Origen

asserts that the devil was deceived into believing that he could overcome Christ. However, the devil later realised he could not bear the torment of holding Christ (Kelly 1977). Gregory of Nyasa echoes Origen's view of atonement (Mozley 1953:109). From the Fathers theological discussions, different views of atonement emerged. The dominant one was the ransom view of atonement.

b) Mediaeval period

Anselm of Canterbury articulated the satisfaction view within this period in his *Cur Deus Homo* (Why did God become human?). The then current ransom theory of the atonement held that Jesus died and thereby paid a ransom to Satan allowing God to rescue those under Satan's bondage. For Anselm this solution was inadequate. Instead, Anselm suggested that we owe God a debt of honour. This debt came about as a result of humankind's sin against God. As Anselm sees it, this debt creates an imbalance in the moral universe; it could not be satisfied by God simply ignoring it. For Anselm the only possible way of repaying the debt was if a being of infinite greatness, could act as a human being on behalf of humankind, to repay the debt of honour owed to God. Therefore, when Jesus died he did not pay a debt to Satan but to God, His father.

Anselm did not state specifically whether Jesus' payment of debt was for all of humankind or for individuals, but his language points to the former direction. Thomas Aquinas later on specifically attributes the scope of the atonement to be universal in nature. Aquinas also argues that Christ's death satisfies the penalty owed by sin and that Christ's Passion was specifically needed to pay the debt of human sin.

The work of Faustus Socinus is of classic importance. It attacks every point in the conception of the death of Christ as a satisfaction to God. Socinus' arguments and conclusions are widely adopted; though debatable.

In the line of Socinus, Abelard offers a criticism against the Anselmian view. Abelard rejected both the ransom theory contending that Christ had come to pay a debt to the devil, and Anselm's theory that Christ had come to pay a debt to God. For Abelard, it is rather the plenitude of God's love that Jesus exhibited, and this love was ultimately expressed in Jesus' death. Thus, Jesus sets an example for us through his death. Abelard's position was later labeled as the "moral influence view".

The work of Grotius was largely a response to Abelard's criticisms on Anselmian view. Grotius saw the death of Christ as a substitute for the penalty of sin. Thus, what Christ did

through his death was to demonstrate that God's justice will require from us to suffer should we continue on the path of sin. This view has come to be known as the "governmental theory" of atonement (see Erickson 1985).

c) The Reformation Period

The Reformers, though following the tradition of the Anselmian satisfaction theory, went beyond that. Examples can be seen from the works of Martin Luther and John Calvin. The classical statement of Luther on the atonement is found in his commentary on Galatians 3:13. There he insists that Christ was the most cursed of all sinners, seeing that he assumed in his body the sins we had committed, to render satisfaction for them by his own blood. Such an expression by Luther clearly indicates the idea of penal substitution. However, Luther was not comfortable with the word "satisfaction" pertaining to the death of Christ. Zwingli paid attention to the exemplary side of Christ's work but was nonetheless substantially in agreement with Luther.

Calvin wrote on atonement in two important chapters of the *Institutes*. He begins by addressing himself to the question of the compatibility of God's love for sinful humankind. From this flowed the work of redemption, wherein hatred cannot be denied a place in God's just vengeance upon sinners.

Calvin postulates that Christ through his death on the cross did not pay a general penalty for humanity's sins but suffered a specific penalty for the sins of individuals. One obvious feature of Calvin's atonement theory is that Christ's atonement is limited in its effect only to those whom God has chosen to be saved. The reason is that the debt for sins was paid at a particular point in time (at the crucifixion). Calvin draws on St Augustine's earlier theory of predestination to construct his theory. Calvin shifted from the idea of Aquinas that satisfaction was penance (which focused on satisfaction) to the idea of satisfying God's wrath, which is propitiated through Christ's death.

Calvin understood the atonement and satisfaction in terms of penal substitution, that is, Christ has borne our punishment through his death. For Calvin Christ has satisfied the demands of justice and appeasing God's wrath in order for God to justly show grace. Calvin employs the language of sacrifice to explain the "how" behind the punishment. Calvin's theory of atonement was affirmed at the ecumenical Synod of Dordt.

d) The Post-Reformation period

The debates on atonement in the post Reformation period was mainly in response to the satisfaction (Anselm) and punishment (Calvin) theories which represented the two widely accepted notions in Western Christianity. The advocates of these theories maintained that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. He did it in full payment for sins, which satisfied the righteousness of God so that He could forgive sinners without compromising His own righteousness. Thus the sacrifice of Christ satisfies the divine justice.

The key difference between Anselm and Calvin is that, for Anselm, satisfaction implies an alternative to punishment. The honour that was obviated must be repaid or punishment should follow. Through Christ satisfying our debt of honour to God, we avoid punishment. For Calvin it is the punishment which satisfies the demands of justice; thus he offers a specific explanation for the death of Christ.[1]

While the idea of substitutionary atonement is prevalent in nearly all atonement theories, the specific idea of penal substitution became dominant only within the Latin Church. Nevertheless, the Reformers' view of penal substitution soon gave rise to opposition. They experienced the first but less important opposition in Germany.

The most significant opposition occurred during the Enlightenment period. With the advent of the modernist worldview, critical approaches were adopted towards theories of the atonement which included transcendent elements. Some of these transcendent elements that were rejected include: the idea of a sacrifice that had some impact upon God, Christ dying in order to pay some penalty or of satisfaction required due to sin. The facets of the Enlightenment's notion of atonement can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, the cross has no transcendent reference or value; its value relates directly to its impact upon humanity. Thus the cross represents a "sacrifice" only in as far as that it represents Christ offering his life. Secondly, the person who died on the cross was a human being, and the impact of that death is exerted upon other human beings alone. That impact takes on the form of inspiration and encouragement to model ourselves upon the moral example Jesus Christ set for us. Thirdly, the most important aspect of the cross is that it demonstrates the love of God towards us. Such views follow a consistent pattern that can be seen from the

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[1] Nearly all of the Church fathers, including Justin Martyr, Athanasius and St Augustine taught substitutionary atonement. However their specific interpretations of the meaning of the death of Christ differ. Athanasius and St Augustine taught that through Christ's suffering in humanity's place, he overcame and liberated us from death and the devil.

eighteenth century writings of G.S. Steinbart, I.G. Tollner, G.F.Seiler, and K. G. Bretschneider (see McGrath 1994:409).

This approach became enormously influential in rationalist circles throughout nineteenth century Europe. The model of a martyr, rather than a saviour, describes the attitude increasingly adopted towards Jesus within such circles.

The most significant challenge to this rationalist approach to the crucifixion was expressed by F.D.E. Schleiermacher. He insisted upon a religious as opposed to a purely moral approach to Christ's death. For Schleiermacher, Christ did not die to create or endorse a moral system; he came in order that the supremacy of the consciousness of God could be established in humanity. However, Schleiermacher's distinctive ideas ultimately proved to be capable of being assimilated within a purely exemplarist understanding rather than posing a coherent challenge to that reductionist moralistic notion. In England, the most significant contribution to the exemplarist approach came from Hastings Rashdall in his 1915 Bampton Lectures (McGrath 1994:409). Stevens, Clarke, and Tymms are also exponents of the exemplarist view of atonement.

From the above discussions it is clear that there are several views on the doctrine of atonement. However, I will discuss only the three main views as identified by Aulén in his 1931 monograph *Christus Victor*. [2]

7.2.3 The three main views of atonement: A brief review of Gustaf Aulén's work

In this section, I will review the three main views on the work of Christ as analysed by Aulén. The discussion will follow the structure of Aulén's analysis.

a) Background

Gustaf Emmanuel Hildebrand Aulén was born in May 15, 1879. He died on December 16, 1977 at the age of 98. Aulén served as the Bishop of Strängnäs in the Church of Sweden since 1933. He studied Philosophy and Theology at Uppsala University from 1889 to 1915 and received the degree of Doctor of Theology in 1915. He became a lecturer of Dogmatics at Uppsala University in 1910 and a professor of Systematic Theology at Lund University in 1913. Aulén was an avid music composer contributing profusely to the Swedish hymnbook. He was the president of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music 1944-1950. Aulén was the

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[2]   Unlike the person of Christ in terms of which the ecumenical councils formally stated their position, the questions on the work of Christ do not have any ecumenical reference point. This somehow makes it difficult to single out one of these theories as the traditional (Nicene) Orthodox reference point.

author of several books and articles including the acclaimed *Christus Victor: A Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* in 1931.

In this book, Aulén distinguishes between three main types of atonement. He identifies the "classic" type (drawing especially on Irenaeus) in which Christ's victory over the powers of evil is emphasised, the "Latin" or Anselmian type in which Christ's satisfaction for guilt incurred by humanity is the focal point, and the "modern" type which draws on Abelard and bases its design on the subjective appropriation of Christ's atonement. Aulén compares and contrasts the three main atonement theories around four key areas namely sin, salvation God and reconciliation.

b) *Christus Victor* (the ransom theory)

The central theme of the *Christus Victor* type is the notion of divine conflict and victory; Christ the Victor fights against and triumphs over the powers of the world, the "tyrants" under which humankind is in bondage and suffering. These hostile powers that hold humanity in bondage (and which Christ conquers) serve as the executants of God's will. The redeeming work of Christ for humankind is, however, not found in any sort of rational settlement, but in a drama in which a decisive event occurs to change the relations between God and humankind.

Aulén contends that according to the classic approach, sin is depicted as an objective power lurking behind humankind. He argues that the atonement of Christ entails God's triumph over sin, death, and the devil.

For Aulén salvation is a comprehensive term which describes humanity's new relation to God. The classic idea of salvation entails that Christ gained victory once for all, yet this victory is continuing in the work of the Holy Spirit. The victory of Christ is therefore present as well as past. Aulén contends that justification and atonement then became one. God's love prevails over the curse of sin and death. Justification is simply the atonement brought into the present, thus there is a close and inseparable connection between the incarnation and the atonement. He argues that because salvation is understood in terms of a divine victory, the incarnation is the necessary presupposition of the atonement, and the atonement completes the incarnation.

Aulén notes that Patristic theology is dualistic, but he also argues that such dualism is not absolute. In the classic approach, God is depicted as intervening in conflict with evil on the stage of history. Yet, at the same time, God is also the all-ruler, the Sovereign.

The hostile powers which hold humanity in bondage also serve as the executants of God's will; thus within divine control. The deliverance of humankind from the power of death and evil does at the same time imply humankind's deliverance from God's judgment. Through the incarnation and death of Christ, God has taken away the evil forces' powers to harm humankind. Thus God through Christ has overcome sin, evil and death and has reconciled humankind to himself (Aulén 1931:145-158).

c) Latin theory (Anselmian and penal substitutionary theories)

Secondly, Aulén analyses critically what he terms the Latin view of atonement. He notes that Anselm's work of *Cur Deus homo?* is the first systematic exposition of this view of atonement. As Aulén sees it, Anselm intended to replace what appeared to him to be the old mythological account of Christ's work as victory over the devil.

For Aulén, the major limitation of the Latin view is that images and analogies are taken largely from the law-courts. Legal order dominates the reconciliation between God and humankind. He conceded that such analogies can also be seen in the classic approach. However he insists that, in the Latin type, legal order dominates the whole conception, and any violation of justice becomes unthinkable. It entails the payment of the required satisfaction. For Aulén, the continuity of divine operation is therefore forfeited. The satisfaction is offered by Christ as human, the sinless human on behalf of the sinners.

Comparing the classic and the Latin types on their conceptions of sin, Aulén contends that the classic type has a wider scope while the Latin type concentrates only on sin and its accompanying guilt. In the classic type, sin entails a whole series of evil powers – death, the devil, law and curse; most constant is the grouping together of sin and death.

As Aulén sees it, sin according to the Latin type has been degraded into a merely moralistic idea. Salvation becomes a mere remission of punishment. However, for Aulén, salvation should instead entail deliverance from both sin and death, as well as an entrance into life; such an understanding portrays salvation as positive rather than negative.

Aulén notes that the Latin type appears to suggest a direct and personal relationship between God and humankind, and at the same time a deeper sense of guilt. Yet he insists that this does not extend beyond theoretical discourse since the threatened penalty is in the same breath borne by a substitute. Obviously, this makes one wonder if the guilt that the Latin view intends to deal with is indeed pressing enough. Moreover, some if not many, can scarcely stand to see an innocent person being punished instead of the real offender.

Another point that Aulén raised against the Latin type, relates to its materialised view of sin. The merits of the satisfaction delivered by Christ for humankind, are treated by default as transferred or imputed onto humankind. Aulén argues that such a view obscures the direct personal relationship between God and the sinner. Then, too, the very idea of a satisfaction shows that the justice of God on humankind has not been fully met. So, in the payment of a compensation for sin, or the endurance of punishment for sin, God's personal demand on humankind is not adequately expressed, nor is the idea of sin itself seen in its full personal significance.

Aulén argues that sin is always positive, wherever the classic idea is dominant, whether the actual terms used be the forgiveness of sins, union with God, the deifying of human nature, or some other. Thus, when Christ overcomes the tyrants which hold humankind in bondage, Christ's victory is accompanied by the divine blessing, justification, grace and salvation. In respect to the Latin doctrine, the natural tendency is for forgiveness to be regarded negatively; for it is the fruit of the satisfaction made by Christ that remits the punishment humankind has fully deserved.

To Aulén, the fundamental mistake that Anselm made with regard to forgiveness is that he expounded a negative conception of forgiveness. Aulén claims that Luther is always vigorously positive when it comes to sin. Luther largely describes salvation in terms which are more or less synonyms, even to the old patristic language of the "deification" of human nature. While one may follow Aulén in this respect, one may equally doubt whether Luther is not picked selectively to back only the classic view.

An important point that Aulén rightly notes is that the penitential system on which the Latin doctrine has its basis, is essentially moralistic: How a perfect God should deal with individual sinners. Such an approach removes the atoning death of Christ from its primary context. Christ's atoning work basically meant to restore the broken relationship between God and humankind. The individual human being has sinned against God, against one another and against nature as a whole. However, to dwell on this as point of departure for the interpretation of the atoning work of Christ, distorts the whole picture.

On salvation, Aulén contends that the Latin doctrine provides a series of acts which are relatively loosely interrelated. The actual atonement consists of Christ's offering of satisfaction and God's acceptance of it. With this act humanity has no input, except in so far as Christ stands as their substitute or representative. Justification is a second act, in which

208

God transfers or imputes to humanity the merits of Christ. Here again, Aulén argues, no direct relation seems to exists between Christ and humanity. Next, we have sanctification, a third act, as he sees it, with no organic connection with the preceding two acts.

Aulén accused the Latin type that it fails to explain the relation between the incarnation and the atonement adequately. For God is no longer viewed as the direct agent in the atoning work. Christ, as a human being, delivers atonement on behalf of human beings. Aulén notes that, "the classic idea of the atonement, as it is set forth in the writings of the Fathers, is both clear and monumental. It sets forth God's coming to human, to accomplish His redemptive work". He contends that incarnation and redemption belong indissolubly together; God in Christ overcomes the hostile powers which hold humanity in bondage. Incarnation is defined by Aulén as "the manifestation of God's goodness and the fulfillment of His saving work in flesh, under the conditions of human nature."

Aulén contends that the Latin approach to the atonement always regards the sacrifice as offered by a human being to God, and expands this into a logical theory. But the classic idea of the atonement, whether from East or West, is always marked by a double-side-ness. For Aulén the sacrifice of Christ is the means whereby the tyrants are overcome; yet there is a close connection between the tyrants and God's own judgment against sin.

Aulén argues that the idea of God receiving a sacrifice, based on a theoretical calculation of what God must demand from the human side for the satisfaction of His justice before atonement can be effected, is odd. He contends that sacrifice stands in the divine economy as a means whereby the divine will to reconciliation realises itself. It also shows how much it costs God to effect the atonement.

Aulén contends that the incarnation is no longer a vibrant doctrine in the Western theological discourses as it had been in the days of Athanasius. As he sees it, it has become a venerable inheritance from the past, which must be guarded carefully, but which is not altogether easy to comprehend fully. Surprisingly, Aulén accuses Anselm of not taking the incarnation seriously. However, Anselm's atonement theory pivots around the question of incarnation.

On the concept of God, Aulén notes that the Latin type depicts God as more remote. The idea of some opposition to God as portrayed in the classic approach, is less evident in the Latin type. He attributes this to what he terms "abstract retributive justice" that substitutes the personal wrath of God. The solution of the antinomy, as Aulén argues, can fairly be termed a rational compromise. The justice of God receives a compensation for human's default, so that

God's mercy may now be set free to act (Aulén 1931:81-98).

d) Subjective type (Moral influence view)

Thirdly, Aulén analyses the subjective type of atonement. This approach is generally known as the "moral influence"-theory and is associated especially with Peter Abelard. According to Abelard, Christ is set forth as the perfect example, the Ideal Man, and the realisation of human perfection.

Aulén notes that the consequence of such a view is that God's share in the process of salvation becomes secondary. He contends that the "subjective" type must be seen against the background of the Latin doctrine, as a reaction against it. According to Aulén, the moral influence theory does not regard the atonement as in any true sense carried out by God. Rather, reconciliation is the result of a process that takes place in human beings, such as conversion and amendment. Aulén points out that, if mention of Christ is made in the connection of atonement, Christ's efforts are not thought of as God's work for humankind's salvation. He is rather the perfect Example, the Ideal Man, and the Head of the race. Aulén, further notes that, in so far as Christ's work can affect the relation between God and humankind, it is a matter of "from below upwards", and not of God's approach to humans.

Aulén further argues that the idea of sin has become altogether weakened in the subjective approach. He discerns this weakness in the larger context of the enlightenment theology which regarded sin as little more than infirmity. He also notes that liberal Protestantism, which, he contends serves as the context for this type, generally has a truncated sense of sin. Aulén contends that this humanistic interpretation of atonement fails to maintain the radical hostility of God to evil, and His judgment on sin.

On salvation, Aulén notes that Abelard stressed the accomplishment of the atoning work through the human nature of Christ. The emphasis on the human nature becomes exclusive, and Christ is treated eventually simply as an ideal Man.

For Aulén, the Christ presented in the subjective approach, was a peculiarly abstract and unreal Christ. He is portrayed as an ideal human being, and actually became in effect a sort of "intermediary being" between God and humankind. On a very important note, Aulén also pointed out that the incarnation ceases to take a primary place in terms of the moral influence theory.

Aulén further observes that the English theologians who subscribe to the moral influence

theory, interpret incarnation in a semi-Arian rather than a Nicene sense. He notes that amongst continental liberal theologians, God is at most regarded as the ultimate cause of Christ's atoning acts. Through Christ God sees humankind in a new light. In either case the atonement is not in any true sense to be assumed the work of God.

On the concept of God as relating to sin, Aulén notes that the moral influence type does not view any opposition against God. Aulén attributes this to the intention to set forth a "purified" and "simple" conception of God, whose character is that of unchanging Love. However, Aulén surmises that this simplicity is won at the cost of obscuring the hostility of the divine love to evil. Thus, for the advocates of the moral influence, atonement is no longer regarded as in any true sense carried out by God. Rather, the reconciliation is the result of some process that takes place in humans, such as conversion and amendment.

Aulén points out that, although Abelard did not pay attention to the seriousness of sin which occasioned the atonement, one would still appreciate his renewed emphasis on love as the underlying motive of the atonement. He contends that it may be fallacious to argue that Abelard was a lone voice on this subjective view. In fact, this approach had been anticipated by Gregory the Great and Anselm himself (Aulén 1931:133-142).

e) Conclusion

To sum-up, Aulén contends that the classic view poses atonement as a movement of God towards humankind. God is closely and personally engaged in the work of humankind's deliverance. With the Latin view, God seems to be more distant, for the satisfaction is paid by a human, in the person of Christ, to God. In the moral influence theory God acts even more distant. As far as God is concerned, no atonement is needed, and all the emphasis is on human's movement to God, and this is accomplished in the human world. That is to say, the essential Christian idea of God reaching out to humans, which dominates the classic type, is weakened in the Latin type, and lost in the subjective type of atonement envisaged.

7.2.5 Colin Gunton's analysis of the three main atonement theories

Colin E. Gunton was Professor of Christian Doctrine at Kings College, London, and associate minister of the United Reformed Church in Brentwood. Gunton was also the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*. He is the author of many influential publications and articles including: *The Actuality of Atonement: A study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*. This book was published in 1988. Gunton's

immediate focus was Aulén's analysis of the three main views of atonement, particularly the *Christus Victor* view, which he sought to respond to. In this section, I will review *The Actuality of Atonement* as a response to Aulén's book *Christus Victor*. In what follows, I will review the three main views which Gunton analyses. He tags these theories as: *Christus Victor*, the forensic or Anselmian and the Exemplarist (Moral influence) theory.

a) Gunton's response to Aulén on the *Christus Victor* view of atonement

In its earliest forms, the ransom theory was embedded with freighted accounts of devils and demons which were vanquished by various divine stratagems. Aulén recaptured the old theory in a new mode by employing the phrase *Christus Victor* to draw together interpretations of the cross as God's triumph over evil.

Of course, from the biblical perspective, one may justifiably speak of the victory of Christ over evil spirits. However, it appears that Aulén largely and almost exclusively based his analysis on Colossians 2:15. This is where Gunton particularly disagrees with Aulén.

For Gunton, the language of victory should rather come from a broader New Testament passage and also an Old Testament background to make it more convincing. From the New Testament, particularly Gospels and Revelation, Gunton cites several passages of Christ's victory over evil spirits to buttress his point.

He also contends that the demons vanquished by Christ are not mythological creatures to be set aside but apt metaphors for both personal and extra-personal aspects of sin. He argues that, from both the Old Testament and the New Testament the texts about demons "present us not with superhuman hypostases trotting about the world, but with the metaphorical characterisation of moral and cosmic realities which would otherwise defy expression".

Gunton moreover argues that a recent study has cast doubt upon Colossians 2:15 as it is been interpreted that Christ met and defeated a host of cosmic enemies. Gunton (1988:55) cited Carr (1981:188-71, 178) to stress his point that such an interpretation does not come from the New Testament, but rather from Origen, a major advocate of the ransom theory. Nonetheless, Dunn (1996:166-170) has reviewed the recent literature on various interpretations of Colossians 2:15 and has taken a position similar to Aulén's view. One may thus question Gunton's argument of the recent study that has cast doubt on Aulén's position.

He further contends that Aulén emphasises the divine initiative. But this emphasis on the divine victory only, entails a one sided truth. He argues that the victory charted in the New

Testament is as much human as divine. From some selected biblical passages such as Luke 4; Luke 22:40-46 and 23:7 and also Romans 1:25, 18, 28- 41, Gunton argues that, the victory over evil forces was won by Christ acting as truly God and truly human.

Furthermore, Gunton contends that the victory of Christ is rather a passive and not a positive action. He explains that the authors of the synoptic Gospels do not describe explicitly the ministry of Jesus as a victory as such. They rather clearly depict it as in part, a conflict between the authority of God represented by Jesus, and those that deny it. He further explains that Jesus' victory over temptation was passive, and its outcome was in both the "spiritual" and "physical" worlds. Furthermore, in the New Testament no absolute distinction is drawn between what can be termed the cosmic and moral dimensions of the world.

b) Gunton's analysis of Anselmian theory

Gunton labeled Anselmian theory as forensic because it explains the substitutionary sacrifice of the God-man as satisfying the requirements of justice. For the advocates of this theory, on the one hand, only a divine being could pay the enormous debt of human sin. On the other hand, only a human being should do so.

The trouble with Anselm's theory, according to Gunton, is that it is dipolar rather than trinitarian. It presents the atonement as a transaction between God, the Father and the Son, whose humanity must suffer the penalty of sin on behalf of humankind. Thus Anselm's approach, as Aulén also points out, overlooks the suffering of trinitarian God and views atonement as merely a removal of guilt rather than a renewal of life.

Gunton argues that a trinitarian interpretation of atonement will not depict sacrifice as something that befalls the creature in the name of a vengeful, angry, or demanding deity. It will also not portray it as action of Christ on the cross exerted once for all. To Gunton, too much weight is thrown on the action of Jesus Christ towards the Father, whilst too little is afforded the notion of salvation being realised through the involvement of the triune God in history.

Gunton contends that atoning sacrifice entails an eternal activity within the divine life in which the Father and the Son reciprocally offer themselves to each other and to the world. Here, Gunton employs the thoughts of P.T. Forsyth and Edward Irving for his discussions.

For Gunton, "substitutionary atonement" means far more than Christ's taking our punishment upon himself. He argues that humankind, in a sense, is substitute for Christ – in that the true

humanity that belongs properly to Christ (according to the doctrine of enhypostasis) now applied to us[3] (see Forsyth 1938).

Gunton also notes that advocates of the doctrine of penal substitution, often elide the juridical with the sacrificial. For Gunton it is a mistake. It is court of law, not the temple that provides the metaphorical setting for the substitutional model. He argues that sacrifice in the Bible is never punitive; rather, it is a divine gift which, as human offering, becomes an expression of praise and gratitude. It is also a demonstration that reconciliation is a costly matter.

On the ongoing debates on whether Jesus died as our representative or substitute, Gunton contends that the debate is barren, in that both cases are true. He contends that these terms in the context of Jesus' atoning work are correlative, not opposing concepts. Because Jesus is our substitute, it is also right to call him our representative. However, Gunton notes that it is rather in the cult, not the court, that substitution receives its metaphorical purchase.

Moreover, Gunton contends, justice too, in the Bible, is not essentially punitive or retributive; it entails restoration. He suggests that if one continues to conceive of the atonement in forensic terms, it is essential to view it not always as a legal transaction but as the transformation of a relationship. He however notes that this is a connection not always convincingly made by advocates of the doctrine of penal substitution.

Gunton contends that in the Western theological discourse, sin is often conceived as transgression of the law of God. Therefore, correlatively, salvation is understood as freedom from the consequences of penalties of that transgression. To Gunton, this is not exactly the case in the context of atonement. There are a number of complicating factors – biblical, historical and systematic. He argues that both Old and New Testament writers show no interest in law abstractly as such.

Gunton explains that in the law books of the Old Testament, there is a certain degree of variety in the way the law is conceived to function in Israel's life. However, the law largely belongs in the context of God's covenant with Israel. The laws and instructions are a gift of God, the framework of the communal life of those whom God set free from Egypt.

Gunton also points out that Anselm believes that unless there is some objective balance, there can be no restoration of human life, even to the state it enjoyed before sin interposed. There is

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[3] In this way Gunton moves from Anselm's theory to that of Barth, from substitutionary punishment to substitutionary grace (see Runia 1982).

to be sure, a quantitative, almost transactional component to the gift: something that the incarnate Son offered to the father to compensate for what human creation has itself failed to offer. However, this is too speculative on Anselm's part.

Furthermore, Anselm is faulted for making the whole affair of atonement appear to be an exercise of power rather than love: the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, had determined to show the loftiness of his omnipotence by no other means than death. Added to this, is the fact that God appears to be not as much concerned to achieve a correct balance of numbers in heaven as to realise his love towards the creation.

For Gunton Anselm also seems to equate salvation with the remission of penalty. A relatively little emphasis is given to the atonement as the sphere where reconciliation in the sense of a renewed personal walk with God is realised. Gunton further expresses his concern on how far the theology of satisfaction is viable in a world which has so different a conception of human freedom.

Gunton notes that the problem with the imagery of the forensic notion of justification is that God is portrayed as a stern judge who demands punishment for human sin, and not so much as a loving father. Nevertheless, the penal substitution position would in fact be a travesty of justice. Penal Substitution theory is based on the concept of a criminal justice system which demands punishment for transgression. But no criminal justice in the world (except possibly tyrannical states) would ever claim that it is just to punish the innocent in place of the guilty.[4]

c) Gunton's critique of the exemplarist theory of atonement

Gunton notes that the exemplarist view of atonement is theologically associated with Abelard, and philosophically with Kant. He contends that this view characterises the attempts of rationalism to reduce Jesus to a perfect role model. It also depicts redemption as an achievement that human beings can reach themselves.

For Gunton the doctrine of atonement receives little attention these days because of its

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[4] It has been noted that penal substitutional theory is based on vengeance and violence. The concern here is that a strategy which depends on violence and on vengeance, cannot be termed reconciliation. Girard has raised a concern that penal substitution entails an inherently violent model of atonement; moreover, this underwrites a culture of brutality and vengeance, ethically, socially and politically. Radical feminist theologians Joan Carson Brown and Rebecca Parker have gone so far as to speak of "divine child abuse" and to argue that the image of Jesus as voluntarily submitting to brutality contributes to the victimisation of women. Black liberation theologian James Cone links the model to the defense of slavery and colonialism. Michael Northcott suggests that it is no coincidence that leaders of the Religious right, for whom the model stands so central, are such staunch advocates of *lex talionis,* capital punishment and the war of terror.

controlling concepts such as substitutionary suffering, the blood sacrifice, and the victory over Satan. It appears to the modern and post-modern mind as both immoral and fantastical. Gunton, however, contends that the language of atonement is metaphoric. It is, nevertheless, useful in demonstrating the real evil of the real world which was faced and healed ontologically in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gunton 1988:27-52).

7.2.6 Conclusion

To sum up, all three theories of atonement carry strengths and weaknesses. As I have already noted, it is neither my intention to critique nor to offer my evaluation of these theories. My aim is to give a brief overview of the analysis of these three main atonement theories as Aulén and Gunton understand them. The overview of this analysis will serve as a guide for the construction of my atonement hypothesis in section 7.4. Before that, in the next section, I will describe the basis of my hypothesis, which entails the Akan understanding of reconciliation.

7.3 Means of mediation in the traditional Akan context

7.3.1 Introduction

Amongst the Akan an intermediary and *mpatadeɛ s*acrifice are the two key elements to effect reconciliation. When a broken relationship appears between human beings or between humans and lesser divinities or the ancestors, an intermediary and compensation or sacrifices are not optional but crucial elements. On the one hand, *mpatadeɛ* are means to affect reconciliation between human beings. On the other hand, *afoddeɛ* are means to affect reconciliation between humans and spirit beings. It is expected of the offender to search for someone to mediate between him/her and the offended party. However, if the wrongdoing at stake affects the whole family or community, it then becomes the responsibility of the community elders to initiate the mediation. This is usually officiated by the family head who acts as the *okyeame* (linguist) when the problem lies between human beings. But if the problem lies between human and spirit beings, usually, the officiating agent is the *osofo* (priest).

7.3.2 Akan terms for mediation

The Akan have at least seven terms for mediation. Terms such as *nntemgyinafo, opatafo* and *dwantoafo,* are abstract intermediary terms. Terms such as *okyeame* and *osofo* serve as agents of the intermediary. *Mpatadeɛ* and *afodeɛ* are also terms which serve as means of mediation.

In this section, I will explain briefly the first five terms and leave the means of mediation for a more detailed analysis.

a) *Ntemgyinafo*

The term *ntemgyinafo* was coined by the Akan Twi Bible translators from two Akan words; *ntem* (between), *gyina* (stand) and *fo* (suffix: one). *Ntemgyinafo* literally means (one who stands in between). In English language, it implies a mediator. The coinage of *ntemgyinafo* became necessary as there is no original Akan term to capture the biblical term mediator. The original Akan terms for mediation, as we will see below, only approximate the biblical meaning of a mediator.

b) *Dwantoafo*

The Akan term *dwantoafo* in a broader sense of the word means intermediary or mediator. Precisely, *dwantoafo* denotes a person who pleads on another's behalf. The break down of the term is as follows: *dwan* (flee); *toa-* (unto) and *fo* (one). *Dwantoafo* means "a person that one can flee unto" to plead one's case with him or her. This presupposes that *dwantoafo* unlike *ntemgyinafo* is only called to a scene in case of a problem. Whereas *ntemgyinafo* functions as a "standing-order", the nature of the work of *dwantoafo* is more that of a task-force. The task of *dwantoafo* is primarily to plead for a forgiveness of sin or for a favour. Of course *dwantoafo* may also have to deal with the root cause of that particular sin to avoid its recurrence. But this is more embedded in the personality of *dwantoafo,* as a recurrence of the problem entails disrespect to the *dwantoafo.* Thus not just anybody can function as *dwantoafo.* The nature of the task of a *dwantoafo* demands a person whom both parties accord respect. The bottom line of the work of *dwantoafo* is that, it is limited to a situation whereby one pleads on behalf of an offender for forgiveness or favour.

It lies outside the task description of a *dwantoafo* to plead on one's behalf by his or her own accord. Technically, it is offensive for a *dwantoafo* to do that. The reason is that, to "plead" for forgiveness on behalf of someone when that one is not present to admit his/her wrongdoing, logically entails judgment. That is to say, the person one is pleading for is the offender. Indeed, it is a declaration that the person in question is guilty and the assumed guilty party is expected to repent and mend his/her ways. Thus the *dwantoafo* only has a task to fulfill when he/she is called to act.

Nonetheless, in some cases, *dwantoafo* may take it upon him/herself to plead for forgiveness

without the person's accused consent – provided that the one involved is a minor or there is a sense of corporate responsibility. Primarily, *dwantoafo* has a task only when sin is admitted, and such an admission therefore may serve as a precursor to reconciliation.

7.3.3 The means of reconciliation in the Akan context

In what follows, I will discuss two Akan mediatory terms namely, *mpatadeɛ* (compensation) and *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice).

a) *Mpatadeɛ* as a means of reconciliation between human beings

Amongst the Akan, it is the responsibility of an intermediary to render an apology on behalf of the offender (in a case where that person has already acceded to his/her fault). In many cases, a mere verbal apology is not regarded as adequate to bring out the desired reconciliation. Thus, for the sake of reconciliation, and also in some cases to avoid a possible retaliation, the Akan elders deem it appropriate that, in addition to the verbal apology, *mpatadeɛ* should almost always be given to the offended party as a precursor to reconciliation. This is the case even between extended family members or husband and wife. One can choose anybody that one deems respectable enough to render the apology and also to present the *mpatadeɛ.*

Mpatadeɛ may be akin to the English term compensation/reparation but there are some subtle differences. Amongst the traditional Akan, *mpatadeɛ* as a means of mediation in a conflict situation serves at least six purposes:

Firstly, for the offender to give *mpatadeɛ* willingly, indicates that the person has accepted his/her wrong or evil doing and thereby renders an appropriate apology to the victim. Amongst the Akan, in most cases, a verbal apology, "I am sorry", is deemed not enough. The formal way of accepting oneself as the guilty party in a case is to present a token – *mpatadeɛ* – as a concrete expression of the outcome of the arbitration of the case.

Secondly, *mpatadeɛ* serves as the historical record of an outcome of arbitration. One important focus of *mpatadeɛ* is to compensate the victim. However, since in former days arbitration of cases was not recorded, *mpatadeɛ* was used as the concrete affirmation of the outcome of arbitration.

Thirdly, *mpatadeɛ* is a key reference point in the recollection of a case. It is typical of an Akan, who is making a reference to an old case to say: "At such and such a time, I had a case with so and so, and he/she was at fault, but he/she acceded to that wrongdoing and gave me an

mpatadeɛ of so much. Here the referent is resting his or her case on the *mpatadeɛ* as the concrete evidence of the outcome of an arbitrated case between the parties.

Fourthly, *mpatadeɛ* also assures the victim that the offender has admitted that he /she has wronged the victim – with the logical implication that the offender will ensure that a similar case will not occur in future.

The traditional Akan concept of *mpatadeɛ,* unlike the Western notion of compensation or reparation, only follows one's own admittance of evil or wrong doing. Amongst the traditional Akan, if one offers *mpatadeɛ* to a victim without any sense of acceptance of one's sins, in most cases the victim will refuse the *mpatadeɛ*. A well noted case will throw more light on this notion.

In the midst of misunderstanding between family members, a nephew slaps his uncle. The family elders call the case for arbitration and reach a decision that the nephew should apologise and offer a sheep to the uncle as *mpatadeɛ*. No sooner than the spokesperson for the elders has finished speaking, the nephew in his usual arrogant mood immediately accepts the verdict of the elders to offer the sheep.

The uncle observes the nephew's crass attitude in his acceptance to give him the sheep. It is therefore clear to the uncle and those standing around that, to the nephew, the whole arbitration entailed a business deal of paying for the slapping. And to the nephew, the cost of a sheep was but a small amount.

Interestingly, before the nephew gets ready to go fetch the sheep, the uncle retorts: "Kofi" – calling the nephew by his name, "even though I have not eaten your sheep, you have given me such a dirty slap. How many more dirty slaps will you give me when I enjoy your sheep?" With such remarks, the uncle thanks the elders and refuses the sheep.

Had the uncle received the sheep and continued to bear ill-feelings against the nephew, the uncle would have been regarded as a bad person. For the Akan, if one does that, it would be said that one has put water in his/her mouth to speak to the elders – meaning that she/he has deceived the elders.

Amongst the Akan, there is no compensation or reparation without reconciliation. If the victim has any cause to believe that the offender has no sense of guilt for her/his evil acts, there is no point for the victim to accept the *mpatadeɛ* – for its essence is to demonstrate that the offender has acknowledged his or her wrongdoing. On the other hand, if the offended one called for compensation instead and the offender unwillingly or willingly pays the

compensation demanded, it may still be regarded as *mpatadeɛ* but will be devoid of its essence as a means of reconciliation.

Fifthly, *mpatadeɛ* functions as a way of removing the ill-feelings that the victim had against the offender. After the acceptance of *mpatadeɛ*, the victim is expected to amend all his/her ill-feelings towards the offender. An Akan maxim illustrates this view: *Efie akyi ne abofono* (literally: if one vomits fully one will not vomit again). *Mpatadeɛ* therefore assures the offender that his/her fault or evil acts have actually been forgiven by the victim.

Sixth, amongst the Akan, it is not the victim who fixes what he/she will accept as the *mpatadeɛ*. Rather, the offer on what will constitute the *mpatadeɛ,* has to come from the offender, guided by the arbitrators of the case. Interestingly this rule helps to maintain the appropriate balance, seeing that any demand from the offended person will endanger the intended reconciliation.

Seventh, *mpatadeɛ* functions as a means of reconciliation. The modern legal compensation in the court of law setting, which has the aim of merely "replacement", is quite different from the traditional Akan concept of *mpatadeɛ*. Whereas the legal compensation has the primary aim of a possible adequate replacement, the traditional Akan *mpatadeɛ* has true reconciliation as its primary aim.

Amongst the Akan someone cannot carry *mpatadeɛ* by him-/herself to the offended party. It is deemed an insult for one to do even that. *Mpatadeɛ* should be given through a respected person whom the victim recognises as such. In matters of human relations, the *okyeame* (linguist) of the case usually takes care of the *mpatadeɛ* (compensation). *Okyeame* may act as *ntemgyinafo* or *dwantoafo*. *Ntemgyinafo* and *dwantoafo* are terms for reconciliation. The *mpatadeɛ* (compensation) is linked to the role of intermediaries. It is not the case that if *mpatadeɛ* or *afodeɛ* does not work, then you need an intermediary. Rather, the intermediary is required to demand *mpatadeɛ* on behalf of the offending party. *Mpatadeɛ* functions as a means of reconciliation; a way of shaping the behaviour of a citizen, a device to avoid retaliation and family feud, a method of keeping historical records and a strategy to deal with conflicts.

b) *Afodeɛ* as a means of reconciliation between human and spirit beings
The Akan term *afodeɛ* in the English language denotes guilt or sin sacrifice. Such sacrifices will require an intermediary, who is a specialist in such matters acting as the officiating person. In the case of a lesser divinity, it is usually the priest of the lesser divinity who then

becomes the intermediary. In the case of one's ancestors, it is usually the family elder (*abusua panin*) or the traditional priest who mediates.

However, for reasons unknown, the Akan do not offer *afodeɛ* sacrifices to *Onyame* (the Supreme Being). Probably, this may have to with the fact that the Akan do not have priests for *Onyame* who are duly qualified to officiate such sacrifices.

(i) *Afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice) as an admission of sin and evil

Offences against the ancestors and the lesser divinities are not taken lightly. It is believed amongst the Akan that offences and curses run concurrently within the system of the spirit beings. Thus, when someone offends a spirit being, that person is automatically cursed.[5]

In this regard, the first reaction of an Akan when he or she offends a spirit being is to accept his/her sins. This admission is expressed concretely in the form of *afodeɛ* (literally sin/guilt something).

The purpose of the presentation of an animal as *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice), is to accept publicly that the offender has acknowledged his/her sin and has therefore surrendered him-/herself to the offended spirit being. Such a sacrifice is offered to establish the fact that one has personally and publicly accepted his/her guilt before a spirit being, i.e. a lesser divinity or an ancestor. Such a sacrifice also serves to enforce the notion that the society does not take sin lightly at, least before God, the ancestors and the lesser divinities who are regarded as the custodians of public morality.

The basic rationale behind the sin offering within the Akan context, is the public acknowledgement of guilt and acceptance of it. The admission of one's sin before the spirit beings serves as a basis to plead for forgiveness of sin and the removal of the curse. In this respect, the death of the animal represents a concrete form of acceptance of guilt and its consequences, namely death. At the same time, it is a means of asking for unmerited forgiveness. Nonetheless, the animal is never meant to be the bearer of the offender's penalty.

Indeed it would be odd, particularly in the context of African traditional sacrifices, to view the presented animal as a substitute to bear the punishment in stead of the offender so that the offender may go free. It would also be odd to view such an animal as a bribe to the lesser divinities or the ancestors – the custodians of public morality.

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[5] Usually one gets cognisance of this either through sickness and calamities or this is revealed to him or her by a diviner.

(ii) *Afodeɛ* **as cleansing of sin**

In Akan traditional religion, sin is believed to lead to the severing of relationships between human beings and the lesser divinities and it may result in a crisis such as an epidemic, famine, drought or serious illness. Thus, when someone commits what amounts to a sin against the ancestors and the lesser divinities, a number of measures are taken by the community. Usually, "cleansing" ceremonies or rituals are performed by elders, medicine men/women, priests, or diviners.

In the event of asking for forgiveness from a spirit being, one does not approach a lesser divinity, ancestor and even a living chief, empty handed. If one recognises that he/she has offended a spirit being, the procedure is to approach the shrine of the offended spirit being with an offering, in most cases a live animal. In the context of the Akan sacrificial system, *afodeɛ* (guilt/sin sacrifice) is the offering presented when a human being offends a spirit being. These usually involve the slaughtering of animals (like sheep, goats or chickens,) and the use of blood. Thereby, the offender is reconciled to the other party and to the wider community and re-accepted within the society.

Interestingly, there may be a possibility whereby a priest may become a victim of sacrifice. This is the case whereby the priest has recommended an item for sacrifice which becomes almost impossible to obtain. Yet, it is necessary that the sacrifice should be offered for the benefit of the whole community. In such cases, the elders of the community may confer to offer the priest himself as the necessary sacrifice. Thus, the Akan saying*: Se okomfo kyere musuyi na nakadeɛ ni ho yede no na eyi* (if priest recommended that something should be used as sacrifice and it is almost impossible to get, the priest himself must be killed as sacrifice).

Such an animal or victim would be slaughtered, and the blood would be sprinkled on the shrine of the offended lesser divinity or on the black stool of the ancestors. This is regarded as a means of cleansing the spirit beings from desecration. Perhaps the primary reason for slaughtering an animal for a sin sacrifice, is to use the blood of the animal to disinfect the uncleanness that has resulted because of the offender's wrongdoing. The need for a blood sacrifice as a sin offering dates back to antiquity and cuts across many ancient societies.

However, the animal is not offered so that the gods get blood to quench their blood thirst. The blood is not meant for the gods and the ancestors to drink so that their anger will be averted. This is a demonstration to all the people that, what had happened is abhorrent to the society at large. The spirit being's anger will be averted because the society has not condoned sin but is

taking the matter seriously.

In some instances the blood of the sheep will be poured on the head of the offender as an expression of the gravity of the sin committed. In this sense, the custodians of public morality would be satisfied, for evil has been confronted and acknowledged as such. This is entirely different from the notion that the animal has been severely punished as a substitute for the ill-doing of the offender. A classic example of the rite of cleansing communal sin within Akan societies is the Odwera festival.

(iii) An example of a sin cleansing ceremony: The *Odwera* festival

The whole *Odwera* ceremony derives its name from the Akan idea of soul-cleansing, a purification ceremony. *Dwera* means to cleanse. Cleansing therefore is in effect the central focal point of the whole *Odwera* ceremony. According to Busia (1976:2003-2004), the *Odwera* ceremony is an annual festival which lasts a week or two. Sheep, drinks and first fruits of the year are offered to ancestors and the lesser divinities (and also to the Supreme Being; particularly the libation drink). *Odwera* is also a time for the cleansing of the tribe of defilement, and for the purification of the shrines of ancestral spirits and tribal lesser divinities.

Here I will only address the core rite of the cleansing and omit the other details. The three main rites related to the cleansing of national sin are as follows. Firstly, the Asantehene's ritual bath (soul washing). During this rite, cleansing and purification usually take place in a stream where the chief takes a ritual bath. Such an act symbolises cleansing of the whole nation as the Asantehene represents the whole Asante nation.

The second rite is the sprinkling of water on the major shrines of the lesser divinities and on the stools of the ancestors. The shrines of the lesser divinities and also the stool of the ancestors represent the spirit beings. Therefore to sprinkle water on these objects is a sign of cleansing the nation from defilement that may obstruct the relationship between them and the spirit beings

Thirdly, the people present at the ceremony will be sprinkled with water. Within Akan understanding, such sprinkling of water symbolises the cleansing of the whole Asante nation.

The fourth rite entails the climax point of the festival. In this rite, a black hen is sacrificed on the state ancestors' stools. The sacrifice of a black hen symbolises the removal of all that has defiled the tribe in the year. It is an offering to the ancestors on behalf of the people for the

sins of the past years. Busia explains that a black hen is usually sacrificed because a spotless white hen was what the traditional priests usually demanded as sacrifice to the lesser divinities.[6]

(iv) *Afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice): Precursor to the ritual of musuyi (curse removal)

Another remarkable issue in the traditional Akan's relation with the spirit beings is a common belief that as soon as someone sins against a spirit being, that person concurrently places him- / herself under a curse; thus disaster awaits such a person. Therefore, as one approaches the spirit being with *afodeɛ* (guilt something), it is a concrete expression of an admission of one's guilt. It then becomes the responsibility of the said spirit being to remove the impending disaster or the curse from the offender.

In the process of removing the curse or the impending danger, the offender will be asked to provide another animal to act as a bearer for the curse or disaster. Notably, it is also the responsibility of the offender to provide the animal for the removal of the curse or the impending disaster. Thus, the spirit acts to remove the sin as well as the curse from the guilty party. Remarkably, the act of cleansing of sin and removal of a curse can take place at individual as well as community level.

c) The ritual of *musuyi* (curse removal) is based on the concept of substitution / representation

The substitutional and representational sacrifices are amongst several kinds of sacrifices offered by the Akan. These kinds are normally offered as an exchange for the safety of a community or an individual who would have otherwise suffered some kind of misfortune. These misfortunes are normally seen or detected by a diviner or by the individuals themselves by means of dreams. Rituals are subsequently offered to prevent the looming danger. Thus, substitutional and representational sacrifices are offered to avert danger or misfortune that, it is believed, might befall the one offering the sacrifice. Amongst the Akan, *musuyi* takes on two forms: Either the substitution/representative will be allowed to escape with a curse upon its head or be killed; usually the former in the case.

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[6] This sacrifice is followed by a ritual feast which the living and the dead are believed to share. All who partake of this feast are believed to receive strength, health and blessings. According to Busia, the cycle of rites observed during the *Odwera* portrays all the elements of Asante religious faith: the Supreme Being, the lesser divinities and the ancestors are all propitiated.

(i) Substitutional curse removal within the Akan context: An example

In most cases, a sheep is presented as a substitute for the human being. The sheep is rubbed against the body of the offerer and it is believed that the offerer transfers his/her illness or misfortune to the sheep. In other cases, the offerer lays his/her hands on the sheep or touches the forehead of the animal with his/her hands. It is believed that the ill-fate of the offerer is exchanged with the animal. Afterwards, the animal is led into the wild and allowed to escape.

When a ritual is performed to transfer a curse or impending disaster on the animal, the animal then becomes accursed. It then follows that, it would be allowed to escape with the curse upon its head. The associated belief in this regard is that the curse or the impending danger is automatically transferred to any person or animal that kills the accursed one.

(ii) Substitutional sacrifice within the Akan context: Some examples[7]

The sacrificial death of four Akan chiefs may serve as examples of substitutional/representative curse removal. In the Akan history, four Akan Chiefs intentionally gave themselves up, at different occasions, to be killed on behalf of the Asante nation (the dominant group of the Akan people). They offered themselves for ritual purposes to gain victory in war against their enemies. Thus, substitutional/representative death is not unknown in Asante.

At the end of the 16th century, war raged between the Asante and Dankyira. Nana Osei Tutu was then the chief and founder of the Asante kingdom. He had a priest and a shrewd politician who was called Okomfo Anokye, a co-founder of the Asante kingdom.

One of the things Anokye asked from the Asante chiefs was that three of them should sacrifice themselves for medicinal purposes which would help the Asante win the war against their enemies. In response to the request, Nana Asenso Kofo, (chief of Adwumakase), Nana Dikopim I, (Chief of Edweso), and Nana Tweneboa Kodua, (paramount chief of Kumawu) offered themselves.

Nana Dikopim I offered himself to be butchered to death and his body distributed to the vultures. His only request was that nobody from his clan, *Asona,* should be sacrificed in any form.

In this free will response to the priest's request, Nana Asenso Kofo was buried alive. His only request was that after his death, nobody from his town, Adwumakase, should ever be killed

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7   I am indebted to Bishop Sarpong for this story (Sarpong 1998:149).

for sacrifice in any form.

Nana Tweneboa Kodua, volunteered himself, and was also asked to lead the marching soldiers. Though he was armed, he was forbidden to shoot, therefore he was killed. He also requested that nobody from his state should be ever be sacrificed in any form. Again, whenever a drummer from any of the Asante states started drumming on *Atumpan* drums, his name and appellations should be sounded to remind future generations that they too should sacrifice themselves for the Asante nation.

Another person sacrificed himself, however, in a different way. Okomfo Anokye asked Nana Osei Tutu to stay at home and another chief to lead the war against the Dankyira. His explanation was that, although the Asante nation would win the war, whoever led as War General would not survive beyond seven days after the war.

Nana Boahen Anantu, Chief of Mampong, at once volunteered to lead the soldiers to the war. He requested that, since he was taking the place of the King of Asante as War General, his stool should be stood next to that of the Asantehene. The Asantehene was occupying the Golden Stool; therefore his state should occupy a Silver Stool.

In the true spirit of sacrifice, none of the four chiefs asked for any personal benefits. However, each one requested that after his death, nobody from their home town should be killed for sacrifice in any form. This may serve as an example of substitutional/sacrifice within Akan history (Sarpong 1998:149).

These incidences are well-known to many Ashantis, particularly that of Nana Tweneboah Kodua, (one of the two paramount chiefs amongst them). This offering usually goes with the Akan colloquial saying: *Na obi nakum Antwi, namum Tweneboa Kodua na onoa de neho kogye akyerema* (no one forces Tweneboa Kodua to die a sacrificial death, seeing that he intentionally offered himself to do so).

7.3.4 *Osofo (*the officiating agent of afodie *(sin sacrifice) and curse removal*

In matters of relations between the lesser divinities and human beings, the *asofo* (priests) serve as the intermediaries. All the recognised and established lesser divinities that have shrines have *asofo (priests)* as their intermediaries. The priests serve as intermediaries between, the lesser divinities, ancestors (and other spirit beings) and human beings. In both *afodeε* (sin sacrifice) and curse removal, it is the prerogative of the priest of the offended lesser divinity to officiate the rite.

Nonetheless, while recognising that there is marred relationship between God and humankind, there is no indication within the Akan context of a human attempt to make amends for the broken relationship. The problem may be due to the fact that there is no priesthood for *Onyame*.

As the rule of such an relationship between the lesser divinities and their priests, it is the prerogative of the lesser divinity to choose or provide its own priest. There has never been a case where someone chose a priest for a lesser divinity. As experience has shown, any attempt to choose a priest for a lesser divinity or impose oneself as a priest, met with a strong reprimand from the lesser divinity. In this respect, the burden lies now with *Onyame* to bring in his/her own priest. Someone that would be designated as God's priest must be necessarily a sinless person.

7.3.5 Conclusion

The Akan terms *mpatadeɛ* and *afodeɛ* serve as the principal means and precursors to reconciliation. The difference between *afodeɛ* and *mpatadeɛ* is that the latter is usually offered to a human being, while the former is largely offered to spirit beings. Nonetheless, *mpatadeɛ* as well as *afodeɛ* can also be offered to the chiefs in their capacity as the ancestors' representatives. Thus, if one offends a chief, the tradition demands that the offender should give *afodeɛ* in the form of a sacrifice to the chief (who sits on the ancestors' stool). Such *afodeɛ* can also be seen as *mpatadeɛ* to the chief. The only difference is that in the case of *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice), an offering of blood is necessary for the cleansing. This is not required for *mpatadeɛ.*

7.4 Christ our *afomusuyideɛ*: A Christian view of atonement in the Akan context

7.4.1 Introduction
In critical dialogue with the three main theories of atonement and the Akan ideas of the means of mediation, particularly the notions of *afodeɛ* and *musuyideɛ* (as discussed in the sections 7.2 and 7.3 respectively), in this section I will propose an African Christian view of atonement. This proposal is conceptualised in terms of *afomusiyideɛ,* that is, that Christ through his death, acknowledged humankind's sins before God and also became our curse bearer. The crucial issue to be addressed in this regard is how Jesus' death and our sins are related. In Christian theology, it is not the statement "Jesus died" that can be described as the

good news. Rather, the belief that "Jesus died for our sins". The problem lies in the word "for" as it relates to the death of Christ and our sins.[8]

In the history of Christian discourse, several proposals have been put forward to relate the death of Jesus to the sins of humankind. The major approaches as pointed out and analysed by Aulén are: the ransom type, the anselmian type and the subjective type. Whereas each of these theories throws some light on the significance of Christ's death, it is doubtful if one of them expresses the significance of Christ's death adequately.

I do not claim to offer a working theory or a final solution to this problem. Rather, I aim to offer a proposal from the African (Akan) perspective on the significance of Christ's death as sacrifice. I must also note that this proposal is only intended to illlustrate how a traditional African could possibly understand the death of Jesus as a sacrifice. Thus the proposal is somehow limited as it seeks to interpret the death of Christ only through the metaphor of sacrifice. I hope some insights from the African animal sacrificial practices may correct the erroneous view of animal sacrifice which serves as the basis of the penal subtitutionary theory. In this proposal I will seek to relate the death of Jesus to the sins of humankind directly within the context of the Akan sacrificial system. This proposal is also illustrated by referring to sacrifice practices from the Old Testament.

Several proposals have been set forward in respect to the significance of Christ's death. The idea however that "Jesus died to acknowledge humankind's sin (guilty status) before God" may be a novel suggestion. In order to discuss my proposal in relation to the three major views of atonement,[9] I will first discuss the three main theories within the Akan context, and then develop my own proposal.

7.4.2 The three main atonement theories within the Akan context

These dialogues – between the three main views of atonement and the Akan culture – are not meant to offer an exhaustive review, critique or comparative study. My intention is to compare the key ideas of each of these three theories with some similar ideas within the Akan culture. The focus here is on how an Akan will view each of these theories within his/her context.

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8   See Hooker (1994:7).

9   These dialogues may also serve as an impetus for further studies of Christian atonement theories within an Akan context.

a) The ransom metaphor for atonement in the traditional Akan context

The earliest articulation of the ransom theory connotes that Jesus' death was meant to pay a ransom to Satan; allowing God to rescue those under Satan's bondage. This view of atonement would be meaningful to the Akan if it is interpreted in the context of the Akan maxim: *Nyame boo owuo na owou kum Nyame; na Nyame na ote nanka oduro nti odii owou so nkonim* (God created death and death killed God; yet God, who is all-powerful, had an antidote for death, and overcame death).

With reference to the maxim, there is a notion of an insurrection against *Onyame* by "Death" who was a creature of God. *Onyame* succumbed to death. But within the "domain" of death, *Onyame*, who is all-powerful, had an antidote for death, overcame death and subsequently rose from the dead.

Obviously, spirit beings do not die, and the Akan believe that *Onyame* is a Spirit being. In the framework of the Akan thought-form, one may speculate here that it was rather the *Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate i.e. *Nyamekrateasefo* that temporarily yielded to death. As death is the lot of only living material beings, the notion of the death of God in the Akan becomes clearer within the context of a proposal that the *Okra* of *Onyame* became *teasefo* (human), that is, *Nyamekrateasefo* (see section 6.4).

Moreover, it is the professed lot of *okra* to assume a human bodily form and, at one time or another, to appear on earth. Therefore one may not be wrong to suggest that the *Okra* of *Onyame* might have taken its turn as *okra* becoming human being for the purpose to overcome Death for the benefit of humankind. In order to demonstrate total supremacy, the *Okra* of *Onyame* finally overcame death. Thus *Onyame* has tasted death, yet death could not overcome *Onyame*.

In this regard one may pose a speculative question: Why did God succumb to death and then later overcame it? Within the context of the traditional Akan conception of *Onyame*, *Onyame* may not need to demonstrate his power over the creatures. *Onyame* created everything including all the lesser divinities, and there is no myth, maxim or story that depicts *Onyame* as struggling with any of His creatures except "death".[10]

Within the framework of the ransom theory, we can focus on the maxim that *Onyame*

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[10] This maxim depicts *Onyame* as a passable Being. This is in contrast with the Greek conception of God that underpinned Western theological formulations; that God is impassable. Whether it was the Greek or the Akan that have the correct conception of God, is an issue which reaches beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, Akan Christians do not need to subscribe to the notion that God is an impassable Being.

succumbed to and later overcame death in order to assure humankind that He/She is the sovereign. From this we can infer that death, sin and evil spirits do not have the final say on human life. *Onyame* has demonstrated that He/She is not an aloof Being to whom all powers are merely attributed. Instead, *Onyame* is aware of the fears and the worries of humankind, and that the most feared of those, "death", is also under *Onyame's* control. *Onyame* did not need to do battle with every "major power", it sufficed to overcome the most feared power, namely Death. The importance of this maxim becomes clearer when one interprets it in accordance with other related myths, namely those depicting the struggles of lesser divinities with Death, and of human beings' attempts to overcome Death.

The myth of the struggles of lesser divinities with Death focuses on the river Tano, the earliest and one of the greatest of the lesser divinities amongst the Akan. According to the myth, there was a struggle between "river Tano" and "Death" with regard to a sick person. Struggles ensued between the two to determine whether Tano could secure life-without-death on behalf of humankind, or whether death will be the lot of humankind. Neither "river Tano" nor "Death" was victorious. A compromise was reached to the effect that, when someone is sick, either Death or Tano will have its way, depending on who makes the first contact. Thus, if a person becomes sick and recovers, it implies that Tano has outrun Death to reach that patient. On the other hand, if one falls sick and dies, this implies that Death has outrun Tano. Of course, this is an attempt from within the priesthood tradition to account for why not all sick people are healed. This myth, however, also illustrates that the lesser divinities are not powerful enough in their attempts to save humankind from the power of Death.

The Akan regard Okomfo Anokye as the most powerful and respected priest that ever lived. Legend has it that Okomfo Anokye, after achieving so much for the Akan, including helping to establish the Asante nation through commanding the Golden stool from the heavens, set out to overcome the strongest "force", namely Death. Yet, the greatest priest was eventually over-powered by death; he died and could not rise again. Thus, the common saying goes: *Okomfo Anokye se okogye owuo adoru aba nanso woko a woamba bio* (The priest Anokye set out to bring the antidote for death but he did not return). This account about Okomfo Anokye represents human beings' failed attempt to overcome their eventual death.

Within the framework of the ransom theory, the maxim illustrates the necessity of God suffering on behalf of humans. It nonetheless resulted in God's power over death. To the Akan, to overcome death connotes that one may be more than human or a lesser divinity. One must be God himself / herself. Thus Jesus as the *Okra* of God incarnate, i.e. *Nyamekrateasefo,*

230

qualifies to serve as the saviour of humankind in this regard. This is evident in the Akan context seeing that neither human beings nor lesser divinities could overcome death, as several stories portray. To overcome death demands a saviour who can deliver humankind from their strongest, "enemy". As we affirm that Jesus is truly human as well as truly God, this maxim illustrates the death and resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent victory over "death".

The ransom theory clearly depicts the prevailing Christology pertaining to divine conquering within the African context. Salvation is described in terms of warfare and conquering with no sense of reconciliatory mediations.

The ransom theory of atonement has some merits. However, it becomes questionable if Christ's death could be interpreted only in terms of warfare and the conquering of foes. The necessary question that the adherents to the ransom theory need to address is: If indeed, God has conquered sin, death and Satan in order to deliver humankind, how can humankind be reconciled with God given their guilty conscience?

The Akan carving symbol *Owou kum nyame* (death killed God) is derived from this maxim. This maxim articulates a sense of "God's death". Thus, it provides the basis for the Akan to accept that Jesus may be regarded as truly God even though he died. This is because he was resurrected with the purpose of overcoming death, sin and evil.

b) The satisfaction metaphor for atonement within the Akan context

The advocates of the satisfaction and penal substitution theories maintain that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. This was in full payment for sins, which satisfied the righteousness of God so that God could forgive sinners without compromising God's own standards. Thus, the sacrifice of Christ satisfies the divine justice.[11]

Nearly all of the church fathers, including Justin Martyr, Athanasius and St Augustine affirmed the vicarious nature of the atonement. The key term in this regard is "substitution". However, the penal substitution theory offers a specific explanation as to the reason for Christ's suffering: Christ accepted the punishment that was meant for humankind.

Traditional Akan culture and religion provide rough equivalents for many of these soteriological images. As already indicated, in Akan history four Akan Chiefs intentionally

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[11] Indeed the death of Jesus entailed a judicial act in human terms, but this does not necessarily mean to say that it was "divine" punishment.

gave themselves up, at different occasions, to be killed on behalf of the Asante nation. This may serve as an example of vicarious representation within the Akan history. One may also point to the *Odwera* festival as a rich illustration of the cleansing of communal sin. The climax of the festival entails the offering of a black hen as atonement for the people's sin. This may well serve as an example of substitutional sacrifice (see section 7.3).

Nonetheless, the Protestant Reformers' idea of penal substitution differs starkly from what a traditional Akan (I might as well say an African) would rarely, if ever, imagine about sin and guilt sacrifices. Interpreting the concept of "penal substitution" within the Akan sacrificial system, this concept would be concretised as follows: An Akan has breached a rule of a lesser divinity. He/she has approached the lesser divinity (through the priest) with a sheep as the custom demands. The animal will be slaughtered (as usual) and the blood will be poured over the shrine of the lesser divinity as a means of disinfecting the lesser divinity from uncleanliness.

The question that this raises is: Would the Akan understand the "role" of the sacrificial animal in terms of "penal substitution"? Amongst the Akan, as well as many other African traditional societies, the sacrificial animal is never meant to be a bearer of the offender's sin. Instead, it is a way of acknowledging one's offence and to disinfect the shrines of the offended lesser divinity or the black Stool of the ancestors from uncleanliness. To buttress this contention, I may point to the custom whereby the flesh of the sacrificial animal is eaten by the priest and the attendees at the shrine.

Amongst the traditional Akan, no sane person will ever think of eating an accursed animal. As already stated, when someone offends a spirit being, the offender simultaneously falls under curse. That is to say, sin and curse run concurrently in the realm of the spirit beings. Thus an animal which may be designated as bearer of sin is accursed at the same time. Let us presume the animal that an offender of a lesser divinity presents to the spirit being is a substitutional sacrifice, thus an accursed animal. In that case the priest and his attendees will never eat the animal. However, it is the norm for the priests and their attendees to eat the carcass of a sin sacrifice. That indicates that sacrifice animals are not "bearers of sin" on behalf of the offender.

Within the traditional Akan context, it would rule out any idea of penal substitution if the animal sacrifice is meant to be a sin sacrifice. Otherwise, it may be odd for traditional priests and the attendees of the shrine to eat the flesh of an accursed animal. The idea of penal

232

substitution conflicts with any known practices pertaining to a sin sacrifice.

The traditional African notion of sin sacrifice correlates with the sin and guilt sacrifices in the Old Testament – whereby the priest also gets to dine on the flesh or the carcass of the sacrificed animal. In respect to the concept of penal substitution, Dunn (1991) suggests that the blood of the animal is drained from it before it can be eaten by the priests. However, such a suggestion would seem odd for any traditional African – as only a social outcast would eat the accursed animal, even when its blood is drained. As such, this cannot be associated with the priest and their attendees who understand the implications of eating an accursed animal.

A related question needs to be posed in this regard: Could an animal that is sacrificed to a lesser divinity be interpreted within the traditional Akan context as "satisfaction", that is, as an alternative to the offender's punishment? In a broader sense, it may indeed be regarded as "satisfaction". The reason is that the offender has acknowledged his/her sin, thereby offering the animal as a concrete affirmation, and the blood of the animal is to be used to disinfect the shrine of the lesser divinity. The honour of the lesser divinity or ancestor which was compromised due to sin, is "repaid" by acknowledging one's sins, followed by the ritual of disinfection from uncleanliness. Such an action obviously avoids the punishment (curse) associated with such sin, as understood in the traditional Akan context, particularly in the case of the lesser divinities and the ancestors.

Nonetheless, the term "satisfaction" and "repayment of a debt of honour" may not be appropriate within the Akan context. The reason is that the presentation of the sacrificial animal – *afodeɛ* (literally, guilty entity), is neither meant to repay a debt of honour nor something to be regarded as satisfactory. It could be appropriately regarded as a sober admission of one's guilty position that anticipates the offended lesser divinity's clemency. In this regard, the traditional Akan do not regard *mpatadeɛ* (compensation/reparation) or *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice) as a repayment of a debt of honour, nor as something to be regarded as satisfactory. What an offender owes to the spirit beings as the custodians of public morality, indeed cannot be repaid. Thus it would not be appropriate to talk about satisfactory repayment for sins committed against the spirit beings, which also entails a crime against the community.

Perhaps a similar idea may be inferred from the Old Testament sin/guilt sacrifices. The rite of sacrifice in relation to sin may be regarded appropriately only as "something adequate", but not satisfactory, to warrant mercy from God or the offended spirit being.

Thomas Aquinas' idea of penance may also have some similarities with African sacrifice

practices, particularly within the Akan context. Amongst the Akan, when one commits what may be regarded as a taboo – *musuo* (beastly behaviour), one would sometimes be made to undergo what may be regarded as similar to penance. This may include the following: shaving the offender's head drearily; killing sheep on the head of the offender – draining the blood over the head and the whole body; and the offender will be compelled to carry an empty pot followed by children, hooting the offender. In some cases, such a person would be banished temporarily or permanently from the community.

Nonetheless, the purpose of such penance is to demonstrate to the members that the community disapproves of such behaviour; thus the ritual of *musuyi* (removing of beastly behaviour). In this respect, to regard penance as the basis of God's forgiveness of humankind's sins does not express adequately the Akan notion of a sin sacrifice which must precede forgiveness. Within the Akan context, mercy and forgiveness is only based on the acknowledgment of sin, not on any form of penance.

Another issue that has become a bone of contention in the atonement debate is the ransom price that Jesus paid. Whereas the advocates of ransom theory are of the view that Jesus paid this price to Satan, Anselm taught that the price was paid to God. Without doubt, the usage of the term "ransom" should be understood here in a metaphorical sense. To press such metaphorical language by asking to whom the ransom was paid: Satan or God, is to overstretch the metaphor. In the traditional Akan context, the payment of the price may refer to the humiliation that the offender has to undergo publicly accepting the evil he/she has committed to be "animal behaviour". The question arises: Can the same connotation not be applied in the case of Jesus as well?[12]

c) Abelard's view of atonement within the Akan context

For Abelard, Christ can be seen as the ideal person. This obviously draws some analogues with Akan ancestors. In the Akan context, ancestors are regarded as the principal role models. One main qualification to become an ancestor is that one must have led an exemplary life, that is, a life worthy of emulation. A would be ancestor must not be a selfish person but must be ready to offer him-/herself even unto death for the benefit of his/her community. The four Asante kings who died for the Ashanti nation illustrate this ideal.

This is what Aberlard would have us believe about the death of Jesus Christ. Similar to the

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[12]   Adam (representing humankind) only shifted the blame onto God – "the woman you gave me," but never accepted his own sin. Likewise, in the myth of God's withdrawal there was no acceptance of sin or guilt.

moral influence theory, the strength of the ancestor Christology lies with Christ as a role model – the most prominent view of the ancestor image. Indeed, some lessons can be learnt from the loyalty demonstrated by Christ's death. However, it expresses nothing about reconciliation which is the focus of Jesus' mediatory work.

d) Some other atonement theories within the Akan context

Grotius saw the death of Christ as a "substitute for a penalty" of sin. Remarkably, this view may also be off-track within the African sin sacrifice. In terms of the Akan belief, sacrifice animals are not regarded as substitutes for a deserved punishment, but serve as a concrete expression of one's acceptance of guilt – *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice).

For Campbell and Moberly, the self-offering of Jesus was the expression of His perfect penitence for the sins of humankind.[13] For Campbell, Christ's vicarious contrition for humankind constitutes his atoning work.[14] For Moberly, Christ offered the sacrifice of supreme penitence.[15] Interestingly this view comes close to the concept of *afomusuyideɛ*. Somehow, an Akan may see a sacrifice animal as an expression of penitence for his/her sins. However, Campbell and Moberly's views share some resemblance only with the aspect of sin sacrifice; it does not shed light on Christ as our curse bearer (Campbell 1949, Moberly 1901).

e) Conclusion

The ransom theory of atonement obviously has a connection with the prevailing African divine conquering Christology. Salvation is described in terms of warfare and conquering of foes, with no sense of reconciliatory mediations. Here the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* differs

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[13] Such an idea appears to come very close to what I have been depicting as meaning of sin sacrifice within the Akan context. Remarkably, the argument against this view that one does not repent or confess one's sin on behalf of someone else, misses the basis of a communal sacrificial system. The Odwera festival of the Akan as explained in section 7.3 relays a sense of communal repentance and confession of sin led by the Asante king. Similarly, the Old Testament Day of Atonement also provides a sense of communal repentance and confession of sin led by the high priest. Nonetheless, there are some subtle differences here. Whereas Campbell and Moberly rest only with what I term as *afoddeɛ* (sin sacrifice), I combine the two aspects, sin sacrifice and the notion of the scapegoat, together in the concept of *afomusuyideɛ*.

[14] Jonathan Edwards thought that an adequate repentance for sin would render punishment unnecessary. God's outraged majesty must be vindicated by punishment, unless the offender could demonstrate repentance, humiliation, and sorrow, proportionate to the greatness of the majesty despised. Edwards denies the possibility: There can be no infinite sorrow for sin in finite creatures. But Campbell and Moberly conceived such sorrow or penitence on the part of Christ – who was not a "finite creature". Following a path which Edwards had seen but left untrodden, Campbell and Moberly contend that the cross pictures Christ as the perfect penitent confessing the sins of mankind.

[15] This conception made a huge appeal to those who would prefer to retain the language of substitution and sin-offering but do not agree with the penal aspect of the substitutionary theory. Over the years, this view has gained support from other theologians such as Robert Mackintosh (Mackintosh 1920).

from the divine conquering Christology as the former draws its core from the traditional mode of reconciliation. While the concept of *Afomusuyideɛ*, expresses the notion of conquering indirectly, it also adequately addresses the mode of reconciliation between God and humankind.

7.4.3 *Afomusuyideɛ*: A conceptualisation of the atoning work of Christ within the Akan context

a) Introduction

The term *afomusuyideɛ* is coined from the two Akan terms *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice) and *musuyideɛ* (curse bearer).This is my proposal in order to conceptualise the significance of the death of Jesus as a sin sacrifice and curse bearer i.e. "scapegoat". In this thesis, I understand the person and the work of Christ in such a way that the *Okra* of *Onyame* (dynamic equivalent of Logos) is the incarnation of *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest) for the purpose of becoming *afomusuyideɛ* (sin sacrifice and curse bearer in one) for humankind. Thus Christ as God-man died for the salvation of humankind. The concept of *afomusuyideɛ* is based on the metaphor of sacrifice. On the one hand, *afomusuyideɛ* (*afodeɛ* – sin sacrifice) denotes an "admission" of one's sin before the offended lesser divinity. Thus in the Akan Christian thought-form, Christ died to "admit" the sin of humankind before God. On the other hand, the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* (*musuyideɛ* – curse bearer) also denotes removal of the curse and of sin. In the Akan Christian thought-form, Christ thus also becomes the bearer of humankind's curse and sin.

In the context of sin sacrifice in both the Old Testament and in the Akan society, Christ becomes humankind's representative. However, in the context of the "curse bearer" (scapegoat) in both the Old Testament and in terms of traditional Akan sacrifices, Christ becomes humankind's substitute. Within this context of being a "curse bearer" i.e. scapegoat (akin to *musuyideɛ*) and not a "sin sacrifice" (*afodeɛ*), substitution receives its metaphorical purchase. Moreover, it is in the cult, not the court, that substitution receives its metaphorical purchase. One may then agree with Gunton (1988) when he contends that the terms "representative" and "substitute" pertaining to Jesus' atoning work are correlative, not opposing concepts. Jesus is our representative and substitute concurrently.

b) The basis and the point of reference of the *afomusuyideɛ* proposal

The *afomusuyideɛ* proposal has two bases. Firstly, the significance of the death of Jesus could be interpreted adequately as a ritual sacrifice. In this sense the Old Testament sacrificial

system serves largely (however not solely) as a prototype for Christ's death. The Roman sacrificial system could be regarded as one of the most dominant systems to have influenced the New Testament writers in their interpretation of the death of Jesus as sacrifice. Nonetheless, the Jewish sacrificial system, particularly that of the Jewish Day of Atonement, serves as metaphor for this sacrifice. This is clearly depicted in the book of Hebrews (Dunn 1991:41).[16]

Secondly, sin sacrifices in the Old Testament show similarities with the sin sacrifices which are still practiced in various African societies. In this regard, Sawyerr consistently argues that the sacrificial practices of African peoples provide important illustrations of the Christian message. For Sawyerr (1969:58), the Christian theologian studying the practice of sacrifices in West Africa, has the task of finding out in which areas placation occurs. He argues that this will help one to place the biblical concept of *hilasterion* in its related context.

What one may term a "primitive" sacrifice, is still practiced amongst the Akan. It may be helpful to get a clue as to what actual sacrifices look like. Indeed, it is my first hand knowledge of the practice of sacrifices – the killing of animals and pouring their blood on the shrines and the black stools – that prompted me to question the reformers' idea of penal substitution as the significance of the death of Jesus as sacrifice. My main contention is that the notion of "penal substitution" seems odd within the context of traditional African sin/guilt sacrifices. It also appears to conflict with the Old Testament notion of sin/guilt sacrifices.

The proposal of *afomusuyideɛ* takes its point of departure from the African context but uses the framework of the Nicene/Chalcedon formular as its point of reference.[17]

c) An explanation of the term *afomusuyideɛ*

In this proposal, the significance of the death of Jesus is expressed by the Akan term *afomusuyideɛ.* The term is made up of two religious terms, namely *afodeɛ* and *mosuyideɛ.* These two terms have a common suffix *dei* which is consistently interpreted as "something". Actually, the coined term *afomusuyideɛ* is derived from two terms *afodeɛ* (guilt something) and *musuyideɛ* (curse bearer). As each of the terms has the same suffix: *dei* (something) one is dropped to make the coined term meaningful. Combining the three: *afo-musuyi-deɛ,* professes

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[16]   Also see Hengel (1981).

[17]   My proposal is based on the following assumption: Even though there were other influential backgrounds, one of the primary notions which influenced the New Testament writers to interpret Jesus' death that "he died for our sins", is the Jewish Day of Atonement. In keeping with this view, I also assumed that there are similarities between the sin/guilt sacrifices relayed in the Old Testament and those sin / guilt sacrifices of the African – which are still practiced in various African societies.

Jesus as "our sin bearer and curse remover". A more detailed explanation of these two terms will provide more clarity in this regard.

(i) The term *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice)

The term *afodeɛ* is constituted by a prefix "a", the stem "fo" and a suffix "*deɛ*". The word "*deɛ*" has a consistent meaning as "something". The key word is the stem "fo" which carries two related meanings: "fo" (guilt) and "fo" (soak with liquid). It is very important to note here that the Akan term "fo" is also regularly used as a suffix, and in that usage carries a different meaning. In most cases, "fo" as suffix connotes the plural. Thus *obroni* (whiteman) and *abrofo* (whitemen), or *okuani* (a farmer) and *akuafo* (farmers).

However, when the term "fo" is a stem in an Akan (particularly Asante) word, it may rarely connote any meaning far removed from guilt. In this respect, the word *afodei* which may be literally rendered as "guilt something" within the context of traditional Akan sacrifices, may be rightly interpreted as guilt/sin sacrifice rather than a general term "sacrifice" as the Akan Twi Bible translators have done. Oddly enough, the Akan Twi Bible renders "thanksgiving offering" as *naase-afodeɛ*, which may literally be translated as "thanksgiving guilt offering".

(ii) The term *musuyi* (removal of curse, taboo or abomination)

In its technical and current usage, the term *musuo* means "taboo", "abomination" or "curse". The prefix *"bo"* and suffix "yi" usually accompanies the term *musuo*. An Akan will say *wa* "*bomusuo*" (she/he has committed an abomination) or *ye ko yi musuo,* which literally means: "We are going to remove (*yi*) something that is an abomination to the society." It is a taboo, abomination or curse in that it offends the ancestors, the lesser divinities, Mother Earth and even God. Amongst the traditional Akan, the ritual of *mosuyi* is usually preceded by a sacrifice termed *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice).

d) An application of the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* within a Christian context

The term *afomusuyideɛ* was coined to express the significance of the death of Christ. In this section, I will dissect the term in order to relate its Christian meaning within an Akan context.

(i) Jesus as *Afodeɛ* (sin offering) for humankind

In ancient Judaism the sin sacrifice or *hatta't* was an important ritual for cleansing of certain, unwittingly committed defilements. The guilty laid their hands on the head of the sacrificial animal. Whatever that entails within the Old Testament narrative is not clear and has become

a bone of contention amongst scholars; whether this refers to a "representative" or a "substitute" (Lasor 1982:153). After the beast was killed, the blood was sprinkled on the altar and elsewhere in the sacred precincts. The purpose of the ritual was to purify the guilty and to re-establish the holy bond with God through the blood of the consecrated victim. Similarly, amongst the Akan, and also many traditional African societies, the point of a sin sacrifice is to disinfect the priest, the shrine, or the people from various forms of defilement, be it moral or ritual.

Within the context of such sacrifices early Christianity regarded the death of Christ as atonement for the sins of humankind. By shedding Christ's blood, the sin of humankind was wiped out. Like the innocent and "spotless" animal Christ died "on behalf of" all people.

The death of Christ may be appropriately explained as "on behalf of" rather than as a substitute. The reason is that in the Old Testament, *hatta't* does not refer to the appeasement of divine wrath but the shedding of the blood of the victim to wipe out sin. The key differences between the sacrifice of Christ and that of the *hatta't* animal are that a) Christ's was regarded as a voluntary and effective sacrifice for all humankind and b) his was considered the perfect sacrifice, delivered once in time and space but perpetuated in eternity by the risen Lord.

Interpreting the death of Jesus as atonement in light of the Jewish Day of Atonement, the first goat which was killed may represent the death of Jesus as sin sacrifice.[18] In this regard the author of Leviticus 16:15-16 states:

> He shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the curtain, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. Thus he shall make atonement for the sanctuary, because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions, all their sins; and so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which remains with them in the midst of their uncleanness.

Looking at the passage as it stands, there is no notion whatsoever that the sacrificial animal was made to undergo any form of punishment as penalty in place of the people. The idea that the blood of the animal is used to sprinkle the mercy seat may denote that the whole act entails a purification of all contamination and asking for forgiveness. Dodd commenting on the related passage of Romans 3:25 said:

> The idea underlying it is characteristic of primitive religion. The ancient felt that if a taboo was infringed, the person or thing involved became unclean, defiled or profane. The condition of defilement might be removed by the performance of the appropriate act: it

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[18]   However, that is not the whole picture. I will return to the significance of the second goat later.

might be washing with water, or sprinkling with blood, or simply the forfeiture of some valuable object to the deity concerned with taboo. Such acts were felt to have the value, so to speak, of a disinfectant. Thus in the Old Testament a whole range of ritual actions are prescribed for disinfecting the priest, the altar, or the people from various forms of defilement, ritual or moral (Dodd 1959:78).

Dodd's idea is similar to the notion of sin sacrifice in West African traditional religion. Amongst the Akan, the blood of the animal offered as a sin sacrifice is used to disinfect the sacred places. On this basis I propose that, *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest) as fully human and human's representative, admitted humankind's sin in order to avert God's anger over their sin. However, the animal was not meant to appease God. Rather it is the offender's acceptance of his/her sin which the animal represents, that averts God's anger.[19]

Jesus voluntarily and publicly acknowldged human sin; that act denotes genuine acceptance of humankind's sin. The purpose of a sin sacrifice cannot be merely to satisfy the honour of the offended party or to serve as penalty for the offender. The purpose has to be reconciliation between the victim and the offender. The first step towards such reconciliation is the offender's acceptance of his/her wrongdoing.

The concept of *afomusuyideɛ* is based on the recognition that genuine reconciliation cannot take place without the offender admitting his/her wrongdoing and showing signs of remorse and repentance. The one who has done wrong must recognise the gravity of the ill in order to seek reconciliation between the conflicting parties.

Within the context of the traditional Akan, it is normal to presume that the Supreme Being, the lesser divinities and the ancestors – who are regarded as the custodians of public morality – are vexed when human beings flout the public moral rules.

Moreover, it is in accordance with the Akan tradition that such sins when committed must be properly and duly recognised, and disposed of before any form of reconciliation can take place. The purpose of the animal is to acknowledge publicly that the offender has admitted his/her sin and has therefore surrendered him-/herself to the offended spirit being. Such an animal would be slaughtered, and the blood would be sprinkled on the shrine of the offended lesser divinity or the black Stool of the ancestors as a means of cleansing the spirit beings from desecration.

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[19]   Conradie, a professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape South Africa, normally explains this in terms of the notion of a "deficit". For him, in any wrongdoing something can be paid back, but some aspects cannot be compensated. Forgiveness is asked and offered for that which cannot be paid back – the deficit. The animal which is sacrificed is merely a small symbol of the deficit that remains.

In this sense, evil has been confronted and acknowledged as evil and ritually disposed of and ousted from the community. This view captures both the ideas of propitiation and expiation in the context of Romans 3:24. It is not the suffering or the death of the animal that causes the anger or wrath of a god to be averted – as the penal substitution theory would want us to believe. It is rather what the death of the animal stands for: admission of sin.

Of course one might consider adequate punishment or compensation/reparation as a basis for reconciliation. Indeed, either of the two could avert anger. But the question remains: Will such an approach offer a genuine reconciliation that will ensure mutual love? Obviously, whereas the approach of *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice) is aimed at restoring the former relationship to a certain degree, the punishment approach either meted out to the offender or his/her substitute, portrays vengeance – which is far removed from the purpose of a sacrifice.

As already indicated, in the case of the relationship between a human being and the ancestor or lesser divinity, the offender offers not *mpatadeɛ*,[20] but rather *afodeɛ*.[21] The concept of *mpatadeɛ* somehow differs from the English term "compensation" (see 7.3).

Afodeɛ as understood within the traditional Akan context is necessarily devoid of any sense of compensation. The reason is that, if God, the lesser divinities and the ancestors serve as the custodians of public morality, it may be logically inconsistent to mention rendering them compensation when they are offended. If one offends them, one has inevitably offended the community as well. It may also not be right to presume that the ancestors and the lesser divinities in their capacity as custodians of public morality would accept bribes or compensation. As it would be a misnomer for a judge to take compensation from a citizen for the state. Therefore it would be logically inconsistent to presume that the ancestors and the lesser divinities in their capacity as the custodians of public morality would accept a bribe or compensation. The belief is rather that the admission of one's sin before the spirit beings provides a basis to plead for forgiveness of sin and the removal of the curse associated with it. This is expressed in the concrete form of *afodeɛ* (a sin admission sacrifice).

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[20]   Ekem (2005:63) rejects the term *mpatadeɛ* as inadequate to capture the nuances of *hilasterion*. He suggests *ahyenanmuadze* (replacement something) as an adequate word to carry the meaning of *hilasterion* in the context of Romans 3:25a. Ekem maintains that the passage propounds "the idea that it is God who takes the initiative to put Jesus forward as a means of 'hilasterion' through his blood …" In the context of Akan belief, the offending party presents *mpatadeɛ,* not the victim or the offended party. Thus, if God is the One who presents the *mpatadeɛ,* then within the Akan context, the impression is that it is God who has offended humankind.

[21]   It is rather unfortunate that the translators of the Akan-Twi Bible failed to observe the subtle difference between the two terms by referring to Jesus as *mpatadeɛ.*

Thus, the basic rationale behind the sin offering within the Akan context is the public admission and acceptance of the status of being guilty. In this respect, the death of the animal represents a concrete form of admission of guilt as well as its consequence: death. At the same time, it is a means of pleading for an unmerited forgiveness.

Nyamesofopreko as truly human as well as truly God, represented humankind by surrendering his life as "sin/guilt admission" to avert or propitiate the anger of the triune God over humankind's sin (as committed and represented by one person Adam). Within the traditional Akan context, *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice) signifies an unconditional acceptance of one's sin. This is common practice of sin sacrifice in many African societies where sacrifices are still practiced. In order to effect such cleansing, the *Okra* of *Onyame* became truly human – *Nyamekrateasefo,* that is: God in Christ became human.

(ii) Jesus as *Musuyideɛ* (Curse/sin bearer) for humankind

On the other hand one might profess the following with regard to Christ's work within the Akan context: Without ceasing to be human, the *Okra* of *Onyame,* inseparable from *Sunsum* and *Ntoro,* responded to Christ's admission of humankind's sin and forgave, cleansed and restored the relationship between God and humankind. Therefore, *Nyamesofopreko* offered the forgiveness and cleansing of sins to humankind by acting as a "scapegoat".

Thus, in the person of Jesus as fully God and fully human, we discover humankind's representative acting to acknowledge humankind's sin and as God's representative forgive humankind. Leviticus 16: 20 relays the narrative about the second goat – the removal of sin and misfortune on the Jewish Day of Atonement.

> When he has *finished atoning* for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and *sending it away into the wilderness by means* of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all the iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness (Leviticus 16:20- 22; italics-RA).

In the Old Testament, the laying of hands on the second goat (the scapegoat) may be understood as God's response to the Jewish community, who had admitted their sins (guilty status).

The phrase "sending it away into the wilderness" may presuppose that the animal is to carry

the community's curses and sins into a place beyond remembrance.[22] The ritual of curse removal (second goat) opens up another chapter, God's response, which is to carry the impending curses away.

In light of this ritual, I may suggest that Jesus representing humankind acknowledged humankind's guilty status before God. He did that by offering his life as *afodeɛ* – a guilt something (to avert God's wrath over human sin). At the same time, Jesus represented God in responding to the human reconciliatory act by forgiving and cleansing human sin. That he accomplished by offering his body as *musuyideɛ* – accursed something. The Akan understanding of vicarious sin sacrifice and the removal of curses, as noted in Odwera festival and the death of four Asante chiefs, underpins this proposal.

In the person of Christ, humankind has placed itself under the mercy of the triune God (as the Three are inseparable even while the son was presented as a human).[23] At the same time, the triune God in the person of Christ has forgiven humankind and removed their sins beyond remembrance. Nonetheless, such a task becomes possible only through the act of incarnation – *Nyamesofopreko* as the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. It thus takes One who is truly human as well as truly God to effect such reconciliation.
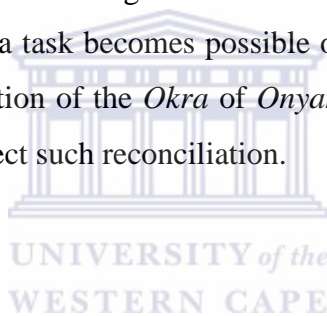
7.5 Conclusion

The relevance of this hypothesis to contemporary society lies in the area of conflict and reconciliation. Whether the conflict is between nations, tribes or individuals, the most important key to peace is a willingness to publicly admit one's sin/guilt as well as a willingness from the offended party to forgive and remove the pain and retribution. For Africans, the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* has an added advantage in that it is well grounded in the African sacrificial system. It is also generally accepted as a mode of reconciliation, that is, a genuine admission of sin and the resulting symbolic forgiveness

My objection to the "penal substitutionary" theory is based on the grounds that it does not tally with what we learn from Christ's death in light of the nature of Old Testament sacrifices. It is widely recognised, particularly amongst Western theologians, that the precise meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices cannot be easily recollected because the ritual is far removed

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[22] There is an interesting ongoing debate with regard to the meaning of *azusa*, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[23] It must be noted here that, as the okra, *sunsum* and *ntoro* in human beings are inseparable, it is also logically inferred that if God's unique priest is the personification of the *Okra* of *Onyame,* so *Nyamesofopreko* does necessarily express the triune God.

from Western civilization. Moreover, the biblical data on sacrifice is not self-explanatory seeing that the authors assumed the prior understanding of their target audience.

However, the idea that the sacrificed animal would suffer for the penalty of an offender, seems odd within any conceivably sacrificial system. Likewise, the notion of "penal substitution" does not fit well with any known sacrificial system.

In the primal sacrificial system, the sacrificed animals are not regarded as the bearers of the curse or as punishment. This accounted for the reason why the priest and their attendees could dine on the meat of the animal. The animals that are regarded as the bearers of the curse and impending disaster, are usually not killed, but are left deserted somewhere in the wild instead. Only the outcast of the society and wild animals dine on such animals.

Dunn has suggested that the blood of such accursed animals is drained before the animals' meat is eaten. But such a view fails to explain why the animals are bearers of sin – thus accursed yet the priests eat their meat (Dunn 1991). No traditional African will ever consider such a possibility within the context of sacrifices. Within the wider African context, where rituals of animal sacrifice are still widely practiced not much different from the past, sin sacrifice can at best be interpreted as an admission of sin. In this respect, the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* might throw some light on our understanding of the significance of the death of Christ for us.
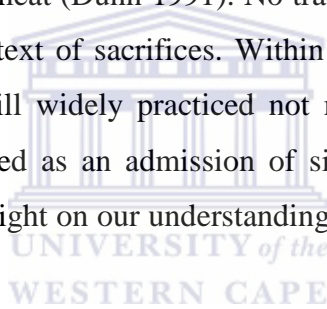
CHAPTER 8

The ecumenical significance of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology

8.1 Introduction

This study seeks to make a contribution from within the Akan context to the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is also an attempt to appeal to a wider ecumenical Christianity. Specifically, I endeavour to reinterpret aspects of the Christian confession of faith as formulated by the Council of Chalcedon (451) that Jesus Christ is "truly God" (*vere Deus*) as well as "truly human" (*vere homo*). In accordance to that, the relationship between these two claims may be understood in terms of the one "person" and the two "natures" of Jesus Christ. In this regard, this chapter addresses two important items: a) Can a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology be recognised as authentic by other Africans and also by Christians worldwide? b) Can a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology be of value to other Christians within their own context?

Before these questions are addressed, a brief summary of the argument of this study is presented in section 8.2. The strengths and weaknesses of *Nyamesofopreko* Christology are then presented in section 8.3. A discussion of the significance of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology in wider Christian circles, under which the above questions are discussed, is offered in section 8.4. This will be followed by a brief conclusion in section 8.5.

8.2 A summary of the argument

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part, which covers the first four chapters, entails reviews of some of the dominant African Christologies – with particular reference to Christologies building on the notion of divine conqueror and ancestor Christologies. In these chapters, the adequacy of these Christologies is assessed with reference to the Nicene/Chalcedonian confessional definition concerning the person of Christ. The conclusion is that these Christologies do not adequately express the person of Christ as truly divine and truly human as defined by the first four ecumenical councils. As a result, these Christologies also express the work of Christ, particularly his atonement, in a less adequate way.

I noted that the methodological problem of discerning the middle way between a Christology "from below" and "from above" is directly associated with the affirmation of the person of

Christ as "truly God and truly human".[1] The two notions must meet at a certain point otherwise the content and the method of the Christology will not be correlated with each other. In other words, any image that expresses the affirmation adequately that Jesus is truly God as well as truly human, intrinsically requires a synthesis of a Christology "from above" and "from below". In this respect, I argued that there is a need for an approach that expresses both the humanity and the divinity of Christ adequately.

In critical dialogue with some African Christologies, particularly the divine conqueror and ancestor Christologies, I proposed a Christology based on the concept of "God's unique priest" (*Nyamesofopreko*) in the second part of the thesis (chapters 5-7).

According to this Christology, three themes were developed. The need for a mediator between God and humanity was discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 then focused on the person of Christ as Mediator between God and humanity. This was followed by a discussion on mediation as the unique work of Christ in Chapter 7. In each case, the core tenets of the Christian faith were related to themes in the traditional Akan culture, worldview, and belief system in an attempt to offer a constructive reinterpretation of such themes.

The core of my proposal is captured in the Akan concept of *okra.* This concept is loosely translated in English as "soul". It could however be better rendered by the concept of "logos" as its dynamic equivalent. This concept pertains the quality of a co-presence of time and eternity – it holds together time and eternity, immanence and transcendence.

In Chapter 5, before introducing the concept of *okra,* I offered an exposition of the term *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest) as a Christological designation which suggests the need for a mediator between God and humankind. This is patterned along other Christological designations such as "Messiah", "Son of Man", and "Son of God".[2] I built on the basis of the traditional Akan myth of *Onyame*'s self-withdrawal and the absence of a priesthood for *Onyame*. In this regard I offered the observation that, in traditional Akan religion and culture, no suitable mediator has been identified that could restore the relationship between God and humanity.

I then developed a constructive proposal on the need for such a mediator. My proposal is that the term *Nyamesofopreko* may be employed to portray Jesus Christ as God's unique priest. In

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[1]   There are ongoing debates with respect to the meaning of the terms Christology "from above" and "from below". It is not my intention to enter into these debates. See also Gunton 1997:10 -55.

[2]   In Chapter 5, I suggested how Jesus who is not Akan, may be accepted amongst the Akan people.

other words, that Jesus is the One who, for the first time, could fulfill this mediating role since he is professed to be a person without sin. As God's unique priest, Jesus mediates between God and humankind, following the alienation between these two (interpreted in the traditional Akan context in terms of the myth of God's withdrawal).

In Chapter 6 I then employed this Akan concept of *okra,* which contains both the properties of that which is divine and human, to suggest that the *Okra* of *Onyame* is incarnated in the person of the *Nyamesofopreko*.

In Chapter 7, the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* was developed to explain the death of Christ as atonement for humankind's sin. The term *afomusuyideɛ* is coined from the two Akan terms *afodeɛ* (sin sacrifice) and *musuyideɛ* (curse bearer) to express the Christian notion of the death of Jesus as a sin sacrifice and acting as "scapegoat". My main contention was that, the death of Jesus as sacrifice may be better interpreted as "one who acknowledged the sin" of humankind before God as a representative. In this respect, for Akan Christians, *Nyamesofopreko* (God's unique priest) becomes our *afomusuyideɛ* (sin sacrifice and curse bearer).

8.3 The strengths and weaknesses of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology

8.3.1 Strengths

Methodologically, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology suggests a synthesis of Christology "from above" and "from below". The proposal also interprets the notion of the "triune God" from within the African context. This suggests a direct relationship between Christology and the Trinity. On the significance of theology to practical life, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology connotes a direct relation between Christology and social ethics and also a direct relationship between atonement and social ethics. Thus a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology may be regarded both as a form of inculturation and of liberation Christology. However, the former takes precedence over the latter.

a) A synthesis of Christology "from above" and "from below"
One of the features of Christology from above is that the *Kerygma* – the proclamation of Christ by the church, forms the basis for understanding Christ. By contrast, a Christology "from below" aims to ground what it has to say about Jesus primarily in the anthropological realm/sphere or, more generally, in that which has to do with time rather than with eternity.

In a Christology "from above", Jesus is usually presented as one who pre-existed as God himself in a non-material world before he also became human in the material world. Thus Christologies from above are usually formulated in the context of a dualistic worldview. With a Christology "from below", the eternal features of Jesus' existence are largely explained as functions, epiphenomena or projections of his humanity. In recent times, stress is placed on the Christology "from below" as the most viable method for Christological discourse. Nonetheless, for those who seek to maintain both the humanity and the divinity of Christ, the need arises for a Christological method that allows for a double movement, corresponding with the human and divine content of the Christological language in this regard.

The reason is that one's approach to the person of Christ inevitably influences the content of one's Christology and soteriology. Notwithstanding this, there is the tendency amongst some scholars to reduce Christology to soteriology. Nonetheless, unless a position on the work of Christ is based upon a belief or statement about who Christ is, a purely subjective theology is likely to result from this (Pannenberg 1968:48). It must also be noted that without any form of synthesis between a Christology "from above" and "from below", reinterpreting of the person of Christ as truly human as well as truly God, remains a pipedream.

Methodologically, the problem of finding the middle way between a Christology "from below" and "from above", is directly associated with the faith affirmation of the person of Christ as "truly God and truly human". In other words, any image that can express the affirmation adequately that Jesus is truly God and truly human, intrinsically requires a synthesis of a Christology "from above" and "from below".

Nonetheless, the riddle follows that if one starts "from below", one can rarely avoid a heresy that is similar to degree Christology – professing in Jesus a divinised man. Likewise, the method of Christology "from above" may also run the risk of docetism. Christology "from below" and "from above" are approaches which are likely to absolutise either "time" or "eternity". While "from below" is likely to render *time* absolute, "from above" is also likely to consider *eternity* in the same vein. The content of the proposed Christology will inevitably be influenced by such methodology.

In response to this dilemma, the core of my proposal is summed up in the Akan concept of *okra*. This concept is loosely translated in English as "soul" but could be better rendered as *Logos* in its dynamic equivalency. This concept provides the notion of a co-presence of time and eternity – in a design that holds together time and eternity, immanence and transcendence.

That is to say, the Akan idea of *okra* may embody the synthesis of the notion of time and eternity.

According to Akan belief, *okra* implies a spark of God's nature that pre-existed with *Onyame*. At one point of its life, *okra* should become *teasefo* (human being) through the normal birth process. At the end of its course of life in the material world, *okra* returns to God. Thus, an Akan mentions *okrateasefo* as the point where sparks of God's nature and human flesh meet (see chapter 6.3).

The traditional Akan speak of the *Okra* of *Onyame* and the *okra* of human beings. The latter is viewed as the sparks of the former. However, whereas the Akan regard the *Okra* of *Onyame* as divine, human beings are not regarded as such (not even as semi-divine). Humans are taken to be embodying sparks of the divine. This may be similar to the church father Origen's concept of a pre-existent soul. As already noted in section 6.4, if one based Christ's divinity on *okra* of human being as both Origen and Karl Rahner have done, the end result would amount to degree Christology.

However, the alternative is to re-appropriate the person of Christ from the essence of divine being as well as from the essence of a human being, as I have done in this thesis. In that case one avoids the situation whereby a human is reconfigured to become God.

Remarkably, the idea of the *Okra* of *Onyame* is not an inference from the notion of *okra* in human beings in terms of the latter serving as the basis for speculation about the former. Rather, it is a distinct traditional Akan belief by itself. The traditional Akan speaks not only of *okra* in human beings as a distinct, yet integral part of being human, but similarly of the *Okra* of *Onyame*. Thus within the Akan thought-form, there is mention of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (similar to the Greek concept of Logos) which is distinct yet inseparable from *Onyame*.

Of course, in some sense, this thesis' proposal may appear to depict a movement from the infinite to the finite. The reason is that *okra* first existed in eternity before becoming human being. This, however, does not strictly make my proposal a Christology "from above".

I argued that *okra* is an eternal absolute Being which unfolds its nature in individual human beings. On the one hand, I perceive *okra* in terms of Being itself. On the other hand, I regard the *okra* (in human beings) as sparks that emanate from Being itself. The Akan concept of *okra* thus suggests the possibility of a union of the concrete with the universal realm. Therefore, *okra* may be said to exist in eternity and time simultaneously.

Moreover, in Akan thought-form, there always exists a form of *okra* which is yet to become

249

human and also a form of *okra* which is already a human being. While some forms of o*kra* become human, some other forms of *okra* have also finished the course of their lives as human beings and have become a non-material embodiment of *okra*.

On this basis, if one proposes that the *Okra* of *Onyame* (God) has at the same time become *teasefo* (human being), it may not look strange to the Akan – as "God trotting on earth". This is because such a movement implies a normal route for *okra*. Jesus as the *Okra* of *Onyame* incarnate may not be regarded as an isolated incursion or intervention into a world totally foreign to him – the *Okra* of *Onyame*.

Thus my proposal may be more appropriately interpreted as based on the notion of a double movement rather than a movement from eternity to time. A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology therefore suggests a synthesis of a Christology "from above" and "from below".

b) A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology and the notion of the triune God from within an African context

African theologians have produced more treatises on Christology than on any other subject. However, the doctrine of the Trinity has received relatively less attention in African theological discourse. The reason given is that the mystery of the Trinity cannot be translated because the African context does not share the metaphysical concern that pretends to be able to separate the nature of Christ from his functions (Pobee 1979:82; Sarpong, 1998:32 and Vähäkangas 2000:35). However, if the doctrine of the Trinity is inherited from the West without original African reflection, then one can hardly maintain that there is a genuine African Christology. African Christology would then be dependent on western conceptions of the Trinity. This will endanger the originality of an African Christology. It will then become only a western Christology decorated with African ideas. Thus, the emergence of genuine African reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity is not only needed; it is a logical outcome of the designs of African Christologies (Vähäkangas 2000:34-35). This section focuses on the necessity and the problem of reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity within the African context, and what a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology may offer in this regard.

If Christ is truly God as well as truly human, the theological inquiry naturally has to proceed to the doctrine of the Trinity. Notwithstanding the necessity of holding Christology and Trinity together, a trinitarian based Christology is yet to be articulated in African theological discourses.

For Mugambi (1998:158), the notion of the Trinity is not clearly expressed in African

Christianity. He notes that, at least in practice, many African Christians identify Jesus with the Holy Spirit and make no distinction between God, Jesus and the third Person of the Trinity. Both Mbiti and Bediako affirmed incidences of such a theological blunder in contemporary African Christian theology.

In African Christological discourse, the socio-economic concerns take precedence over the theological affirmations. Thus, Jesus is presented to the Africans more on the basis of what he can do and is doing, without taking any due regard to the nature of his person. In this respect, the need for an articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as the basis of Christology holds a major challenge for African Christian theologians.

Remarkably, some African theologians, particularly Sarpong (1998:32), appear to have abandoned the possibility of appropriating the Christian confession of the triune God within the African context. His contention is that, the doctrine of the Trinity is "simply beyond the comprehension of any culture". Nonetheless, several attempts have been made to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity from within the African context. Here the review of the Vähäkangas (2000:34) on African trinitarian discourse may be the best available guide.

Firstly, there is an attempt to relate the African family system to the concept of the Trinity. Most often when the theme of the family is discussed in African theology, the doctrinal topic connected to it is the communion within the church. Nonetheless an attempt has also been made to extend this to the subject of the Trinity. For Africans, family in the traditional sense, pertains to the extended family, or clan.

An example of the African family and trinitarian discourse is the African concept of *Ujamaa.* The Swahili word *jamaa* means (extended) "family" and belongs to the basic vocabulary of the language, whereas its derivative *ujamaa* (familyhood) belongs predominantly to political rhetoric.

According to this proposal, African concepts of family are not used as the standard criterion of a proper understanding of the Trinity. Rather, the trinitarian model is used to influence African models of family as well as be interpreted through them. The relationship between the Trinity and the African family model is not based on the number of persons but rather on the Holy Spirit as the bond of trinitarian unity. The primary view is that the African family should reflect the trinitarian communion (Vähäkangas (2000:34-37).

Secondly, there is an attempt to construct a trinitarian theology on the basis of an ancestral model. Nyamiti is an African theologian who has penetrated this notion the deepest in relating

251

the idea of ancestors to the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Nyamiti (1999:34-39), all the ancestral characteristics, except mediation, can be found in the notion of God even if only in an analogical sense. Nyamiti (1984) contends that "no human term or category can apply univocally to God and His creatures". Personally, I would wish to disagree with his contention. My reason is that the Akan concept of *okra* denotes both divine and human characteristics (see Vähäkangas 2000:39).

Nyamiti (1999:35) maintains that ancestral relations exist within the triune God. Thus, in reference to the notion of the Trinity, Nyamiti, implements the following ancestral terminology: The Father is the Ancestor of the Son who is the Descendant. The Holy Spirit is the mutual Oblation of the two. In this regard the influence of Augustine's model of love to understand the triune God is evident.

Thirdly, the African understanding of reality has been compared with the notion of the Trinity. According to Nyamiti (1999:34-39), African understandings of reality always imply being-with-the-others; purely individual non-relational existence is out of the question. The quality or strength of a being is defined by his or her relations to the others. The deeper and more harmonious the union someone enjoys with others, the stronger he or she will be.

By comparison, the notion of the Trinity represents the deepest possible communion of persons. Viewing the African concept of being human in the context of the trinitarian relationships would obviously cohere well. This has become one basis for further theological reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity within the African context.

Unlike the traditional models which attribute the distinctions between the divine persons to their relative opposition, Nyamiti maintains that the personality of each is derived from communion. The deeper one's communion becomes with others, the more fully he or she will exist as a person. Mulago, Penouku and Egbulefu also have attempted to explain the Trinity in this regard (Vähäkangas 2000:33-51).

From this discussion, it should be obvious that the majority of African reflections on the Trinity are based on social analogies or familial relations. The possibility of re-appropriating into the African context the notion of triune God in ontological form, i.e. in terms of rational and relational entities, has also been achieved, albeit to a lesser extent.

Many western theologians, following ecumenical contact with Eastern Orthodox theologians, have been attracted towards the "social analogy" to comprehend the relationship between the unity and the *tri*-unity of the divine persons.

In the midst of such a discourse I offered a trinitarian proposal. This is a logical outcome of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology.

My proposal is based on the concept of *Nyamebaasafua*.[3] It literally means: God-three-one. The term might, linguistically, express the notion of the Trinity adequately.. However, within the Ghanaian context, the term presently still entails a literal translation of the Father (*Agya*), Son (*Oba*) and Holy Spirit (*Sunsum Kronkron*).

I suggest that the composition of *Ntoro*, *Okra* and *Sunsum* may be regarded as the triune *Onyame* (God). This idea is based on three distinct vitalities which are inseparable. As the diagrams 1-A and 1-B indicates (see the Apendix I), Jesus' divine nature is viewed from the perspective of the triune God. This guarantees a Christology that is directly based on the notion of the triune God.

The advantage this hypothesis has over the other proposals is that, the three dimensions, *okra*, *sunsum* and *ntoro,* stand at par with each other. Thus their order of arrangement is arbitrary; the arrangement does not connote any sense of superiority of one over the others. The Akan do not assign any superiority to any of the three invisible vitalities or interpret them in terms of ontological subordination. Moreover, in terms of gender, *okra* and *sunsum* are described as neuter.

On this basis, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology suggests a direct relation between Christology and Trinity. For the details of this discussion, see chapter 6.4.

c) A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology suggests a direct relation between Christology and social ethics

Firstly, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology pertains to an intrinsic correlation between Christology and social ethics. The Akan concept of *okra* does not only relate human beings to God but also serves as common denominator that unites all human beings. This suggests organic relations between Christology and social ethics within the framework of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology.

The concept of *okra* and *nkrabea* (see 6.3) expresses the Akan conviction that human life must be freed as far as possible. It suggests, for instance, that human beings are not embarking on a purposeless mission in this world. It affirms that humans have a mission to

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[3] This term was originally coined by the Akan Roman Catholic Church, probably by Bishop Kwasi Sarpong. I first got acquainted with it when I was learning the Apostle's creed. It is part of catechism in the Roman Catholic Church.

fulfil, a message to deliver – which is the meaning of their existence – and that this mission has been fully endorsed by the creator.

The idea embedded in these concepts is as follows: *Onyame* allows one to determine the life one wants to lead as a human being, amidst human despondency towards evil. In light of this follows a strong lesson that human freedom must not be curtailed, so long as it does not infringe on another person's freedom. One may thus infer the idea of the "supremacy of human freedom" as against any form of tyranny and despotism. From the traditional Akan perspective, one may then hold that ethics must have its foundation only on issues which infringe on another person's freedom.

Secondly, a *Nyamesofopreko* proposal suggests a direct relation between atonement and social ethics. An adequate expression of the work of Christ must have a direct cash purchase in our contemporary ethical "market". Otherwise, Christ's work remains an outmoded ritual which is irrelevant to the contemporary society. In this regard, Hebblethwaite (1997:77) rightly noted: "It is quite impossible, in the context of personal theism, still less in that of Christian trinitarian faith, to treat the goodness of God as an attribute to metaphysical perfection, unrelated to our human notions of moral goodness."

Both my proposal and the penal substitutionary theory are grounded in the notion of Jesus' death as sacrifice. Yet the former may have an advantage over the latter in terms of the moral lessons one may discern from the work of Christ. Here the relevance of my hypothesis to contemporary society lies in the insistence that God forgives sins on the basis of one's acknowledgement of one's sins. This is what Jesus did for humankind. On that basis God showed His mercies and thereby made provisions for the forgiveness of humankind's sins. This obviously serves as a much more improved moral lesson than the ideas embedded within the substitutionary theories. True reconciliation cannot be effected without a genuine "acknowledgment of sins". This is a universal and timely basic principle of reconciliation which the ritual of sin/guilt sacrifices in Africa symbolises.

In this regard, one may conclude that a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology suggests a synthesis of inculturation and liberation Christologies – this serves as the third point. On the one hand, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology is deeply embedded in the religious and cultural realities of Africa. It draws on various aspects of the Akan mythology, history, culture and worldview. An example drawn from the myth of God's withdrawal and the need for a mediator between the Supreme Being and human beings is used in chapter 5. The traditional Akan conceptions

of God and of person are offered in chapter 6 as an affirmation of both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. African (particularly Akan) traditional sacrificial practices were used in chapter 7 to illustrate the meaning of the death of Christ.

On the other hand, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology responds to political and socio-economic realities in present day Africa. The socio-ethical implications of the concept of *okra* are drawn to suggest that we owe socio-economic duties to one another. This assertion is based on the traditional Akan belief that indicates that *Okra* (the nature of God) is the common denominator between individual human beings and God on the one hand, and between individual human beings on the other hand. In this respect, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology combines both the ideals of inculturation and liberation Christologies.

8.3.2 Weaknesses

Notwithstanding the strengths of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology, there are a number of theological criticisms which may be raised against this proposal. These include the following: a) It has done less justice to the *parousia* and the final judgment of Jesus Christ, b) It runs the risks of obscuring the significance of biblical revelation by juxtaposing biblical and African accounts and c) Interpreting the atoning death of Jesus solely from a sacrificial perspective remains an inadequate Christology.

a) Less justice to *parousia,* the final judgment of Jesus Christ and the notion of hell?

A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology may be able to offer an account of the incarnation, sinlessness, resurrection, ascension, and the sitting at the right hand of the Father. However it is less evident that such a approach may do justice to the traditional Christological theme of the *parousia*, the final judgment of Jesus Christ and the Christian notion of hell. There are no analogies to these themes within the Akan worldview. The problem lies with the differences between the respective concepts of time and history.

In a sense one might refer to the "final judgment" of individuals within the Akan context. To the traditional Akan, *Onyame's* abode is in the sky, while the human abode is on earth. There is a belief amongst the Akan that each individual human being through his or her *okra* will return to give an account before God of his or her life. Such a belief entails judgment, but it is strictly an individual judgment, not a corperate one.

This differs from the Christian notion of judgment that entails the expectation that this universe will one time change radically or come to an end. Jesus will return – *parousia* – hold

corperate judgment and the righteous will go to heaven and the sinners will go to hell.

However, according to the Akan belief, no one is eternally damned. The Akan believe that those who could not qualify to become ancestors will not get entry into bliss (the place of rest for the ancestors). Nonetheless, the spirit of those who could not qualify as ancestors will roam about as ghosts until they are reborn. One may suggest that this type of return into the world implies a kind of re-incarnation. Thus, the Christian concept of hell has no analogy within the Akan worldview and is therefore foreign to the Akan traditional thinking.

In this regard, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology focusing on the Akan context as the recipient of Christian ideas, may not be able to express the Christian notion of the *parousia*, the "final universal Judgment" at one time and the Christian notion of hell (Sarpong 2002:99).

b) Inadequacy of interpreting the atoning death of Jesus solely from sacrificial perspective

A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology interprets the atoning death of Jesus solely from a sacrificial perspective. To understand the mediation of Christ as priesthood, presupposes the atoning death of Jesus as vicarious sacrifice. Indeed, it is by means of Christ's death as sacrifice that other atonement views were discussed. However, one may contend that the soteriological significance of Christ's atoning death cannot be reduced to one line of interpretation, namely sacrifice. It may be argued that it will be at best a too narrow and one sided approach to salvation and at worst, a misrepresentation or failure to capture the richness of Christ's work. Christ's death amounts to more than sacrifice. Sacrifice is essential, but it offers only one line of understanding the significance of Christ's death for humankind.

c) The risks of obscuring the significance of biblical revelation

A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology also runs the risk of obscuring the significance of biblical revelation by simply juxtaposing biblical and African accounts. The approach of studying the biblical account together with similar accounts from approximately a similar background, has several disadvantages. Perhaps, the most notable of these is that, comparing the similarities between the Christian story and the related African one would tend to obscure the significant differences. This is particularly the case when one compares the biblical story of the fall with the African version of the myth of God's withdrawal. It somehow becomes difficult for Akan Christians to argue with the traditional Akan as to why the story of God's withdrawal is a myth and why the account of the fall in Genesis could be regarded as more. Of course, some Christians regard the biblical account of the fall in Genesis as a myth as well.

Moreover, following the approach of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology, a traditional Akan might argue: If it is possible to view *Onyame* as the triune God within the Akan context, why would one then restrict the notion of God's revelation to one particular culture and history only? A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology may therefore be used as a instrument to defend the African traditional religion as an embodiment of God's revelation which is on par with the biblical revelation. There would thus be no need to portray the Christian faith as African traditional religion's final fulfillment.

It has already been indicated that the myths, stories and the history of the Akan may be regarded as the shadow of better things to come, which are fulfilled in Christ. It was further argued that, even if it can be proved that African traditional religion is capable to absorb the mystery of God, it does so from within a Christian framework of understanding. While an attempt has been made to delineate my position from possible misinterpretations, it is nonetheless evident that such arguments concern Christians more than non-Christians.

8.4 The significance of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology within in wider Christian circles

This study is a contribution from within the Akan context. It is also an attempt to contribute to a a wider ecumenical Christianity. In this regard, this section has to address two important themes: a) Can a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology be recognised as authentic by other Africans and also Christians worldwide? b) May a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology be of value to other Christians within their own context?

8.4.1 Would *Nyamesofopreko* Christology be recognised as authentic by other Africans and also Christians worldwide?

This thesis is primarily associated with the Nicene/Chalcedon confessional definition of the person of Christ. During the course of searching for materials for this study, the question was usually posed to me: Why do you seek to "import" the 5th century Chalcedonian fomulation into 21st century African Christianity?

Indeed, in this age, it seems that creeds are regarded more often than not as outmoded restrictions on the free play of thought and imagination. In light of this a thesis that re-appropriates Nicene/Chalcedonian Christianity, and in particular the creed associated with these councils, is to say the least, out of the ordinary. For some theologians, the Chalcedon definition about the person of Christ is outmoded in character, therefore need not be followed as reference point for 21st century Christianity.

At the Council of Chalcedon, almost all the Eastern Churches refused to ratify the formulation. Later on, some strong reactions also came from some members of Western traditional Churches which adopted the Chalcedon definition of the person of Christ as its confessional point of reference (see Lane 1982 and Need 1995).

Such reactions come from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives. Some major publications from Roman Catholic theologians who have abandoned Chalcedon are those by Schoonenberg (1977) Schillebeeckx (1982) and Küng (1980). Some major publications from Protestant theologians who also abandoned Chalcedon include those by Flesseman (1972) and Robinson (1973). Amongst the contemporary theologians, Pannenberg has also registered his protest against Chalcedon. For him Chalcedon is unavoidably dualistic. Dunn (1977) and Bauer (1972) have also expressed dissatisfaction about applying Chalcedon as point of reference for Christological assessment.

Some African theologians, particularly Pobee (also an Akan), have also registered protest against the Chalcedonian Creed. Since the primary focus of this thesis is on Akan Christianity, it is necessary to analyse Pobee's concern against Chalcedon in more detail. This is especially crucial in the light of Pobee's claims that functional Christology fits better within the Akan context than my proposal of ontological Christology would.

According to Pobee (1979:82), "the process of philosophical abstraction from the concrete biblical texts which has been the chief trend of Western theology is not … effective in Africa, at least if theology is to engage the church as a whole and not just the initiates."

Pobee notes that in any discussion of Christology, one sooner or later has to make some reference to the Nicene/Chalcedon definition as the reference point of orthodox Christianity. However, for Pobee, the definition was an attempt of a predominantly Hellenistic society to articulate its belief in Jesus in terms of the language and concepts of that time. Thus, as he views it, some of the terms and concepts of the formula are alien to our current and modern language and thought-forms – whether in Europe or Africa, America or Asia. He particularly questions the contemporary relevance of the key terms in the Chalcedon definition such as substance, person and hypostasis in their technical Chalcedonian sense (Pobee 1979:82-83).

For Pobee, Chalcedonian Christology is at best based on one of the Christological assumptions in the New Testament. He contends that the Creed was an attempt to "translate" the biblical faith into the then contemporary language and thought-forms. However, the worldview and language assumed at Chalcedon do not allow the definition to become

serviceable within any modern context. For Pobee, this makes it necessary to get behind the formula towards the biblical faith. Thus the Christological point of reference is the biblical texts and not the Chalcedonian definition. Having taken such a stance, Pobee has obviously undermined the legitimacy of Nicene/Chalcedonian Christianity as reference point for Christological discourse. This goes a long way to say that, any Christological proposal which uses the Chalcedonian Creed as a point of departure, would tend to forfeit its authenticity – whether in Africa or elsewhere in the Christian world.

Pobee contends that our intellectual indebtedness to Greco-Roman culture has predisposed us to keep on discussing Christology in metaphysical terms. He argues that the biblical approach is different. With reference to the Trinity, Pobee contends that the ontological relations within the Godhead are absent in the biblical faith [piety]. For him, this amounts to mere metaphysical speculations about Christ. Such an assertion inevitably undermines the importance of the concepts of the triune God and the hypostatic union of the person of Christ which the Council of Chalcedon promulgated (Pobee 1979:82).

Nonetheless, as Pobee views it, Christology in the context of the "biblical faith" was present in hugely functional terms of Jesus concerning his actions. Having taken the approach of degree Christology, Pobee has truncated the Chalcedonian definition of the person of Christ in terms of Christ confessed as truly God as well as truly human.

From this discussion, it is already evident that Pobee has rejected a Nicene/Chalcedon Christology, particularly, insofar as it is proposed as reference point. He would probably also object to any other Christological proposal that employs a Chalcedonian definition of the person of Christ as a point of departure.[4]

Here my reaction and intention is not to defend the Nicene/Chalcedon notions per se, but instead to explain the necessity and the relevance of a re-appropriation of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon's design into 21st century Akan, African and ecumenical Christianity. In this manner one may also explicate the essence and relevance of the ecumenical councils with regard to contemporary Christianity. The crux of the matter is that, if the Council of Chalcedon's design is not relevant for contemporary ecumenical Christianity, its authenticity

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[4]   Pobee has noted that his colleague J. Christopher Thomas had already expressed his dissatisfaction about his opposition between the Creed and the New Testament. However, he explained that this is not exactly the case. Instead, he is of the view that "both the New Testament and the Creed agree on the essentials of Christology, namely humanity and Divinity of Jesus Christ." Pobee also noted that he is not claiming that "we can go back to a simple gospel which is conceptually neutral" (Pobee 1979:165). However, if one reads Pobee's book *Towards an African Theology* (1979: 81-83), one may still agree with Pobee's colleague J. Christopher Thomas in this regard.

for Akan Christians would also be questionable.

Pobee has noted rightly that the New Testament presents several Christological assumptions. Dunn has also argued that there are several Christological assumptions in the New Testament and that the Chalcedonian view just happened to have become the dominant one. In this regard a question needs to be raised: If one, from the Bible, can view different Christological assumptions to construct Christology, and the Chalcedon definition "faithfully" represents one such assumption, what then, is the concern, if one re-appropriates the content of Chalcedonian definition of the person of Christ within the Akan context? That is, considering the fact that African, particularly the Ghanaian Christianity, is largely pro-Chalcedon inclined? Let us return to the question: Why does one make use of the Chalcedonian formula as a basis for contextualization? Obviously, this contestation betrays the bias of the anti-Chalcedon sentiment.

The language of the Chalcedon formula has been described as static in character by Pannenberg, Pobee and others (Pannenberg 1968:29-33; Pobee 1979:82). Again it is contended that Chalcedon's design is a by-product, and does not represent the biblical narratives. For this reason, it might or might not accurately represent the biblical faith.

However, a response to these contentions is: If one is to construct contextualized Christology on the basis of one of several so called Christological assumptions in the Bible, would the end-product not also entail a "by-product" of the biblical faith, and for that matter also be liable for misconception concerning the person of Christ – the same misappropriation Nicene/Chalcedon is accused of? Interestingly, whether or not Pobee's degree (functional) Christology faithfully represents the totality of the person of Christ, as being portrayed in the Scripture, is another issue worth considering; but this would go beyond the scope of this thesis (see Pobee 1979:82).

Obviously, the church in African would gain much by standing with Nicene/Chalcedon which is duly represented in the tradition of mainline Christianity rather than an individual Christian Christological proposal which is in conflict with the ecumenical councils.

The importance of ecumenical councils lies with the Church Fathers' efforts to protect the essentials of the Christian theology from degenerating into relativism whereby each Christian holds a belief as he or she understands it. This would have been the case if an individual Christian would have to select any of the several so called New Testament Christological assumptions to fit their situations. This is not to say that individual Christians are not at

liberty to exegete the content of biblical passages and arrive at what they each deem to be the right meaning of the text. The aim of the ecumenical councils was to guide Christians with regard to the essentials of Christian doctrines.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that the decisions of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon were arrived at amidst conflicts. This leads us to the second major charge against the authenticity of Nicene/Chalcedon as reference point for ecumenical Christianity. There is a contention against the ecumenical councils that their decisions have previously served as a spring board for disunity and that this continues up to this day. For this reason, it would be illegitimate for one to promote Nicene/Chalcedon as basis for contextualized Christology or as postulate for a new ecumenism.

Again, if such an indictment on Nicene/Chalcedon, which serves as its negative outcome, has more weight than the Councils' positive outcomes, then, the authenticity of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology, which is primarily based on Nicea/Chalcedonian Christology, becomes irrelevant.

It must be noted, however, that in the world of human beings, no ideological position could be maintained without conflict. Christian doctrines could therefore be no exception. These disunities, though not desirable, ensued from the Church Fathers' bona fides – to maintain the church unity in Christ and its identity as Christian. For this reason such disunity could be regarded as a necessary evil.

Besides, one will overstate one's case if disunity could only be associated with the ecumenical councils. These Councils' aim was Unity in Christ and the church identity as being Christian. For that matter, such a noble aim has been largely achieved if one would compare the Church today with the ecumenical creeds to what it would have looked like had there not been any ecumenical Council.

Of course, comparing an existing situation with a non-existence alternate one, and declaring the existing situation as a better option is based on the fallacy – argument from silence. Usually such arguments are not regarded as strong ones. Nonetheless, if one is to compare a community with communal point of references (i.e., laws), with a community without any such point of reference, it is more probable that the former would have an advantage over the latter.

Without any form of theological unity, theological discourse could degenerate into confusion. For this reason, from the early days of the church, the decisions of the ecumenical councils

have been taken as adequate summaries of both the biblical witness and the preaching and teaching of the church. The decisions of the councils served both as a means of identification and the basis for unity. These decisions provided and continue to provide a norm both for reading the scriptures and for evangelism and instruction (Turner 2001:9 also see Geddes 1980).

These ecumenical decisions have anchored the church in beliefs and practices without which the church in Ghana, Africa and the rest of the world can preserve neither its unity in Christ nor its identity as being Christian. In keeping with this view, I hold that theology as a practice of the church is responsible to the doctrines of the church as derived from Holy Scripture and expressed in the ecumenical decisions.

Thus, for any Christological proposal to be relevant and authentic, it has to be based on the following: biblical narratives, a thorough inhabiting of the traditions of the church, and a critical engagement with the age in which we live. This conviction provides a necessary basis for the renewal and reunion of the divided Church not only amongst the Akan but also worldwide between Christians. This is what I have attempted through a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology.

African Christianity is largely pro Nicene/Chalcedon. As noted in chapter 1, the missionaries who introduced Christianity to West Africa were largely affiliated to the churches who, at least, officially adhered to Nicene/Chalcedonian decisions. The church in West Africa has subsequently remained largely pro-Nicene/Chalcedonian. For this very reason, would it not be more appropriate, if one wants to engage in responsible theological reflection, to set the Nicene/Chalcedon confessional definition of the person of Christ as the appropriate point of reference for a contextualised Christology?

Only when the African church anchors its faith within the tradition of the church that the church can assess proposals which do not cohere well with the doctrines of the ecumenical church.

8.4.2 Can a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology be of value to other Christians within their own contexts?

I have captured the argument of this study with three Akan terms, namely the conglomerates *Nyamesofopreko* and *Afomusuyideɛ* as well as the concept of *Okra*. Such characterisations may appear to be a major stumbling block for the ecumenical significance of a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology. One might dismiss the whole thesis as an inculturated edition

of local theology – which does not have any wider theological appeal. The pertinent question in this regard would be: What if one does not share the Akan view that human beings are composed of *okra*, *sunsum, ntoro* and *mogya*? Although these concepts are drawn largely from the Akan context and are partly applicable to the general African context, they may in my view be recognised ecumenically and they could have ecumenical significance.

a) The core meaning of the myth of God's withdrawal could have ecumenical Christian significance

A *Nyamesofopreko* Christology draws on African mythology, with reference to the myth of God's withdrawal. The core meaning of this myth concerns a broken relationship between God and humankind.

This thesis builds on the traditional Akan myth of *Onyame*'s self-withdrawal and the absence of a priesthood for *Onyame*. The observation was offered that, in traditional Akan religion and culture, no suitable mediator has been identified that could restore the relationship between *Onyame* and humanity. This observation is followed by a constructive proposal on providing such a mediator.

The proposal is that the term *Nyamesofopreko* may be employed to portray Jesus Christ as God's unique priest, i.e. as the One who, for the first time, could fulfill this mediating role since he is professed to be a person without sin. As God's unique priest, Jesus mediates between God and humankind, following the alienation between them (interpreted within the traditional Akan context in terms of the myth of God's withdrawal).

This myth is not unique to the Akan. With some slight differences it is a shared by many different societies in Africa. Africans do not consider this myth as a historical fact, but draw on the core message which the myth entails.

Given that it is not the story itself that matters to the African, but rather its embedded message, the core meaning of the myth of God's withdrawal could also be recognised as having ecumenical significance for other Christians worldwide.

b) The proposal of *okra* as Christian concept could be recognised ecumenically and might have ecumenical significance

The characterisation of *okra* as a Christological concept, may also appear to be the major question for the ecumenical significance of such a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology. However, this argument is not so strong. The reason is that the Akan conception of being human, like those of the Greeks, Hebrews or any other, is not a structure that one can allude to as being

factual. Even, the theological dichotomy of human body and mind cannot be taken at its face value as factual.

The different conceptions of humanity are assumptions of being human, based on the expressions of diverse cultures. That is to say, any anthropological notion is necessarily posed from a particular perspective. Even the materialist view of a human being as constituted by material components only, cannot be taken as a statement of facts. This enables one to communicate and expand the moment, to remember the past and to anticipate the future.

Besides, one might pose the question: If Greek Christians can apply the concept of Logos as an analogy to express the Christian faith, why can the Akan concept of *okra* not be used in similar vein, especially if the concept of *okra* may be used to express Christian beliefs?

On this basis, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology, although it takes its point of departure from the Akan anthropology and culture, could be recognised ecumenically and might have ecumenical significance for other Christian theological discourses.

c) The core meaning of Akan "sin sacrifice" could have ecumenical Christian significance

I suggested that Jesus did not die to pay the penalty of our sins. Rather, he died as *afodeε* and *musoyideε (afomusuyideε),* that is, to acknowledge our sins and remove our sins and the curse that accompany them.

This hypothesis is based on the traditional Akan understanding of sin sacrifice and curse removal. These traditional practices are also found in many African, particularly West African, societies. I argued that these practices have close similarities with the practices of sacrifice relayed by the Old Testament teaching and in Judaism as well as that of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

The concept of *afomusuyideε* pivots on "reconciliation" as the most probable aim of the ancient sacrifices. It also entails that a genuine "acknowledgement of sin" is symbolised by the ritual of sacrificing the animal to serve as precursor to forgiveness and reconciliation. One could agree with Conradie that such sacrifices can never ensure full remuneration. It is offered as a symbol of the whole and accepted on that basis. Even though the deficit can never be redressed, the sacrifice needs to be commensurate with the gravity of the offense – as far as this might be possible. Conradie describes this in terms of the notion of a "deficit"[5].

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[5] This is derives from oral discussions with Prof. Conradie of the Department of Religion and Theology,

Such a view expresses adequately the timely and universally well accepted principle of reconciliation. On this basis, the concept of *afomusuyideɛ* based on the Akan sacrificial practices, could also have ecumenical significance for other expressions of the Christian faith.

8.5 Conclusion

To sum up the proposal of this thesis: The person of Jesus is presented as God's unique priest (*Nyamesofopreko*): he is the incarnation of the *Okra* of *Onyame* (*Nyamekrateasefo*). The purpose of this incarnation was that the *Okra* of *Onyame* through the person of God's unique priest became the *Afomusuyi* (sin sacrifice and curse bearer) for humankind.

Logically, any complete Christology serves as a prolegomena for reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the case when Jesus' divinity is not denied; denial leads to the rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity as well. Thus my proposal rests on the foundation of faith in the triune God. This was conceptualised as *Nyamebaasafua,* that is, *Onyame Ntoro* (God the Father) *Onyame Okra* (God the Son) and *Onyame Sunsum Kronkron* (God the Holy Spirit).

The characterisation of *okra* and also *Nyamesofopreko, Afomusuyideɛ and Nyamebaasafua* as Christological concepts, might also appear to be the major problem for my proposal to be regarded as ecumenically significant. However, this argument does not hold. The reason is that, for example, the Akan conception of being human, like those of the Greeks, Hebrews or any other, does not entail a structure or entity that one can allude to as being factual. The different conceptions of humanity are assumptions to explain what it means to be human. That is to say, any anthropological assumptions are necessarily derived from a particular perspective. Nonetheless, they could serve as operational concepts.

On this basis, the relevant question remains: If Greek Christians can apply the concept of Logos as a core concept to express the Christian faith, and if that can indeed become a viable ecumenical concept, why can the Akan concept of *okra* not be used in similar vein to express core Christian beliefs?

Thus, a *Nyamesofopreko* Christology, although it takes its point of departure from the Akan anthropology and culture, may be recognised ecumenically and may have ecumenical significance for wider Christian theological discourses.

University of the Western Cape South Africa, on 17th September 2007.

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Illustrative Diagrams: Incarnation, two natures in one person and Trinity

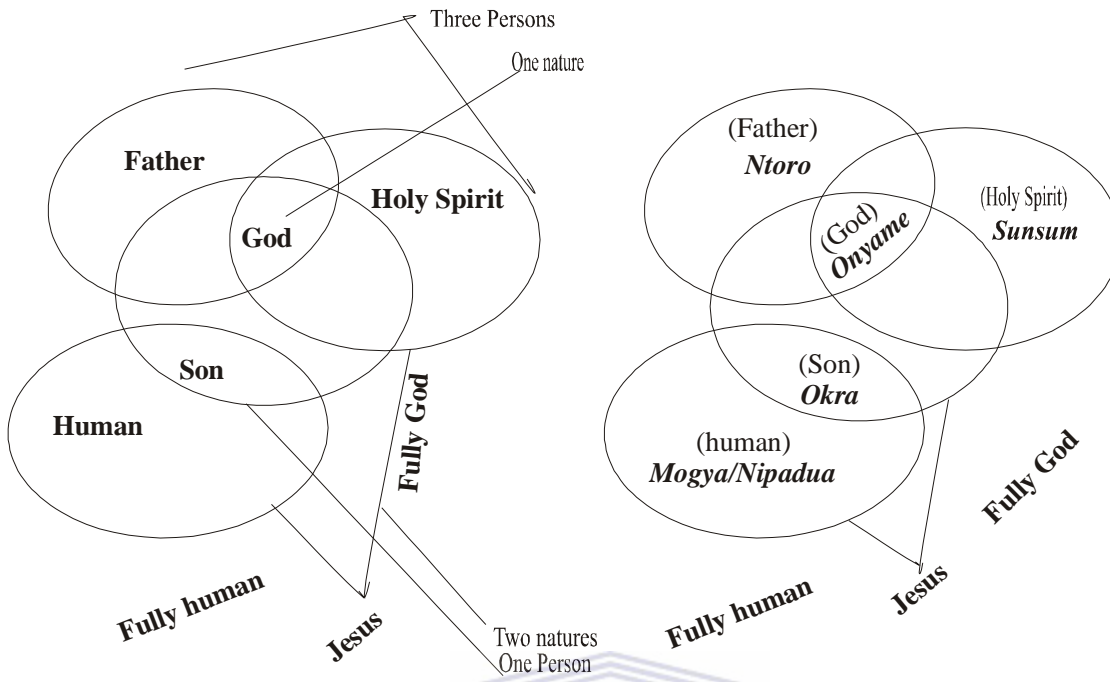**<u>Incarnation / Two natures in one person</u>**

Three Persons

One nature

Father

Holy Spirit

God

Son

Human

Fully God

Fully human

Jesus

Two natures
One Person

<u>Diagram 1- A</u>

(Father)
Ntoro

(Holy Spirit)
Sunsum

(God)
Onyame

(Son)
Okra

(human)
Mogya/Nipadua

Fully God

Fully human

Jesus

<u>Diagram 1- B</u>

<u>Fully human with spark of God's nature</u>

ntoro

sunsum

mogya

okra
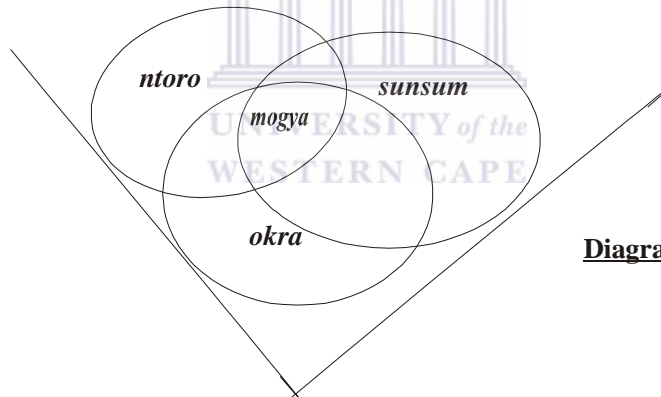
<u>Diagram 2</u>

<u>Trinity: Three persons in Godhead(*Nyamebaasafoa*)</u>

Father
(*Ntoro*)

Holy Spirit
(*Sunsum*)

God
(*Onyame*)

Son
(*Okra*)

<u>Diagram 3-A</u>

Ntoro

Sunsum

Onyame

Okra

<u>Diagram 3-B</u>

281