

Models of African Christology: Some Factors Favourable To Their Development

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Abstract

It has become almost trite saying that the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to Africa. This is seen in the number of Africans who have become Christians, the number, that is, who have declared their faith in the Lordship and salvation of Jesus Christ. This belief of theirs has seen them form a thousand and one images and models of Him. By descriptive cum analytical methodology, this study endeavoured to unearth the factors that gave birth to these models. While it laid no claim to have exhausted all the factors, from the ones that it made known, it was able to establish that more than one of the factors could, at one point in time, influence a particular African christian and, indeed, theologian, in the development of his or her own model. And since Christ remains a mystery that can never be captured by any one model, it found out as well that more models will, therefore, see the light of the day tomorrow. These, however, would always bank on more and different factors that would never exclude, as a matter of fact, the realities of Scripture and tradition. The study remains, at the end of the day, a valuable contribution to the ever-growing field of African Christology.

Keywords: Models, Factors, African Christology, Development, Jesus Christ, African Christians.

Introduction

It has been established that in the house of theology in Africa today, the greatest space has been given to Christ. Yes, the study of this same Christ, that is, Christology, remains, as it were, the most advanced of the different segments that make up the house of African theology. In fact, there seems to be abroad today a certain level of unrestrained Christological “diarrhea”, a christological boom, that shows no signs of abating. This is evident in the number of models or images of Christ that has been developed by Christians and theologians in Africa. This, as they endeavour to answer the question: “Who do you say I am?” (Mk.8:29) - a question, Stinton(2004, 29) observes, is “addressed to every individual and generation in every context”.

Among such models and images mention must be made of the Christus-Victor model developed by Mbiti (1972), Proto-Ancestral model by Bujo(1992), the Brother-Ancestral model by Nyamiti(1994) the Healer model developed by Kolié (1991), the King model developed by Manus (1993), the Chief model by Kabasélé (1991), the Liberator model by Ela (1986), the Guest model by Udo (1988), the

Master-of-Initiation model by Sanon (1991), Elder-Brother model by Sawyerr(1963), and the Nganga model by Schoffeleers (1994). There is also, among others, the Mother model developed by some African women theologians and deriving, according to Okure(2001), “from the cultural view of the woman as the embodiment of life, the one who gives birth to life. The continent itself is fondly called “Mama Africa”. If Jesus is ‘the life’ and our source of enduring life (cf. John 14.6), it follows naturally for African women that he be called Mother”(243).

Since there is no smoke without fire, this paperendeavours to look at and, at the same time, unravel some of the factors that occasioned the emergence and development of the aforementioned models and more, an emergence that at kind of puts calm to the fearsof people like Fashole-Luke (cited in Clarke, 2011, 1), who, some years ago, had lamented that, “there are no signs that christological ideas are being wrestled with by Africans”.

FACTORS FAVOURABLE TOTHE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS

a. A Positive Re-Assessment of African Religious Culture and Tradition: Africa’s encounter with Christian missionaries had its positives and negatives. While of the positives mention must be made of the introduction of Jesus Christ, rather than God, to the African’s religious consciousness(Muzorewa, 2000, 34), one of the negatives was that some of the missionaries entertained the notion that African culture in its entirety was pagan, barbaric and heathen. For them, there was nothing good in it. “They condemned”, says Fashole-Luke(1978, 357), “without proper evaluation African religious beliefs and practices”. Together with slave traders and the colonialists, they, consciously or unconsciously, helped, therefore, to construct the Western perception of Africans as “savage, ignorant and superstitious”(Bediako, cited in Ezigbo, 2010, 4). This negative perception of African culture, however, had to be attacked by most Africans, theologians included. In fact, Baur(1994) maintains that, “the most outstanding result of African theological endeavours so far has been the positive re-evaluation of traditional African religious and cultural values”(38). This, to the extent that today Maluleke(1997,10) can say that, “African culture and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have long been acknowledged as the womb out of which African Christian theology must be born”.

But this author believesthat they can also be said to be the womb from which, specifically, the aforementioned models of African christology were born. “African religion and culture”, Oduyoye observes, “furnish the language of Christologies that describe Jesus as an ancestor, a king or elder brother”(2002 a, 152). This, of course, is not surprising since Idowu (1965, 25) could not have been any more correct in his observation that, “If God of our redemption is the same as the God of creation, then, in constructing an African christology, the primal religions of Africa cannot be ignored”. Hence, while there is always need for caution so that, “The images of culture used to understand Jesus Christ should not overshadow the person of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture” (Lutterodt, 2015, 17),the fact still remains that showing that African culture could provide the language that could image Jesus as our master of initiation, ancestor, elder brother etc., and thus proving that he could be identified with African “things”, has a way of boosting the self-esteem of

Africans. In this sense, then, the following from Furlong (1986, 300) may be applied to what is at stake here, thus:

[I]n the process of acquiring self-esteem a despised group needs to feel not only God's sympathy and interest but actual identification. I need to feel God is like me before I can fully trust in her\him or in myself. Someone else God – male, powerful, rich, white, western, whatever it may be – is of no use as an incarnation image. Only by finding God in myself can I discover who I am.

b. Magisterial-cum-Individual Exhortations: When men and women are challenged they do better; they often achieve more than they could imagine. In the post-missionary history of African christology, there could be detected instances of such challenges and exhortations thrown, at different places and times, at the African Church and ipso facto its theologians. Mention must be made of Paul VI's, "you may, and you must, have an African Christianity" (1969, 12). There is also John Paul II's following observation: "By respecting, preserving and fostering the particular values and riches of your people's cultural heritage, you will be in a position to lead them to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ, which is to be lived in the noble, concrete and daily experiences of African life. There is no question of adulterating the word of God, or of emptying the Cross of its power, but rather of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life and of lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself African" (1980, 6). Though Ela's experience is known, as would be shown later, to have had a hand in his christological constructions, the impact of the aforementioned exhortations, especially the former, on him and, then, on his christological model, may not be downplayed (1988, xiii).

In the same vein, one must register the significance of the observation made in 1963 by the British missionary, John V. Taylor. "Christ has been presented", he had said, "as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church Universal?" (16). Ezigbo (2010, 6) had termed this observation by Taylor, "Taylorian Christological Presupposition". According to him, "Interestingly, the emergence of constructive African contextual Christology is indebted to the writings of some Western missionaries, particularly the British missionary John V. Taylor [...]. In *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion*, Taylor asked [...] questions that triggered a paradigm shift in Jesus-talk among African theologians [...]. These questions have continued to inspire many theologians to undertake constructive Christologies from a contextual spectrum" (5-6).

c. A Deeper Appreciation of the Scriptures: It was Newman (2005, 339) who had once observed, that, "The divines [theologians] of the Church are in every age engaged in regulating themselves by Scripture, appealing to Scripture in proof of their conclusions, and exhorting and teaching in the thoughts and language of the

Scripture. Scripture may be said to be the medium in which the mind of the Church has energized and developed". And true as his observation could be, truer is the fact that African theologians are all the more engaged in this appreciation of, self-regulation by and appeal to Scripture. This is because they, like many other Africans, find that the Bible "has a ring of truth about it, that its language, proverbs, and ideals of morality and justice are very close to the world they know and understand"(Oduyoye, 1995, 35). Yes, together with Mbiti(1980), they are aware not only of the fact that, "Any viable theology must and should have a biblical basis,[...and that] Nothing can substitute for the Bible", but also that, "As long as African theology keeps close to the Scriptures, it will remain relevant to the life of the church in Africa and it will have lasting links with the theology of the church universal" (122).

How much aware they are of this and how much a role, consequently, the bible plays in the formulation and development of the above christological models could be gleaned by the efforts each of the proponents of the models made in order to assert the biblical foundation of his or her model. Goergen (2001, 27), for instance, had proposed the model of "Jesus as Host" and he would soon gloat:

Jesus as host is a biblical image, and various African writers have stressed the importance of the Scriptures for doing theology in Africa. One of the fundamental characteristics of the biblical, earthly Jesus was his solidarity with people. He welcomed them, and they felt welcomed by him. He responded to their innate human dignity, and they could sense his respect for them.

Manus (1993), on his own part, would not only point out the obvious: that the "origin of the Christian faith is biblical"(28), but would also boldly put the rider "New Testament Christology" to the title of his model, "Christ, The African King". According to him, a "New Testament Christology which is constructed on the person and the salvific role of Christ in the kingdom of God and how these facts are analogically related to one of the principal concepts derived from the value-system of traditional African kingships is in no way bizarre"(24). In fact, he would confess that despite having stressed African and native ideas, his purpose is "to remain faithful to the criteria of rigorous exegesis and biblical confession"(32).

However, it is good to point out that the use of the same bible by these theologians always involved a kind of creative dialogue between it, the bible, that is, and the African context, eventuating, as it were, in a model of interpretation as conversation. "This model", according to the duo of Pope-Levison and Levison (1992), "recognizes that the interpreter engages the Bible as a dialogue partner with specific questions that arise from his or her context. The goal of interpretation is to allow the conversation between the Bible and its interpreters to develop a life of its own. Deepest insight and relevance lie neither in the original meaning of the Bible alone nor in the contemporary context but in the to-and-fro of question and answer between them. The relationship between them can be understood as the fusion of two horizons. The text represents the first horizon, and the context, the second horizon. The ultimate goal of interpretation is to fuse these horizons in a way that is

contiguous with the past and relevant to the present”(15-16). Not yet done and in a bid to pedagogically exemplify the foregoing, they would maintain:

This model of interpretation can be illustrated by the African portrait of Jesus as Elder Brother. In the Bible, the first horizon, Jesus is the first-born. In the many African cultures, the second horizon, the elder brother is the first within a family to become a full member of the tribe by completing the rites of passage (e.g., birth, the initiation into adulthood, marriage). These are obviously two distinctive horizons: elder brother is hardly a dominant biblical designation for Jesus, nor is Jesus an African by birth. However, in the fusion of biblical and African horizons, Jesus becomes Elder Brother. As Elder Brother, Jesus is transformed to become truly an African, meshed in the kinship fibres of tribal African life. The African rites of passage are transformed because Jesus fulfils them with the ultimate rite, the resurrection. The result therefore, is a creative fusion that goes beyond both horizons(16).

But the foregoing need and often obsession to give a biblical foundation to their theological or rather, christological articulations, and ensure, as it were, this “creative fusion that goes beyond both horizons”, while, at the same time, escaping from the criticisms of some African theologians like Ilo(2011, 4) who observed some time ago that “these images in African theological writings are speculative creations, often not rooted in biblical evidence”, has not, however, come without its problems. Sometimes, what Oduyoye(2000) once said of the reading of the bible in Africa generally, seem to be applicable, here “Throughout Africa”, she said, “the Bible has been and continues to be absolutized: it is one of the oracles that we consult for instant solutions and responses”(174). At other times, one sees a situation where the exponents of the models would only “skate over the New Testament materials”(Manus, 1993, 19) or even indulge in approaches to the bible that would appear reductionist. For instance, Magesa (1991, 153-154)it was who had developed the model of “Christ as the Liberator” maintaining that, “The Christ Event, the act of salvation or redemption of the human race by Christ, can be described in terms of liberty, the happiness of every human person, the breaking of every kind of chain that binds humanity - in a word, humanity’s emancipation”. But Ukpong(1984) would once accuse him of belonging to this category of those who indulge in reductionist interpretation of the bible. “Magesa”, he points out, “has a biblical orientation and goes to the Bible for an understanding of liberation. His approach to the Bible is, however, reductionist. For example, the story of the cure of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12; Mt 9: 1-8; Lk 5:17-26) is, for him, the model for understanding the history of salvation; it is ‘a dramatization of the process of liberation’” (529).

d. The Reality of Christian Tradition: If tradition, as Pelikan (1971, 7) would observe, “means the handing down of Christian teaching during the course of the history of the Church, but it also means that which was handed down”, under this very factor of Christian tradition, therefore, one can point, for instance, to the

influence of Dogmatic Christological conciliar formulations, which forms part of this tradition. But it was Akinwale(2010) who, not long ago, made a wonderful observation in view of contemporary African inculturation theology, an observation whose christological implications are quite relevant to what is at stake, here. “Inculturation theology”, he had begun, “as it has been done so far on the African continent, betrays attempts at communication without sufficient attention to doctrines, foundations, dialectic, history and research. At least two consequences can be identified. The first consequence is that our inculturation theology has neither retrieved nor appropriated the faith that comes to us from the apostles. The second is the less careful retrieval and less than prudent appropriation of our indigenous culture and religions and an unwitting self-incarceration in a museographic complex. Hence one comes across many [...] celebrated African theologians whose publications represent attempts at doing Christology as if the Christological councils never took place, or if at all they took place, their doctrinal positions are no longer relevant”(239).

True as his observation may be, it is still a fact that not all African theologians fall within the parameters of this shortcoming. He himself, of course, acceded to this with his qualification of these African theologians with “many” rather than all! The reason for this is obvious: Most of the purveyors of the above models, even when not openly stated, are not oblivious of the fact there is no way we can:

understand the condition of our faith in Christ unless we have taken the measure of this faith as it was in the past. We may not be indifferent to any age in this past. Each generation of christian history has contributed something towards the appropriation of the *Mysterium Christi* which deserves the consideration of posterity. To allow only those questions which are live issues for the present – and perhaps only for the present – to determine the interpretation of the *Mysterium Christi* would be a dangerous limitation to our understanding of Christ (Grillmeier, 1975, xxiii).

No wonder, Ezech (2003), for example, in proposing his model, “Jesus Christ the Ancestor”, did not hesitate to tell us that his is “An African Contextual Christology in the Light of the Major Dogmatic Christological Definitions of the Church”. Hence, he writes: “Through the resources of the core African cultural symbol of the ancestor and the analysis and the application of the Christological definitions of the Church in her first five centuries of her existence, this African confession of Christ as the ancestor is weighed on the balance of the classical Christological orthodoxy. This ancestral Christological model is truly African and no less Christian”(17).

e. Individual and Communal Experience: Horkheimer (cited in Davies, 1980,18)once pointed out that, “Behind every genuine human action stands theology”. And if this observation is turned the other way round, it may not be wrong also saying that behind every genuine theology, or, better, here, every genuine christological model, stands human action, the human personal experience of the author. Yes, nobody writes from nowhere. Where one is coming from actually influences where one is going and how and, even, when, one will eventually get there. “[M]ore than other sciences”, Ukpong (1984) points out,

“theology cannot be approached with cold objectivity. A theologian must be fully involved in his enterprise”(512). And truly, the purveyors of the aforementioned models were fully involved in the development of their models, involved by way of their personal experience.

For instance, Ela (cited in Bujo, 2006, 185), in making known how his theology was born, under which also, as a matter of fact, would be born his christological model, Christ the Liberator, had observed, thus:

I would point out that my theological reflection was born in the villages. My theology was born, to be precise, under the palaver tree in the northern mountains of Cameroon. In the evenings, I gathered there with Africans of either sex to read the Bible with African eyes. For fourteen years I shared their destiny and got involved in evangelizing. My theology was not born between walls made of concrete.

Equally, in the collection of essays, *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation in African Diversity*, edited by the duo of Mugambi and Magesa, while, for instance, Kinoti had written on “Christology in the East African Revival Movement”, Waliggo would write on “African Christology in a Situation of Suffering”. Stinton’s attempt (2010) to point out where these same two were coming from in their christological pilgrimage in the above essays, would, as a matter of fact, be ad rem here. According to her: “[T]he ESEAT authors rightfully theologize from their own inheritance and experience of African realities. For example, Hannah Kinoti, herself a daughter of the East African Revival, produces an incisive analysis of the Christological emphases that emerged within this significant historical movement. Moreover, John Mary Waliggo’s personal experience of suffering persecution and extended exile from Uganda during the Amin and Obote regimes lends heightened credibility to his profound reflections on suffering in Africa as a source of Christological reflection”(20). Hence, she concludes, with particular reference to Waliggo: “In view of Waliggo’s experience, it is understandable that Jesus as liberator is the cardinal christological image for him”.(2004, 262)

And the foregoing involvement of these African theologians in their Christologies, is, of course, little surprising. This is because while Schillebeeckx (1980,18) it was who had pointed out that, “The account of the life of Christians in the world in which they live is a fifth gospel; it also belongs to the heart of Christology”, Orobator (2008), on his own part and, of course, nearer home, would come out more forcefully, thus: “Based on his or her flesh-and-blood experience, every African Christian who confesses the God of Jesu Kristi faces the challenging task of formulating his or her own answer to the Jesus question [“Who do you say that I am?”]. This answer will be conditioned by his or her situation in life and the degree of personal relationship that each one has with Jesu Kristi” (77).

But, then, it is good, in view of such fresh-and-blood experiences of every African Christian and especially, of every African theologian involved in Christologizing, to make the following two points clearer: One, such aforementioned experience of the theologian should not be viewed in isolation but always together with that of the whole people. This is because, according to Pobee

(1992, 16), “[t]o be is to live in community which is at once a political-social unity and a spiritual unit”. Hence, Schönborn (2010) says: “The experience of individuals, but also the shared experience of a whole people are part of the history of faith and, thus, part of Christology. Such experiences never take place in isolation but are always related to others” (34).

Secondly, there is a way it could be said that the same particular fresh-and-blood experiences of the particular individual theologian - as well as other factors, of course, - could account not only for the eventual shape and face of the said theologian’s model, but also for the difference and diversity in the models of various individual theologians. The same Pobee (1992, 9-10) would hint at this, thus:

Christian history in one sense is the story of how peoples of various races, classes and genders and ages have encountered on their own Emmaus Road or Damascus Road Jesus Christ of Nazareth who was crucified, buried and raised from the dead and is now believed to be exalted as Lord and Christ [...]. There is a reality which is interpreted variously and no two interpretations will be exactly the same or they will have different emphases[...]. Even if there is a reality, there also is the fact of people’s attempt to articulate and portray the Christ whom they have experienced or met on a Damascus Road. And they do that articulation from their being and as they are. So one once more can expect different and varying emphases in that articulation, differences determined by one’s experiences, by one’s heritage, by one’s gender, by one’s race. The encounter on the Emmaus road is not identical with the encounter on the Damascus road.

f. Positive Appraisal of the Social Sciences: Unlike before or, even, unlike some today who tend to see the social sciences as “outcasts” in the theological palace, to be kept at distance or touched only with the proverbial long “sticks”, most of the epigones of the above models and more were open to their reality, the social sciences, that is, especially sociology and anthropology. Like Orobator (2006, 44), they seemed to have understood that, “theology cannot avoid dialoguing, interacting or correlating with the human sciences, especially because the character of the christian faith and divine self-revelation upon and about which theology discourses does not exist in a vacuum. Faith is a lived experience. Revelation happens in history”. This, in the words of Bosch (2011, 433), is an “epistemological break”. According to him: “Contextual theologians claim that they constitute an epistemological break when compared with traditional theologies. Whereas, at least since the time of Constantine, theology was conducted from above as an elitist enterprise (except in the case of minority Christian communities, commonly referred to as sects), its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) was philosophy, and its main interlocutor the educated non-believer, contextual theology is theology “from below”, “from the underside of history”, its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) is the social sciences, and its main interlocutor the poor or the culturally marginalized”.

Such openness of theirs would enable them to receive, of course, with the necessary caution, what these same social sciences had and still have to offer. Ukpong (1984) actually tells us about two of such contributions. According to him, the first main contribution of these twin sciences, despite some weaknesses, was the introduction, in the last century, of a pluralistic concept of culture as opposed to the classicist monolithic concept. Culture came to be defined in terms of differences in existing societies rather than in terms of one society taken as a paradigm. And then, the production, thanks to the best theories of the same sciences, of a new way of thinking which has led to a re-evaluation of African culture. This involves the identification of the various values to be recovered from African culture, e.g., the sense of community, the sense of the sacred, closeness to nature, high appreciation of life after death, etc., and in the process, too, whatever dead wood there was has been exposed and allowed to fall apart (506-507).

Their receipt as well as the consequent use of the contributions of these sciences was enhanced, however, by the fact that some of the above supporters of the models actually did study the said sciences at the university. Ela, for instance, apart from having a 1969-doctorate in theology from the University of Strasbourg, France, also received - years later - a doctorate in sociology from the university of Sorbonne. And in all his theo-christological articulations, he made use of the same to such an extent that one of the accusations levelled against him, at the end of the day, was that he was a sociologist rather than a theologian (Gifford, 1998, 270) - an allegation Bujo (2006), calling Ela, among others, “our theologian sociologist” (188), would refute! According to Bujo, Ela:

is a theologian who tries to live his day-to-day faith founded and rooted in Christ’s pressing charity: Caritas Christi urget nos (2 Cor 5:14). It is difficult to separate the theologian from the sociologist in him. They form a whole because his sociology is always imbued with a theological and pastoral concern. He is first of all a priest committed to his faith and pastoral mission (190).

Then, there is Nyamiti, the exponent of Brother-Ancestral model of African christology. Besides his doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, he also earned a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Vienna. No wonder, he would always see the same cultural anthropology, sometimes called ethnology by him, as the “handmaid of African theology” (cited in Kuster, 2001, 71). Mention also must be made of Shorter (1985). He had talked of Jesus as the African healer, or better, as having some things similar, and, of course, dissimilar with the African witchdoctor. While he studied theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, he also has a doctorate in Social Anthropology from Oxford University. In fact, Magesa (2010) would actually call him, “The Africanist anthropologist and theologian” (92). Like Shorter, Schoffeleers (1989), well-known for his Nganga (Medicine man) christological paradigm, studied theology in the Netherlands and then obtained a doctorate in cultural anthropology also at Oxford. The influence of such on his work on African christology is equally worth taking note of. After all, was he not the one who would begin one of his essays with the following citation from Richard Kearny - “ethnologie et la christologiesont-

elles necessairement exclusives?" (157), - Are anthropology and christology necessarily exclusive?, - which could be said to have been his guide in his anthropo-christological studies? No wonder, Pobee (1992, 15) would declare: "Just as biblical christology is not possible without Jewish anthropology, so too African christology is impossible without African anthropology".

g. Contemporary Socioeconomic-cum-Political Realities in Africa: "While African inculturation theology", says Ukpong (1984), "is concerned with basic and essential Christian questions, African liberation theology and African black theology are concerned with social and present Christian questions. They are theologies that seek to give present answers to present social questions in Africa" (535). And if truly they, African liberation theology and African black theology [read African theology of reconstruction since this has "replaced" the latter especially today in South Africa which was not the situation in 1984 when Ukpong was writing], seek to give present answers to present social questions, what is undeniable is the fact that these present social questions, would actually influence the answers to be given. And this is where one can actually appreciate the influence of the socio-political realities in Africa: war, corruption, democracy, terrorism, injustice, famine, disease, globalization, neocolonialism, etc., on the development of the models above.

While snippets of this influence may be seen, to some extent, on all the models, it is, however, specifically in relation to the Liberator model that they become more obvious. Reason: Proponents of such are aware, as Sundkler (1962) points out, that "theology in Africa has to interpret [...] Christ in terms that are relevant and essential to African existence" (211). Hence, Ela (1988), well-known, as pointed out above, among such exponents, would maintain: "How to speak about God in the living conditions of the poor in African societies torn apart by many forms of neo-colonial violence, is the question which should mobilize African churches"(xvii).

But then, preoccupation with contemporary conditions, social, economic and political, by the authors of these models did not, however, prevent them from paying attention to Africa's historical reality or, simply, the history of Africa. But such historical consciousness and excursus, such interest with Africa's past, was usually undertaken with an eye on Africa's present. Constantino (1975,14) would harp on the need for this:

A people's history must rediscover the past in order to make it reusable[...]. Such a history must deal with the past with a view to explaining the present. It must therefore be not only descriptive but also analytical; it must deal not only with objective developments but also bring the discussion to the realm of value judgements. The past should not be the object of mere contemplation if the present is to be meaningful. For if the past were viewed as a "frozen reality" it would either dominate and immobilize the present or be discarded as irrelevant to today's concerns.

And what Constantino has hinted at above, of course, from the historical perspective, may not be different from what Lonergan (1979) would emphasize - doing so, as a matter of fact, from the theological perspective. "If one is to hearken

to the word”, he said, “one must also bear witness to it. If one engages in *lectiodivina*, there comes to mind *quaestiones*. If one assimilates tradition, one learns that one should pass it on. If one encounters the past, one also has to take one’s stand toward the future. In brief, there is a theology in *oratione obliqua* that tells what Paul and John, Augustine and Aquinas, and anyone else had to say about God and the economy of salvation. But there is also a theology in *oratione recta* in which the theologian, enlightened by the past, confronts the problem of his own day” (133). Hence, Akinade (1995, 184) would insist that, “genuine Christological reflection cannot be separated from Africa’s socio-political, religio-cultural and economic contexts - this is the real and concrete everyday experience within which we Christologize”.

h. Reality of the African Independent Churches(AICs) and Pentecostalism in Africa Today: According to Oduyoye (1995, 37), for these African independent churches, the bible: “[W]as the only written source of christian theology, liturgy, and practice. They found in the Bible how God had spoken directly to Adam and Hagar, to Pharaoh through a prophet, and to Joseph through dreams and their interpretation; they found there the use of symbolism, the taking off of shoes, the blessing of water, and many other ritual approaches to religion. They also found sacrifices, healings, and appearances of spirit beings. They understood theology in the Bible as people talking about their encounters with God. Praying is a real and dynamic encounter with God that has power to bring about what is desired. The Bible is used to construct types of ministries and to validate the roles of persons in the congregations”. Hence, Maluleke (1997) observes that:

The basic proposal of many AIC ‘theologians’ is that the praxis of these churches must now be regarded not only as the best illustration of African Christianity, but also as ‘enacted’, ‘oral’, or ‘narrative’ African theology - a type of theology which is no less valid than written African theologies, they would add. In this way AICs are adding to and becoming a facet of African theology at one and the same time (18).

While he, the same Maluleke, that is, would sound the following caution that, “these churches must neither be romanticised nor studied in isolation from other African churches - including the so-called ‘mainline churches’. In the same way that an African theology based only on a reference to mainline churches is inadequate, so too will any African theology based exclusively on African independent churches” (19), the fact still remains, as Gifford (1993,2) points out, “that the accepted picture of [the same] African Independent Churches has been rendered obsolete by the Pentecostal explosion of the 1980s”. Indeed, “[t]here are many different expressions of Pentecostalism in Africa”(Anderson, 2011, 65), little wonder since Pentecostalism itself “is a movement of diverse colors” (Kanu, 2008, 4). But because this author is a Nigerian and because Lagos, Nigeria’s commercial city, is seen as “the most Pentecostal city in the world” (Anderson, 2004, 4), the manifestation of the same Pentecostal explosion in Nigeria can be taken here as a case study. In Nigeria today, according to Akinwale (2010), there is a case of

aggressive Pentecostalism with its attendant distortion of the image of God who, having, as it were, been created in the image and likeness of the preacher, is given a job description that is reduced only to working miracles as he is controlled, commanded, bribed and settled in the pursuit of narrow selfish interests, an instrumentalization of God, he says, that is itself “a carryover from the instrumentalization of the deity in African traditional religion” (221).

Even as this factor of Pentecostalism may not be said to have deeply influenced the core purveyors of the aforementioned models, or, if actually it did, it could not have been so great, it is still good to point out its reality since it will always help to keep any theologian engaged in the development of any christological model on his or her toes so that his or her model would not encapsulate such a reduced image of God, or, better, of Christ, but instead would be used to correct the same distorted image thereof! Hence, Stinton (2010, 33) would urge: “With current trends in African Christianity, there is need for creative Christological formulation and analysis of the distinguishing Christologies of neo-Pentecostal and African Instituted Churches, especially the newer expressions of Christianity perpetuating a ‘prosperity gospel’”.

i. African Women Experience and Spirituality: It was Oduyoye (1994) who would always insist that, “[African] Women’s spirituality is qualitatively different from that of men because women’s experience of socioeconomic realities differs from that of men” and also that “When women read the Bible, they often hear what is unheard by men” (167). And based on this, a conclusion may at least be drawn: The christology of women, which “is not words or reasoning about Jesus, but an actuality in their lives” (Oduyoye, 2002a, 163), will also be different from men’s since the christology of the former is reflected in their spirituality (164). Hence, the emergence of a different christological model from that of men, Christ as Mother – even as Jesus is also often designated by the same women as “the Christ, the anointed one who liberates, the companion, friend, teacher, and true ‘Child of Woman’” (166). In all, therefore, to say that women’s spirituality, women’s experiences, or, to stretch it a bit further, feminism in Africa, is and can be regarded as another factor determinant of the aforementioned models, is stating the obvious.

j. Formal Theological Training: Many of those who had developed one or the other of the aforementioned models had had formal theological training. As already pointed out before now, Ela had a doctorate in theology from the University of Strasbourg, France. Bujo has one from the University of Würzburg, Germany. Nyamiti and Manus obtained theirs from the same Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. While Shorter studied theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, Schoffeleers did the same in the Netherlands. And the list goes on. In the course of their training, some of them did come under systems that influenced them. For instance, Nyamiti “was influenced heavily by Thomism” (Wachege, 2006, 159), or, precisely, by neo-Thomism. Thus, he could not but set out his model, “Christ, our Brother-Ancestor”, within the framework of Thomistic theology. This, of course, has seen an admixture of both approbation and criticisms following him thereof (Vahakangas, 1999, 46). Likewise, some of them did come under the influence of their teachers. Others, in the course of the same studies, did come into contact with some scholars or theologians from other parts of the world who had

developed models of Christ answerable to their particular situations. From such “masters”, they learnt, in the first place, that it is possible to engage in such christological enterprise. Secondly, it was Buber (cited in Metz, 1999, 104) who had told a story narrated by a rabbi whose grandfather had been a pupil of Baal Shem Tov. “My grandfather”, begins Buber’s rabbi, “was paralysed. Once he was asked to tell a story about his teacher and he told how the holy Baal Shem Tov used to jump and dance when he was praying. My grandfather stood up while he was telling the story, and the story carried him away so much that he had to jump and dance to show how the master had done it. From that moment, he was healed. This is how stories ought to be told”. And similarly, these same African theologians who had had formal theological training, following such interactions with their “masters”, were also gifted with the “voice”, like the grandfather of that rabbi above, to tell their own christological stories. Hence, the birth of new African christological models, titles and images!

k. Christian Mission and Christian Living: Robinson (1998) it was who had pointed out that “Theology is also close to the spoken voice. It evokes sermon, sacrament and liturgy, and of course, scripture itself, with all its echoes of song and legend and prayer” (117). And put the other way round, it could be said also that the spoken voice, sermon, sacrament, liturgy, song, legend and prayer etc. are close to theology and, indeed, harbour theology, even Africa theology. Hence, Okullu (1974, 54) observes:

[W]hen we are looking for African theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church, to Christian homes to listen to those spontaneously uttered prayers before people go to bed. We should go to the schools, to the frontiers where traditional religions meet with Christianity. We must listen to the throbbing drumbeats and the clapping of hands accompanying the impromptu singing in the independent churches. We must try to understand what these sermons are saying and how congregations understand them. Everywhere in Africa things are happening. Christians are talking, singing, preaching, writing, arguing, praying, discussing. Can it be that all this is an empty show? It is impossible. This then is African theology.

Hence, Walls (2012, 19) says something that may be said of this same African theology: “The laboratory space for theology is not in the study or the library; the major theological laboratory – workshop might be a more appropriate term – lies in the life situations of believers or of the Church. Theological activity arises out of Christian mission and Christian living, from the need for Christians to make Christian choices, and to think in a Christian way”. And it is the belief of this author that also Christological activity may arise out of “Christian mission and Christian living”. In fact, just as Hastings (1989) had said that “The worship and ministry of the local Church may well be in practice the most powerful and consistent source in the shaping not, perhaps, of the rather limited field of academic theology but of the popular and preached theology in Africa today” (92), the same could be said of christology in Africa today. Herein, mostly in oral rather written

forms, various names and titles are given to Jesus. Sometimes he is called “Oku-nare-ere” (The Consuming Fire), Oji-aka-agbaji-igwe (The One who uses mere hands to break the iron), Anukporo-nku-na-eju-onu (The Dry Meat that fills the mouth), Odogwu-na-agma (The Mighty one in battle), OgaKpatakpata (The overall Master), Winner Man, etc., all of which encapsulate his greatness and superiority over the many forces that the typical African christian encounters in his or her day-to-day life.

And with a personal example, Orobator (2008) comes in to give credence to the foregoing. “A couple of years after my ordination”, he had begun, “I had the privilege of presiding at the Eucharist in a prison in Benin City, Nigeria. The prison inmates were convinced charismatic Catholics. For the entrance procession they intoned and passionately sang a song that has never ceased to intrigue me: ‘Jesus is my bulldozer. Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen! Bulldoze my case, O Lord! Amen! He’s my Bulldozer, Amen! Bulldoze the lawyer, O Lord! Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen! Bulldoze the judge, O Lord! Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen!’”. Had Jesus addressed the question of Matthew 16 to those Christian convicts of Benin prison, he would have been in for a big surprise. His disciples were much circumspect. Peter responded with an answer that Jesus affirmed as inspired by God. Peter spoke for himself, based on his experience of faith seeking love and hope. The process he set in motion continues today, as each Christian strives to discover an adequate answer for himself or herself[...]. Hence, for the imprisoned Christians of Benin City, only a Jesu Kristi endowed with the power and force of a bulldozer would do”(76-77). No wonder, Ezigbo (2010, 104) would observe:

[I]f a contextual theologian wants to be relevant to the majority of African lay Christians, he or she must begin to construct a Christology that moves beyond a peer-driven conversation. In addition, he or she should interpret and appropriate the Christ-Event in the ways that are rooted strongly in, to use the word of Kenneth Ross, ‘how ordinary people understand the identity and meaning of Jesus Christ’[...]. I argue that no constructive Christology is truly contextual if it fails to take seriously the living experiences of people. A contextual Christology must go beyond ‘formal written expressions to include informal expressions, for example, in worship, prayer, preaching, artwork, drama, gestures, and symbols’.

I. Degree of One’s Personal Relationship With Christ: While this is, in a way, related to what was said above about individual-cum-communal experience, the emphasis is here put on the degree of one’s relationship with Jesus Christ. To start with, it could be said that no one could proceed to create a model or image of Christ if the person has never had any relationship or encounter with Him. “Those who profess to know Jesus and aim at producing a reliable portrait of him”, says O’Collins(2008, 225), “should remember a cautionary observation that came from St. Augustine of Hippo on the deep connection between knowledge and love. *In De diversis quaestionibus* he wrote: ‘nemonisi per amicitiam cognoscitur’(83.71.59).

We might paraphrase this remark as, ‘you need to be a friend of someone before you truly know him or her’. But who dares make the claim, ‘I am a true friend of Jesus’? Yet some measure of friendship with Jesus or at least a desire for such a friendship is needed if anyone is to attempt the daunting task of describing and interpreting Jesus. Only those who wish to follow him as disciples and have a living relationship with him in prayer will be able, however haltingly and partially, to understand and interpret him”. No wonder, Boff(1978) would state, thus: “Yesterday as well as today, admiration for Jesus is at the basis of Christology” (233).

Indeed, while Ratzinger (2007) in his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, had made it clear that it is on this friendship, on this, “intimate relationship with Jesus, [...that]everything depends” (xii), there is a way it could be said that the degree of this relationship will always determine the face or the portrait of Jesus that will be painted by the theologian concerned. Likewise, it may also be said that the face of the same Jesus portrayed, has come to be also one of the ways of knowing better the face of the same theologian. “Two years ago”, starts the same O’Collins (2002, x), “a student painted for me an artistic and prayerful icon, the face of the Crucified Christ. When I contemplated the icon, I could see the face of the artist as well. Whether we do it through painting, words or some other medium, to identify and portray Jesus is to identify and portray ourselves. It is an awesome thought. If all theology comes across as species of autobiography, this is especially of Christology. Writing about Jesus betrays what we have experienced and done as human beings and where we stand as his disciples”. Hence Schweitzer(2005) concludes: “[I]t was not only each epoch that found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man’s true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus” (4).

Implications of the Aforementioned Factors for Christians in Africa Today

It was Harnack (2006, 1) who in his *What Is Christianity?* had observed, thus: “The great English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, once commented that mankind can hardly be too often reminded that there was once a man named Socrates. That is correct, but it is even more important to remind mankind that a man named Jesus Christ once stood in their midst”. And, indeed, the enumeration of some of the factors that informed the development of the various Christological models in Africa, would, in a way, remind Africans that Jesus Christ had really stood in the midst of African thought and theology. And since He is the same today as yesterday and forever (Heb.13:8), and thus does not and will never go out of currency, He will always be found standing in the midst of the same African thought and theology. What this implies is that every age in African theology will always have something to say of and about Him. If the following models are the outcome of the sayings of these others, each Christian in Africa today will also have something to say that will see to the birth of new models of African christology. He or she is, therefore, challenged to say this “something” in a way that the image of Jesus formed by him or her will be one that will be meaningful to him or her, and thus make him or her feel free, strong and, above all, secure. This is because the reality of christological insecurity of the same African Christians has been observed

to be one of the major problems facing Christianity in Africa today. In fact, for Banda (2005, 1):

[T]he greatest enemy of Christianity in Africa is not other competing religions. The greatest enemy of Christianity in Africa lies within Christianity itself. That enemy is the failure by African Christians to place total security in Jesus Christ against the malevolent attacks and harassment by evil spirits, angry ancestors, witchcraft and other such evil religious powers. In other words, the greatest enemy of Christianity in Africa is christological insecurity.

Secondly, these factors, as evident above, are varied and coming, as it were, from several sources. This, in a way, helps to underscore the reality that there is no area of African life that Jesus does not and cannot touch. “The Christ of Christianity”, says Oduyoye (2002 b), “touches human needs at all levels, and Africans are but ordinary members of the human race feeling the need for salvation” (19). And being touched this way, there is, consequently, no area of African life from which an image of Jesus cannot be formed. Again, the same factors help to remind African Christians that Christological models do not fall from the sky. They were and are always necessitated by contextual realities. Little surprising then that each of them bears both the image of the one who developed it and that of the epoch in which it is developed. Furthermore, it is good to point out that more than one factor could move one at a particular time to develop a particular model. For instance, while Ela, as pointed out above, was influenced, apart from Scripture and tradition, by his personal and then communal experience, it was also observed that he was influenced by the theology and sociology in which he was trained as well as the then contemporary socio-economic and political realities of Africa. What this shows is that these same factors may not be found existing exclusively of others but will always call for a situation where multiple factors may be at play at the same time.

Conclusion

O’Collins (2002) had observed that the “Christian religion stands or falls by what its adherents believe Jesus of Nazareth to be or to have done for us” (2). Christians in Africa and, especially, African theologians over the years have encapsulated what they believe Jesus of Nazareth to be or to have done for them in thousands of images and models. Nothing comes out of nothing. This paper has tried to look at the factors, or better, some of the factors - since it cannot lay claim to have exhausted all the factors- that have seen to the emergence and development of the images. Of course, since Christ remains a mystery and since no one can fully represent all that he is in any one image but can only highlight some aspects of his inexhaustible nature (Ezeh, 2003, 308), it is expected that other images and models of the same Christ will see the light tomorrow. These same images will also be helped, apart from the aforementioned factors, by others that may come up in the everyday life of Christians in Africa, theologians inclusive. And this is all the more important when it is realized that the enterprise of Christology itself is an ongoing reality, one which, according to Grillmeier (1975, xxiii), “will only end with the Second coming of the Lord”.

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