

## Research Article

# Christology for African Community in View of African Ancestors

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Africa is an exciting and diverse continent. It's a world where the physical and the spiritual come together. This is especially notable when one explores the traditional African belief of ancestors among many other beliefs. Ancestral belief is a significant part of countless African communities, and even among some African Christians. It is my hope when comparing the characteristics of the African ancestors with that of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will come to find that while some of Jesus's characteristics are relatable, they are ultimately incomparable, fulfilling all positive notions of African ancestors. More than that, Jesus, the God-Man, comes and offers us and our communities hope and redemption. In this article we will begin by seeking to understand ancestral belief, after which we will identify some characteristics from the ancestors and see how those of Jesus Christ compare, thus developing a Christology relatable for Africa. Each of these characteristics will begin with a brief identification, followed by biblical and theological discussions. The last section will show that Christ the Redeemer of African community has offered superabundant fulfilment of ancestral characteristics.

## 1. African Ancestral Belief

Intermediaries<sup>1</sup> are very important in African belief and practice. They play a central part in African culture, spirituality, and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> And with that in mind I have often wondered whether removing ancestral belief from the traditional African thought would damage the fabric of their society if there wasn't anything to take its place.

On the one hand, many people of European descent don't appreciate or understand African ancestors, understandably so, for it is a foreign worldview. On the other hand, many African Pentecostal Christians believe African Ancestors to be demonic forces and ought to be dealt with accordingly.<sup>3</sup> As

important as it is, in this article, I am not interested in understanding what ancestors are, whether they be demonic beings or not. My approach is different, I am far more interested in understanding what traditional Africans<sup>4</sup> understand about their ancestors.

For those inquisitive readers, who would like me to be forthright about my own standing: I don't believe it is biblically tenable that ancestors exist in fellowship with the living as believed by many traditional Africans. Neither do I believe that ancestors are demonic; this is not to say that hostile spirits or demonic beings don't take advantage of African traditional belief and pose as one's ancestors occasionally – I am sure they do.<sup>5</sup> And anecdotes aside, it's impossible to prove this either way. More generally I am inclined to think that ancestral belief is a psychological-social construct than manifests in certain beliefs and experiences. But as I said, my opinions are not important here. While I don't want to promote the ancestors, I would like us to consider what African ancestors are understood to be by traditional Africans, and then reflect upon the person and work of Jesus Christ in light of the living dead, and to do that I will need to describe ancestral belief in Africa. So, keep in mind that I am not describing my belief in ancestors, but the ancestral worldview.

Ancestors are believed to be spirit intermediaries,<sup>6</sup> they form bridges between humanity and God, usually referred to as the Supreme Being. Other spirit intermediaries include nature spirits and other kinds of spirits, and lesser divinities. You would be interested to know that there are also mediators who are physically alive, such as oracles, seers, rainmakers, medicine men, ritual leaders, kings, and even elders.

Unlike in Christianity where God is believed to be both transcendent and immanent, Africans generally believe that God is supremely transcendent, that is, he is too far beyond us and so people feel that they can only approach God through a mediator, one who is somewhere between God and us. For this reason, people go to mediators to offer up their offerings, prayers, and sacrifices once they have told them their needs.

It's best not to think of the ancestors as dead people who rule from the grave. Instead, think of them as the 'living dead' who are still very much a part of their community even though they are deceased. While not quite the same, they are similar to the Roman Catholic understanding of the communion of the saints in some respects.<sup>7</sup> Ancestors are considered in the community as custodians of morality. This makes sense especially when their lives are honoured and celebrated as people having lived exemplary lives. However, this does not mean that they don't afflict with tragedy and misfortune, they

sometimes do as a way of parental punishment towards those who are disrespectful towards them and others and who disobey. But on the other hand, the ancestors may also offer protection, health, and prosperity for those who honour them. Therefore, it is important for African communities to approach their ancestors with fondness in order that they may receive their blessings. This is why rituals for the ancestors are usually done with honour and celebration. African communities and families only recognise and celebrate their own ancestors, they don't care much for the ancestors from other families or communities, because they are deemed to be foreign. An ancestor does not have influence in another community from the one he or she originated.<sup>8</sup> In other words, a Xhosa ancestor has no influence on a Kalejin family in Kenya, or even a different Xhosa family in South Africa. Each family or community unit has its own ancestors. This is however different, when you have a leader, for example, a Zulu king who has passed on may have influence on all Zulu communities.

Contrary to popular believe among many Christians, Ancestors are not considered as evil spirits among traditional Africans. Yes, there is a price to be paid in way of offerings and sacrifices to receive favourable intervention from the ancestors. Africans consider their ancestors as noble and good, they are extensions to the living community, and they are honoured and respected for good reason, especially when they lived an exemplary life before their past away.

Being an ancestor is a privileged position because of the honour attached to it, but also because the ancestor is enabled to mediate and intercede on behalf of the living and the Supreme Being, and therefore they are eligible to receive libations, prayer, offerings, and sacrifices. However, while they are intermediaries between God and people, ancestors are still in essence human beings even if they now reside in close proximity to the Supreme Being. Ancestors make good intermediaries because they know the needs of their family or community having been a part of it themselves. For this reason, some have suggested that they speak a 'bilingual language', that of the Supreme Being and that of their living people. This often manifests in the dreams or visions of those living.

It is therefore desirable to preserve harmony between the living and the living dead to acquire help in protection and prosperity from the ancestors. A good relationship with one's ancestors is vital. And when there is some kind of wrongdoing or moral failure, there is an opportunity for atonement, usually by means of a sacrifice of a fowl or other animal.

There is a bone of contention, around the question of whether the ancestors are venerated or worshipped.<sup>9</sup> I remember sitting down over pizza with my good friend, Fr Jonathan, a Roman Catholic priest. I asked him about the Catholic view of Mary and the saints, and whether they worship them or

venerate them. His answer was helpful, he said that unfortunately, as with anything there are extremes, there are few Roman Catholics who do seem to take veneration to the extreme where it becomes worship. But he made it clear that this was not the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and that God alone is to be worshiped. He did say, however, that they pray to Mary and the saints because they are very much alive, they are not dead, and yet they are closer in proximity to God than we are. “It is similar to asking a friend to pray for us,” he said, “only that the saints are in the presence of God.” I am not advocating praying to Mary, the saints or even the ancestors, but I have found his response helpful in understanding why Catholics pray to the saints as well as the relationship between the African and their ancestors. In the same way, the ancestors are venerated, not worshipped, at least that is proper African Traditional Religion (ATR). But is there sometimes blurring between veneration and worship, I am sure there is.

Without developing a theology of Jesus as a proto-Ancestor or the like, or placing Jesus alongside ancestors, in what follows is a comparison of some characteristics between the ancestors and Jesus Christ. No doubt, some will bemoan and say that Jesus is entirely different; well in some ways he is not, although ultimately, he is quite different precisely because he is infinitely superior in every characteristic. It is my prayer that as we reflect on these themes in light of who Jesus is, we will be able to connect with those who are influenced by ancestral belief and proclaim who Jesus is in a way that is relevant and meaningful.

## **2. The Glory of the Living Christ in Community**

The mindset in much of Western Christianity is unfortunately an individualist one. It’s all about me and Jesus. But Jesus is very concerned about our community, our world, and the cosmos as well. Africans know all about community – and so does Jesus – much more than the Western counterpart. Here we will place focus on Jesus Christ, but we will begin each characteristic or theme considering how it relates to African ancestral belief and then see how Christ gloriously fulfills each theme in relation to community. Each of our discussions on Jesus will start with a biblical foundation and then progress to theological reflection.

### **3.1. *The God-Man***

People often think of the ancestors as spirit beings, and they are that. But more importantly, they were and still are human, maintaining their character and human identity as the ‘living-dead’. The human

identity of an ancestor fades after the last person in the community no longer remembers them,<sup>10</sup> at that point they move on and join the abode of spirits of which little is known. It is their humanity that gives the ancestor credibility as a mediator for their living community, but this humanity ultimately comes to an end.

The humanity of Jesus Christ is unique in comparison to the ancestors because he was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary – without a father’s seed (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18–25; Luke 1:27, 34). Scripture is clear that God sent forth his Son, Jesus Christ to be born of a woman (Gal 4:4). God gave of himself and incarnated his only begotten Son to become human by means of a miraculous conception. Christ became flesh, in human form and likeness, becoming one of us (John 1:14; Phil 2:5–11; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 John 1:1; 4:2; 2 John 1:7). Jesus’s humanity is evident in his needs and emotions. Matthew tells us that Jesus experienced hunger (Matt 4:2), Mark mentions Jesus sleeping (Mark 4:38). John took note of Jesus’s exhaustion (John 4:6) and described his emotions when he wept at Lazarus’s tomb (John 11:35), not to mention that he had a troubled soul before his crucifixion (John 12:27). Jesus also experienced thirst after he had been crucified (John 19:28).

Temptation wasn’t any stranger to Jesus either. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted like we are and yet he was without sin. For this reason, he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Although Jesus experienced temptation like you and I, he never gave into it and so he was able to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3). For this reason, Jesus became human in every way, so “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil”<sup>11</sup> (Heb 2:14), and “to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).

Whilst never forsaking his divine nature, Jesus lived and died as a human being. And he rose again, not as a spirit, but as a resurrected human person in flesh. He truly was and is alive, and people recognised him as a physical man. Mary Magdalene saw him at the tomb (Mark 16:9; John 20:14–18), Jesus appeared to two men walking on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), Thomas saw Jesus’s pierced hands and side (John 20:24–29), Jesus had breakfast on the beach with his disciples (John 21:4–14), and he appeared to more than five hundred men (1 Cor 15:6–7).

The humanity of Christ had a definite beginning, but we tend to forget that his incarnation means that God in the person of Jesus Christ will forever be human. Jesus’s humanity is infinite into the future – at least it has not been revealed to us otherwise from Scripture. On the other hand, Jesus’s divinity does not have a beginning or an end (John 1:1–3; 17:5), it is infinite on both side of the time continuum. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is God, he is deity (Matt 14:33; John 1:1; 5:18;

8:58; 10:30–33; 20:28; 1 Cor 12:3; Col 1:19; 2:9–10; Heb 1:3, 8). So, Jesus, from the time of his conception to this moment and into the infinite future was, is and will forever be fully God and fully man.

The difference between an ancestor and Jesus is that the ancestor was merely a human person whose humanity will eventually fade once he or she is forgotten. Jesus Christ on the other hand is both human and divine, and his humanity that will never fade! Moreover, though Jesus died, he resurrected and is physically alive forevermore (Rev 1:18).

And so it is that one of the foundational beliefs of biblical Christianity is that Jesus is fully God and, in his incarnation, took on humanity and forever became fully man without forsaking his deity in anyway, as affirmed by the creeds, and neither is it a mixing of the divine and human natures. Jesus holds his deity and humanity in glorious union as a single person. Samuel Kunhiyop, a Nigerian theologian, highlights that Jesus was born like any other person, he grew up, needed feeding, clothing and shelter, like anyone else, and he experienced suffering and death as any other human being would. Yet, it appears that Jesus was conscious of “his pre-existence with the Father (John 3:31; 8:58).”<sup>12</sup>

Jesus is not God who pretends to be a human being, this is called Docetism, and neither is he a human who becomes God or adopts divinity – known as Adoptionism. No, as the Australian theologian, Michael Bird, so clear states, “The story of Jesus is the story of God becoming one of us and sharing in our humanity so that he might redeem humanity.”<sup>13</sup> Only one who has divine power and is also a human person can work redemption for humanity. Anselm of Canterbury, in his work, *Cur Deus Homo*, meaning, “Why God Became a Man?”, argued that it was essential that the person who is to make payment for the redemption of humanity can only be perfect God and perfect man. He is unable to offer redemption if he is not truly God, and neither is he obliged to do so if he is not human, and so it was necessary for the redeemer to be the God-Man, on whom both natures are properly kept intact (Anselm, 1099, pp.320–321; Book 2:7). In order for the redeemer to pay for the guilt of humankind, he is able to identify with sinners (Anselm, 1099, pp.321–322; Book 2:8). And so, God took on flesh becoming one of us to save and redeem humanity.

There has been some discussion recently as to the eternal Sonship of Jesus. Some theologians<sup>14</sup> have suggested that the Son eternally submits to the Father, as an eternal functional submission. Other theologians<sup>15</sup> reject this eternal subordination in Christology, believing that this is a move away from Christian orthodoxy. Both perspectives hold that Jesus is equal in essence and substance to the father,

the question is, “Is Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God eternally subordinate to the Father in an economic sense?”, or was Jesus’s submission and obedience to the Father limited only to his incarnation?

Many of those who say that Jesus is eternally subordinate to the Father have employed their Christology in support of their view on gender roles, notably, complementarianism. I am not advocating for specific gender roles in one way or another, however, it seems dubious to reformulate historic Trinitarian faith in support of one’s view on gender.

On the one hand, it does appear that Jesus submits to the Father, when Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” (John 5:19). Paul also wrote, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Cor 11:3). And “For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor 15:27–28). Yet, on the other hand, as Johnson says, if all three members of the Trinity are of one substance, then no inequality exists between them. However, I argue that this does not negate the possibility of ontological subordination between the Father and the Son. While they are of one nature, they are distinct in their persons by way of their relationship to one another and their functionality.<sup>16</sup>

Johnson offers helpful commentary, he reminds us that the members of the Trinity act inseparably, and so the sending of the Son by the Father ought to be understood “in the context of inseparable operation.”<sup>17</sup> The Son is not inferior to the Father because he is the one being sent,<sup>18</sup> and neither does it suggest that he is eternally subordinate to the Father. While the Son and the Father “act inseparably, they do so in an ‘ordered’ way. The Son always acts with the Father according to his ‘filial’ [meaning: relating to the son] mode of being ‘from the Father’”.<sup>19</sup> Although Jesus Christ, the Son of God may be subordinate to the Father, he is certainly as much God, as the Father is – they are equal in their personhood.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is said to be the word of God. John makes this clear at the start of his passage, mimicking the very beginning of Genesis, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (John 1:1–2). The famous Swiss theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Barth, developed this idea in the first two volumes of his *Church*

*Dogmatics*. Barth identified God's self-revealing as the "Word of God" aligned "with the very nature and character of God himself," says Guretzki.<sup>21</sup> In Barth's own words, "Understanding the Word of God not as proclamation and Scripture alone but as God's revelation in proclamation and Scripture, we must understand it in its identity with God Himself. God's revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God."<sup>22</sup>

Jesus was and is the word of God, yet he also received a three-part office from the Father, as the Reformer, John Calvin pointed out, Jesus is prophet, king, and priest.<sup>23</sup> John Frame explains that these offices demonstrate the redemptive work of Christ. As the prophet, Jesus brings to us the true word of God. Jesus offers himself up as the true and ultimate sacrifice in his priestly office, thus he is able to make intercession on our behalf. And as the king, Jesus rules over everything by his power.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2. *God with Humanity*

Ancestors were physical people who lived in their community before they passed on. Yet, ancestors are believed to continue to live among their people. They are still very much a part of the community, even if they are not seen nor interacted with daily.

Jesus too lived among his people. In fact, his very name, Immanuel, means "God with us" (Matt 1:23). John 1:14 tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." At the end of Matthew's Gospel, before Jesus ascended to the Father, he proclaimed, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20). Jesus's words are reassuring. But for the ancestors, their ancestral status ends after a few generations. Very few ancestors, if any, are remembered from 500 years ago, but after two thousand years, Jesus's presence remains and is so felt that his church continues to flourish.

One of the strange characteristics of the Christian God when compared to the gods of other religions is that he always desires to be with us in community. Scripture tells how Moses constructed the tabernacle (the Tent of Meeting) where God came to manifest himself among his people (Exod 33:7–11). Later, his presence would fill the temple (1 Kgs 8:1–13; 1 Kgs 8:22–53; 2 Chr 7:1–3). After the return from exile and the building of the second temple, there is no indication that the presence of God returned, until he came to live among his people in the person of Jesus Christ. As a child, Jesus taught the religious teachers in the temple (Luke 2:46), and as an adult he taught in the portico of Solomon (John 10:23). Later in his gospel, Luke also records that Jesus often taught in the temple (Luke 22:53). But Jesus was not confined to the temple walls, most of his ministry was in Galilee and in numerous

other communities in and around Israel. Jesus, the Son of God lived among his people and in community with his disciples.

God dwelling with his people came to an end when Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to heaven... or so it seemed. He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell his people (John 14:16–17). Evidently this happened at Pentecost when the community of believers came together in prayer (Acts 2:1–4). Those who have the Holy Spirit are now the holy temple in the Lord, “...being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” as the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19–22.

Finally, John, the Revelator proclaimed that he, “heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev 21:3). He heard this after he saw “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2a). The New Jerusalem is imagery for the presence of God because he desires to dwell among his people.

### *3.3. The Infinite Sacrifice*

It is believed that the status of mediator and the stature of the ancestors entitles them to received sacrifices from the living. Sacrifices help appease the ancestors<sup>25</sup> when a moral wrongdoing is committed or when health and prosperity are desired, or even to thank them for good fortune.

But Jesus comes along and turns the whole sacrificial system of every culture on its head, for Christ so loved us that he “gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2) as the “propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2). He sacrifices himself once and for all, and by so doing he undid any need for further sacrifice, whether to God, the ancestors, or any spirit (Heb 10:8–10). John the Baptist understood this before anyone, when he proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29b). Therefore, if God in Christ Jesus has sacrificed himself for us, the ancestors have no entitlement to sacrifice because a perfect sacrifice has already been made to cover all our sins and wrongdoings and, in this sacrifice, he distributes abundant blessings.

Jesus’s sacrifice is unique because he was both the sacrifice itself, and the one doing the sacrifice. And if sacrificing one’s own life for another was remarkable, there are no words to describe how a supremely infinite Being would incarnate, become a human person, and sacrifice himself for his creation, for humanity! It is precisely Jesus’s divinity that makes the worth of his sacrifice infinite. It is unspeakable! And yet he did it. This is why apostolic teaching declares that Jesus’s sacrifice was

utterly effective for all of humanity and indeed for the whole cosmos forever.<sup>26</sup> Fleming Rutledge proclaimed:

We might be ready to die for our families or our countrymen, our tribe or our group, but talking about the righteous dying for the unrighteous is like asking a refugee from Darfur to die for the *jantaweed* militia ... like expecting a torture victim to die for her torturer. Paul puts it like this: “It’s rare to see a person willing to die even for a *righteous* man, let alone an *unrighteous* one – though occasionally perhaps for a *righteous* person one might dare even to die: (Rom 5:6–8, my [Rutledge’s] paraphrase). In the cross of Christ, we see something revolutionary, something that undercuts not just conventional morality but also religious distinction across the board. Christ has died for the *ungodly*, the *unrighteous*.<sup>27</sup>

More than that, as Rutledge continues, “Only in the sacrifice of Jesus are they [people] transferred from enemies into friends”<sup>28</sup> Jesus’s sacrifice is as completely effective precisely because his sacrifice is of infinite worth.

### 3.4. *The Conqueror of Sin*

Ancestors are thought to have lived moral lives, and that might be true, however, they were certainly not without sin. John wrote in his letter, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8). And without the power of Christ to overcome sin, they would have made a practise of sinning which is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), despite their moral life.

Jesus, on the other hand, was without sin even though he experienced temptation (Heb 4:15), this was possible because the Father sent him “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3). But Jesus takes this further and does what no human being or ancestor ever could do, he “bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet 2:24; 1 Cor 15:3). While the wages of sin is death, Jesus offers us the free gift of God, eternal life (Rom 6:23). He does this by, (1) condemning sin in the flesh, (2) destroying the devil who has power over death (Heb 2:14), and (3) becoming a propitiation for our sins, the sins of the whole world. Jesus is the universal saviour because he saves us from our sins (Matt 1:21) and takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). When there is moral failure in an African community, an ancestor may require sacrifice to appease them. Not so with Jesus Christ, because he became the great sacrifice on our behalf offered once and for all.

You and I are as much agents of sin as we are victims of its power. As Michael Horton says, sin is “simultaneously judicial and moral, legal and relational.”<sup>29</sup> While we have transgressed against one another, we have also sinned against God in thought and deed. Our corruption runs deep in each of us, no one is unaffected by the power of Sin in us and against us. Despite this dark power, Fleming Rutledge proclaims how Jesus stands alone on the frontline and in our place and absorbed “the full onslaught of Sin, Death, and the devil.”<sup>30</sup> This cosmic struggle with hostile powers is descriptive of the cosmic drama whereby Christ Jesus ultimately conquers the Sin of the world<sup>31</sup> by his sacrificial death on the cross and his glorious resurrection where he overcomes the power of death. You might have seen the Greek inscription, ICXC NIKA in stained glass windows and iconography. ICXC is shorthand for Jesus Christ and NIKA means victory, thus, “Jesus Christ conquers”, referring to Christ’s victory over Satan, Sin, and Death.

### 3.5. Salvation

Although African ancestors don’t act as redemptive agents. Their work as mediators is ethical or moral, yet obedience to ancestors may, however, secure happiness, prosperity, and blessings, and perhaps “escape the anger of gods or the Supreme God,”<sup>32</sup> Victor Ezigbo explains. This wellbeing might loosely be considered a kind of salvation. However, there is uncertainty regarding its effectiveness and is often unfruitful. Jesus is different, he provides eternal salvation, resurrection, and cosmic renewal. We are all familiar with John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Again, John says a few verses later, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” (John 3:36a; John 1:12). Holy Scripture proclaims that Jesus is the saviour (Luke 2:11; Titus 2:13) and that the “free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23b), because he has destroyed the power of death (Acts 2:24; Heb 2:14). The salvation that Jesus offers us is simply incomparable to any notion of salvation by the ancestors or any other being.

I remember once sharing among a small group of Christians that Jesus certainly did come to save our souls, this is very important, but that he *also* came to save creation, to save our world. One of them was horrified that I mentioned that part of Jesus’s redemptive plan was to save creation, he had a dualistic worldview where he thought only our souls are important and need saving. The curse and power of Sin, however, is so insidious and pervasive that it effects every aspect of our world in addition to our own sinful natures. All of it, requires redemption including ourselves. I had a similar experience as a

missionary in Kenya where some people, struggled to conceive that Jesus's redemption was also for creation. After all, Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." The German Theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, said it well when he wrote,

The prayer for the coming of the Kingdom 'on earth as it is in heaven' was replaced by the longing 'to go to heaven' oneself. The Kingdom of God's glory and the salvation of the whole creation was reduced to heaven; and heaven was reduced to the salvation of the soul. This religious reduction led to the heedless neglect of the earth and to the surrender of its future. Anyone who confuses the Kingdom of God with heaven transforms his hope into resignation.<sup>33</sup>

We need to keep in mind that salvation for humankind, for those who are in Christ, and for God's creation is physical as much as it is spiritual – and by spiritual, I don't mean ghostly or ethereal. Ultimately, salvation is the "transformation of space, time, and matter", as N.T. Wright put it. He is also famous for saying, "We are saved not as souls but as wholes."<sup>34</sup> Salvation is not purely an individualistic matter, God saves us in order that he might work through us and reach our communities in order that the entire world may be transformed.<sup>35</sup>

### *3.6. Communion with Christ*

African ancestors are not viewed as departed spirits. Instead, they are believed to be the 'living dead' who continue to live side by side with their living offspring and relatives. They continue to experience community and fellowship with the living, even if the nature of this existence is somewhat different.

For the Christian, God calls us into the fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9). Similarly, Jesus calls us his friends, not his servants (John 15:15). This fellowship with Christ is individual as well as communal. Speaking of those who have heard the gospel, John wrote that his readers may have fellowship with him and his company because their "fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3). This was Jesus's prayer, that all those who belong to him would be one as God the Son and God the Father are one (John 17:21–23). Sadly, this has not always been the case in the Christian community, but it is God's deep desire.

This communion with Christ is also called, "Union with Christ", developed from phrases like "abiding in Christ" or "being in Christ", and so on (1 Cor 1:30; 1 John 3:6–9; 4:11–13; 5:20). Considering fellowship with the ancestors, there is little outward imperative to love one another, other than some

vague moral obligation. Yet, the evidence of union with Christ is that we love one another (1 John 4:11–13). In other words, union with Christ cultivates fruit and virtue. There is also a mutual abiding between Jesus and the Christian, “abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:4). This abiding fosters obedience to Jesus and his commands which works its way out by loving one another:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (John 15:9–13).

The Reformer, John Calvin, explained that we have union with Christ “if we have true fellowship in his death”, for our old self is crucified with Christ and so our sin dies, and our corrupted nature diminishes.<sup>36</sup> Jesus brings us unto union with him by offering himself up as a sacrifice for us so that he might cleanse us and wipe our guilt away, and in so doing he conquered death.<sup>37</sup> John Owen, a Puritan, understood that in the incarnation, Christ “took our nature into personal union with his own; so in this he takes our persons into a mystical union with himself. Hereby he becomes ours, and we are his.” (Owen, 2004, p.157).

John Murray explained that we come into union with Christ when we partake of redemption secured by Jesus’s ransom sacrifice and thus become new creatures in him.<sup>38</sup> This union includes all the aspects of salvation and is fully accomplished at the glorification of the believer.<sup>39</sup> It is easy to think of union with Christ as an individual matter – me and Jesus – but while it certainly is personal, we ought not to lose sight that “union with Christ binds all together” in a living community as well.<sup>40</sup> Murray proclaimed that there is nothing comparable to being in union and fellowship with Jesus Christ. There is a reciprocal love whereby Jesus communes with his believing community and we commune with him. In this we share a life of love and fellowship.<sup>41</sup>

### *3.7. The Compassion of Christ*

As long as African ancestors are appeased, they are said to care for their living community. Their care is conditional! Jesus Christ, on the other hand, died for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). God so loved the world, even in its sin, “that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not

perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Christ’s love and care towards humanity is so significant that long before he was conceived, Isaiah proclaimed, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9:6). Unlike the ancestors whose compassion is conditional and limited to their community, Jesus cares for all humankind and their communities, and desires that all come to him (1 Tim 2:4).

Whatever compassion ancestors might have for their community it is limited to their humanity. Furthermore, their compassion is barely, if at all, transferred to the living community. Jesus, however, overflowed with compassion during his ministry: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34); “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matt 14:14); “Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.’” (Matt 15:32); “And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.” (Matt 20:34)

Yet, even this overflow of compassion was limited by Jesus’s humanity, but now that Jesus has ascended and is glorified, while still as much human as he is God, the compassion of Christ is unlimited in his divinity. Moreover, this compassion, overflows from Jesus through us. Jesus transfers his compassion to the world through his church. The Apostle Paul makes this clear when he instructed us to “Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Eph 4:32). He tells us to fulfil Christ’s law by bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2). And in Colossians 3:12–13, he wrote, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” Evidently, the compassion of the ancestors, dwarfs in comparison to the unimaginable compassion of Jesus Christ for us, for Christian communities and for the world. He is one who truly sympathises with our pain and suffering having experienced it himself.

The Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote a wonderful little book titled, “The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth”. He argued that Jesus’s pity and compassion upon humanity and individuals remains the same as it was when he was on earth ministering to us, except that now his tender affections upon you and I are not limited by his humanity, while continuing to be human. In his

glorification these affections and compassions are unrestrained. Nothing can be of greater comfort and encouragement for the believer and the Christian community than this super abundant compassion by our Mediator.<sup>42</sup> Goodwin proclaimed, “he *suffers with you*, he is as tender in his affections to you as ever he was; that he might be moved to pity you, he is willing to suffer, as it were, one place to be left naked, and we flesh still, on which he may be wounded did with your miseries common there so he might be your merciful high priest.”<sup>43</sup>

### 3.8. *Christ Our Mediator*

Harry Sawyerr was a Sierra Leonean Anglican theologian and writer on African religion. His book, “GOD: Ancestor or Creator?” helps us to understand that for many African communities, kings and chiefs are distant from the ordinary person and thus are not easily approachable but can be reached by means of intermediaries. People in communities ruled by a king or chief know that they may run to them in times of need and find safety. Yet, even if such a person runs to his chief in a time of danger, and the chief is present, communications still happens via a mediator.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, as Sawyerr explained, approaching the Supreme Being, or God, requires such mediation through ancestral spirits.<sup>45</sup> Having lived as physical humans and now existing in close proximity to the Supreme Being, ancestors are ideal mediators, according to traditional African belief.

At this point, in light of previous discussions, we are beginning to wonder just how effective ancestral mediation really is, if at all. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that we have a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, having been tempted in every respect as we have, but without sin. Ancestors can also sympathize with the weaknesses of their people, and they too were tempted. But there is a glaring difference between the ancestors and Jesus. Jesus was without sin, and he is both man and God, he is divine, and thus his mediation is infinitely powerful. Hebrews picks up on Jesus’s deity by saying that, “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.” (Heb 7:3). Contrary to the ancestors being close to the Supreme Being, Jesus though he is human, is God himself! It’s not surprising then that Paul tells us that “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim 2:5). In light of Jesus Christ as mediator, all other mediators are made redundant. Jesus made it clear when he proclaimed that “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6). Why would African communities look to the ancestors for mediation, when Jesus who himself is God

offers us mediation to the Father? Someone infinitely greater than all the communities of African ancestors invite us to call on him as our only mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yusufu Turaki, on the other hand, rightly proclaims that “Jesus, the Messiah is indeed the Mediator between God and man. His cross, resurrection, ascension and second coming are the signs of His work of mediation and redemption.” God himself affirmed Christ’s mediatory work, along with his prophets and the apostles, his church and ultimately the witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> Jesus’s cross is the symbol and power of reconciliation between humanity and God, God and nature, humanity with one another, and humanity with nature. It is through this atoning work on the cross in which “God’s grace, love, justice, peace and forgiveness become manifest and effectual in the world.”<sup>47</sup> Unlike the African king or chief, Jesus Christ, the King of kings calls us to himself as his friends, he says, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15).

### *3.9. Christ the Reconciler of Ethnic Communities*

I mentioned earlier that one’s ancestors only have authority within their own family or community from which they originate. This has the potential to promote ethnocentrism, and possibly tribalism between different African ethnic communities. We should not be naive though, because Christianity has, and in some sectors, continues to promote ethnocentrism. However, this is a far cry from the plain teaching of Scripture, genuine Christianity, and God’s heart for his church and humanity!

I worked together with a Swiss man, Hans Seppi, at a Discipleship School in Kenya for some years where we discipled and trained bush pastors. He always told the story where he taught a class of older students from various tribes who at the time in Kenya were in political conflict with one another. He asked them how they could sit together in the same classroom. They replied, yes, we might be Kalejin, Kikuyu, Kisii, Luhya, Luo, and Maasai, but all of us belong to the “Jesus Tribe”. And that is the heart of the matter, Jesus unites all humanity, there is no place for ethnocentrism or tribalism. Paul tells us that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28). He also wrote that he had “received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among *all the nations* (Rom 1:5; emphasis mine). Jesus himself shunned ethnocentrism by engaging with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.

John's Revelation illustrates that there is no place for ethnocentrism and tribalism either in the kingdom of God. John narrated in one of his visions how the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb and sang a new song saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9–10). If that was not enough, John gives another account where he saw "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9–10).

Ancestors do nothing to promote ethnic unity, not only do they not claim to do so, but they are simply unable to, they are bound to their own families and communities, and only have their interests at heart. Jesus Christ, however, ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, so that they may be unified into a kingdom, a royal priesthood where they will reign on earth forever (Rev 5:9–19; 1 Pet 2:9). It is clear in these biblical passages that Jesus does not call us to forsake our ethnic identities, those are important to him, but he does call us to be unified together in the "Jesus Tribe".

Sadly, the church has contributed to the problem of ethnic division, however, Jesus purposed that the church ought to have no ethnic boundaries or agendas. Samuel Kunhiyop points out that the church is a community that is unified in its diversity, because all those who are in Christ have the same creator-redeemer, we are in one family in God's house. There is no room for ethnic loyalties and hatred of other ethnicities in God's kingdom. The love of Christ, as Kunhiyop explains, is shown by the way we love others, "especially those who are different from us".<sup>48</sup> The love of Christ, if we truly believe in him and what he taught us, unites us together irrespective of our ethnic communities. Herman Bavinck, the Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian wrote,

Tribes, peoples, and nations all make their own particular contribution to the enrichment of life in the new Jerusalem ... what we have is shown here is harvested in eternity ... the great diversity that exists among people in all sorts of ways is not destroyed in eternity but is cleansed from all that is simple and made serviceable to fellowship with God and each other.<sup>49</sup>

Jesus unifies ethnic communities with one another and yet he treasures ethnic diversity and the contributions they make in his kingdom in this world and the world to come.

### *3.10. Honour and Glory to Jesus Christ*

Although Ancestors are venerated by their communities, they don't require worship, and neither are they worthy of it. Scripture, however, offers us several accounts when Jesus was worshiped – you never hear of people venerating Jesus. When the wise men saw the infant, Jesus, “they fell down and worshiped him” (Matt 2:11). Jesus's disciples “worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God,’” after they had seen him walk on water (Matt 14:33). Again, in Matthew's gospel the disciples worshiped Jesus after his resurrection (Matt 28:9; 28:17; Luke 24:52). In John 9:38, the blind man believed in Jesus and worshipped after he had been healed. Further, all the angels are said to worship Jesus (Heb 1:6), and in heaven we have an image of “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.” (Rev 5:13–14).

I have already established that ancestors are departed people who lived moral lives and that they now live in closer proximity to the Supreme Being, and thus they are believed to be mediators who are worthy of honour. There is, however, no indication from the Supreme Being, sacred writings, or other entities that ancestors are worthy of honour other than the testimony from the living elders.

The scenario is different for Jesus. Luke 2:52 tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” At Jesus's baptism, “the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22). God the Father himself honoured his Son publicly. Jesus was aware of his authority and that he was worthy of honour, for he said, “That all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” (John 5:23). The Apostle Paul also wrote, that “God has highly exalted him (Jesus) and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9). This too is the testimony of heaven as we read in Revelation 5:9–13.

The ancestors of any community certainly ought to be honoured and respected, however, this honour and respect fails in comparison to the honour due Jesus Christ, which is proclaimed by the testimony of many people, Holy Scripture, the host of heaven, and God himself! Imagine the celestial expanse in the heavenlies in Revelation 5. No one in the seen and unseen realms was worthy to take the scroll and

to open its seals. But, alas, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, was the only being worthy of honour to open the seals, because he had conquered Satan, Sin and Death by sacrificing his own blood and ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and the people and nation – and then he made them a kingdom and priests to God, and they shall reign on the earth. No person who has ever achieved ancestorhood has claim to open the seals of the scroll, they only prostrate themselves to the glorious sacrificed-slain lamb, for he alone is worthy! As Michael Horton proclaims, “Jesus Christ alone is worthy to open the seals of history – the mystery of the ages – because it is in him alone that the ‘two peoples’ have been made one.”<sup>50</sup> Michael W. Smith, likely inspired by Revelation 5, composed the song, *Agnus Dei*, meaning “Lamb of God”. The lyrics go like this:

*Alleluia Alleluia*

*For our Lord God Almighty reigns*

*Alleluia Alleluia*

*For our Lord God Almighty reigns*

*Alleluia*

*Holy Holy*

*Are You Lord God Almighty*

*Worthy is the Lamb*

*Worthy is the Lamb*

*You are Holy...*

### *3.11. Christ the Cosmic King*

According to African Traditional Religion, ancestors have no claim to celestial status in way of prominence, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and sovereignty or rulership. This is true even after they are forgotten by the world of the living and merge with the world of spirits. Indeed, they even have limited ability interacting with their living community.

The celestial status of Jesus Christ on the other hand is exalted and supreme. The government is said to be on Jesus’s shoulder, and he is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9:6). Jesus is eternal (Rev 1:18; 2:8). All things were created by him, through him and for him, all things “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” (Col 1:16; John 1:1–3, Heb 1:1–3). He is the head of all rule and authority (Col 2:9–10). All spiritual forces are subjected to Christ! Therefore, Jesus’s status is above all rule, power,

and authority of the spirit world and above all dominion. He even has “authority over all flesh, to give eternal life” (John 17:2). He holds the keys of Death and Hades (Rev 1:8, 18; 22:13) and he sits “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” and “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:1–3). Evidently, Jesus Christ is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and sovereign. He holds supreme cosmic status in *all* realms.

### *3.12. Cosmic Redemption*

Any concept of salvation offered by the ancestors are underwhelming and vague. At best they bestow blessings, health, and prosperity, so it is believed. There is, however, eschatological promise for the living, that should they live a moral life worthy of honour and ancestorhood, they will take their place among the ancestors. However, in light of the glorious redemption that Jesus offers those who believe in him, both personal and cosmic, ancestorhood is dismal. Jesus Christ has already demonstrated the reality and authenticity of this hope filled redemption in his resurrection and glorification.

Jesus rose again from the dead in bodily form (Luke 24:39; Rev 1:17–18). He is said to be the first fruits of those who have died (1 Cor 15:20), meaning that he was the first to be resurrected from the dead and has the power and authority in the eschaton to raise his saints to eternal (John 17:2; Rev 1:17; 2:8). The Apostle Paul told us all we need to know about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, and one thing he makes clear, is that “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality” (1 Cor 15:52b–54a). This is only possible because in his resurrection Jesus overcame and conquered the power of death (1 Cor 15:54b–57).

As if this was not enough for an eschatological hope, through Jesus, heaven and earth will also be made new, and the new Jerusalem – which is biblical imagery for God’s presence – will descend from heaven and he will dwell with humanity. He will be with his people, and he will be our God forever (Rev 21:1–3). Herman Bavinck views cosmic renewal similarly to the renewal of a person when they become a new creation in Christ, where the old passes away and the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). He proclaims That Jesus will redeem “the same humanity, the same world, the same heaven, and the same earth that have been corrupted and polluted by sin.” The power of God’s word will bring about the birth of our new (or renewed) world.<sup>51</sup> Cosmic harmony and balance, therefore, ultimately “finds its

fulfillment, meaning and relevance in Christ's work of reconciliation, re-creation and regeneration of both of falling humanity and the fallen creation", says Turaki.<sup>52</sup>

Bavinck<sup>53</sup> also proclaims that all "that is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable in the whole of creation, in heaven and on earth, is gathered up in the future city of God – renewed, re-created, boosted in its highest glory." He continues, "by the re-creating power of Christ, the new heaven and the new earth will one day emerge from the fire-purged elements of this world, radiant in in during glory and forever set free from the 'bondage to decay'" And so the world will ultimately be restored and the human race in the believing community will receive salvation.<sup>54</sup>

Sadly, much of Christianity has promoted an 'unbiblical dualism' between the sacred and the secular, or the spiritual and the material. This has unfortunately resulted in a kind of 'pop-theology' where Christ will snatch people out of this world, take them to heaven, leaving the earth to its own devices. Yet, Jesus's work of redemption is holistic, and is this worldly as much as it is heavenly; bringing heaven and earth together.<sup>55</sup>

## **4. Christ the Redeemer of African Community**

Some think it futile to compare Jesus Christ to African ancestors because they are so different, like comparing apples and oranges. However, as I have demonstrated, some characteristics are similar, for example, both the ancestors and Jesus Christ are believed to be mediators. Victor Ezigbo says that Jesus is both like and unlike the African ancestors, because of his pre-eminent role of mediation.<sup>56</sup> Evidently, the comparison is not so much about a comparison of persons, but rather of characteristics. And here we saw that Jesus's characteristics far exceed the shared attributes of the ancestors, and in this sense, Jesus is gloriously incomparable! You have heard it said that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; but to fulfil them (Matt 5:17). Similarly, Jesus did not come to abolish the ancestors; but to fulfil them. He fulfils them perfectly and superabundantly. I say that Jesus did not come to abolish the ancestors, because the ancestors, or forebears in any culture are important for one's identity and for appreciating one's ancestral roots and the heroes in one's family and community. But even then, our identity ultimately needs to be found in our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the redeemer of African community, not the ancestors, that much is obvious.

While people foreign to the African ancestral worldview ought to dialogue with ancestral veneration respectfully, it needs to be made clear that Jesus offers more than any ancestor ever could in his

person and work. He exhibits almost all the positive attributes of the African ancestor yet displays them in such an extraordinary manner that it diminishes the need to approach any other intermediary for mediation and intercession. Samuel Kunhiyop said it well when he wrote,

... “it can be said that Jesus has come to fulfil our African ancestral cult and has taken the place of our ancestors, replacing them with himself.”<sup>57</sup> Because Christ fulfilled all laws, including those related to our ancestors, the rituals associated with veneration of our ancestors are now null and void. Christ has assumed all the functions our ancestors fulfilled in traditional beliefs. He is the only mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim 2:5) and he is able to sympathize with us and intercede on our behalf in all areas of life.<sup>58</sup>

Should Africans acknowledge their ancestors? The answer is yes. But should they approach their ancestors in any form of communication or for mediation, the answer is a resounding, no. Let all African communities and all humanity look to Jesus Christ as our sole Lord and mediator!

As Victor Ezigbo has made so clear, it is possible for African Christians and their communities to live out their Christian faith through the sole mediatory work of Jesus, for he is the redeemer of the entire cosmos, including Africa and its peoples. The work of ancestors, on the other hand is non-redemptive ensuring their people keep the moral laws.<sup>59</sup> This article has argued that the Christology in Jesus Christ offers a redeemer and mediator who is supreme in every way over and against the traditional African concept of ancestors, calling African communities to himself.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Much of the discussion in this section is a reworking of a section on intermediaries (ancestors) in chapter 4 of my doctoral thesis Robert Falconer, “A Theological and Biblical Examination on the Synthesis of Penal Substitution and Christus Victor Motifs: Implications for African Metaphysics” (Johannesburg, South African Theological Seminary, 2013), 201–13.

<sup>2</sup> Reuben Turbi Luka, *Jesus Christ as Ancestor: A Theological Study of Major African Ancestor Christologies in Conversation with the Patristic Christologies of Tertullian and Athanasius* (Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2019), 226.

<sup>3</sup> Victor I. Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 69–

70.

<sup>4</sup> When discussing the beliefs of Africans, I am only referring to those who hold to a worldview of ancestral veneration. One ought also to keep in mind that traditional African belief systems are diverse and not monolithic, so this outline of African ancestral belief is general rather than specific, there are variations among various communities.

<sup>5</sup> See Mhlophe, Afrika. *Christianity and the Veneration of Ancestors: Should a Christian Consult the Dead.* (South Africa: Prominence Media, 2013), 150–151.

<sup>6</sup> Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity*, 123.

<sup>7</sup> For an informative discussion on the relationship between saints in the Christian tradition with Africa's Ancestral Cult, see Luka (2019, pp.232–239).

<sup>8</sup> Luka, 219.

<sup>9</sup> Luka, 224–25.

<sup>10</sup> Luka, 222.

<sup>11</sup> All quotations from Scripture are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 82–83.

<sup>13</sup> Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine Through the Apostles' Creed* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), Ch. 5.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Bruce Ware, Wayne Grudem, Denny Burk, Mark Thompson, Mike Ovey.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Liam Goligher, Carl Trueman, Darren Sumner, Mark Jones, Scot McKnight.

<sup>16</sup> Keith E. Johnson, "Trinitarian Agency and the Eternal Subordination of the Son: An Augustinian Perspective," *Themelios* 36, no. 1 (2011): 11.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, "Trinitarian Agency and the Eternal Subordination of the Son: An Augustinian Perspective," 19.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, 21.

<sup>20</sup> For further reading on this important topic, see: Bird and Harrower (2019), Whitfield (2018), and Butner (2018).

<sup>21</sup> Guretzki, David. *An Explorer's Guide to Karl Barth* (Explorer's Guides; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 181–182.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd ed., vol. I.1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1975), 137.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Revised edition (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), 318, Book 2.15.1.

<sup>24</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 900.

<sup>25</sup> Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity*, 253.

<sup>26</sup> Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 240.

<sup>27</sup> Rutledge, 276.

<sup>28</sup> Rutledge, 276.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, 1.2.2011 edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 427.

<sup>30</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 375.

<sup>31</sup> Rutledge, 377.

<sup>32</sup> Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity*, 123.

<sup>33</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 181.

<sup>34</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 199.

- <sup>35</sup> Wright, 200.
- <sup>36</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 390 Book 3. Ch. 3. Sec. 9.
- <sup>37</sup> Calvin, 299 Book 2, Ch. 12, Sec. 3.
- <sup>38</sup> John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 155.
- <sup>39</sup> Murray, 156.
- <sup>40</sup> Murray, 157.
- <sup>41</sup> Murray, 161.
- <sup>42</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 3–4.
- <sup>43</sup> Goodwin, 52.
- <sup>44</sup> Harry Sawyerr, *GOD: Ancestor or Creator* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1970), 7.
- <sup>45</sup> Sawyerr, 9.
- <sup>46</sup> Yusufu Turaki, *The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ* (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers Limited, 2006), 38.
- <sup>47</sup> Turaki, 40.
- <sup>48</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 122.
- <sup>49</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 727.
- <sup>50</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 723.
- <sup>51</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:717.
- <sup>52</sup> Turaki, 46.
- <sup>53</sup> Bavinck, 4:720.
- <sup>54</sup> Bavinck, 4:720.
- <sup>55</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 251.
- <sup>56</sup> Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity*, 116–17.

<sup>57</sup> Quotation is taken from, Yusufu Turaki. "The Role of Ancestors," in *African Bible Commentary*. Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers Limited, 2006), 480.

<sup>58</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity*, 124.

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