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Ancestral Christology vis-à-vis Postmodernism

Towards a Reconstructive Guest Christology in Continental Africa

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Abstract

Recent theological trends among African theologians have advocated for theological reflection on the Christian faith in the light of the African socio-cultural milieu. Certainly, there are obvious challenges that always goes with contextual theologies. For instance, African Christology, a theology centred on the study of Christ from an African perspective and which is born out of this approach, has given birth to Ancestral Christology. The challenge facing this type of Christology is that most of the so-called postmodern Africans do not have adequate knowledge of cultural elements and do not appear to appreciate this indigenous rooted christology. This research article seeks to clarify Ancestral Christology, as espoused by Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo in the context of Postmodern Africa, and evaluates its impact on the spirituality of postmodern people. It moves on to construct a Reconstructive Guest Christology, from a socio-cultural perspective, as a methodology in constructing African Ancestral Christology. The Reconstructive Guest Christology portrays Christ as the one who reconstructs lives at individual, cultural, social-economic, liturgical, structural, communal, and at the universal levels. To this end, it strives to restore wholeness, lost dignity, spiritual justice, fairness, and reconciliation through love which are central to Jesus' solidarity with humanity. It is hoped that this would appeal to postmodernists as they participate in Christ's divine providence. The material in this article is conceptually and methodologically designed and gathered through an extensive review of relevant literature.

Keywords: Ancestor Christology, Guest Christology, Brother-Ancestor, Proto-Ancestor, Postmodern, Reconstruction.

Introduction

Many African theologians have contributed to the ancestral Christology model. This article evaluates the contributions of ancestral Christology as elaborated by Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo. African theologians regard western cultural dominion as the single major problem threatening Africa's theo-artistic destiny. However, there is the possibility of traditional African indigenous cultures equally posing challenges to the quest for an African Ancestral Christology as we undertake our theological reflections. Perhaps, this might turn out to be the most striking features in African theological conundrum as we undertake an Ancestral Christology.

The historical context in which this research article is based connects with the intellectual ground of postmodernism. Postmodernism, as a cultural phenomenon, occurs at the academic and social levels (Canale 2006:97). The research article proposes that African indigenous values can be primarily be understood in their African cultural settings; and secondarily in their relevance to the postmodern context. Their divergences justifies the development of a Christology based on values and ideas that contemporary postmodernists can easily resonate with.

The challenge is that most youths in Kenya receive education that borders on irrelevancy, as it tends to be alienated from their respective cultural settings. This renders the quest for an African Ancestral Christology vulnerable and foggy and/or gives a blurred future, as the so-called postmodernists do not know their ancestral concepts that would enrich this locally owned theological 'project.' Further, this makes it difficult to accept African Ancestral Christology that is constructed via local resources (riddles, metaphors, sayings, proverbs, dances, songs, oral narratives and so on). Considering that Christology is a central doctrine in the Christian faith, this research article seeks to explore a suitable metaphor that is acceptable to this postmodernist context in the twenty-first century Africa. The research article also hypothesizes that if the ancestral Christology is evaluated and a new model is reconstructed in a postmodern context and utilizes relevant imageries that are in continuum with postmodernists; hence they would easily identify themselves with Christ as their proto-Ancestor. In this scholarly treatise, we strive towards a reconstructive guest Christology in the postmodernist era in Africa. And as a theological paradigm, reconstruction theology finds its justification in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ who sought to reconstruct Mosaic laws rather than overturn it (Gathogo 2008b).

1. The problem of Ancestor Christology in a Postmodern Africa.

1.1 Postmodernity

The definition of the terms postmodernity and postmodernism are often confusing because of the interchange of the terms. Adams (1997:2) has attempted to draw the distinction between the two terms, as he argues that it is the social scientists tend to speak of postmodernity, while those in arts and humanities prefer the term postmodernism. Postmodernity refers to a cultural condition or state of being, while postmodernism focuses on an artistic or pluralistic movement within a culture. He rightly states that postmodernism is the condition in which the twenty-first century culture finds itself. Postmodernism is thus a reflection upon that condition; and a response to it.

What is distinctly clear about the two terms is that they are more than anything else, a state of mind (Bauman 1992: vii). Postmodernism is a way of naming the present social-cultural reality by those who reflect upon it. The postmodern is primarily a phenomenon of western culture; and is therefore, a movement that has arisen in Africa as well, as a reaction to the modernism of western civilization. It is a part of today's broader and more profound changes.

Contemporary movement towards religiosity across the socio-political divides has been viewed positively and negatively within the postmodern context. Or could it be a secularized religiosity in the twenty-first century Africa? Could it be synonymous to globalized religiosity that alienates itself from indigenous religiosity that has served Africa from time immemorial? Nevertheless, postmodernists are social scientists involved in naming the present socio-cultural reality and reflecting upon cultural movements or plurality movements within a culture. Stated postmodernists are the people who experience a paradigm shift, in their way of thinking, in our contemporary society; their purpose is to do things differently and push for a change (Daley 2016:287).

1.2 Ancestral Christology

Nyamiti (2005: 65), in his contribution to Ancestral Christology, starts by pointing out that there is no uniform system of beliefs of the cult of ancestors in Africa. Nyamiti (2005) claims that an African would desire to have many children because the spirit continues to live within the family by naming a child after the ancestor's name. The link between the living and the dead is the continuation of the relationship, as no one can be an ancestor of a family with whom they have no connection.

By death, an ancestor enters the life of sacred superhuman status. Still, the power of the ancestors is only linked to the family where the living enjoys the benefits of long life, good health, material wealth, and children as a reward for their mutual adoration with him. Nyamiti (1992:44) considers the concept of ancestors to convey the understanding of the worth of any human or religious value which transcends time and space. Nyamiti, (2005:67) further argues that owing to their superhuman condition and nearness to the Creator, the ancestors are sometimes considered mediators between the Supreme Being and their earthly kins, with the result that the

earthly kins only turn to the Supreme Being as a last resort. The ancestors, however, demand loyalty from the living relatives through prayers and rituals.

According to Nyamiti (1996:38), no one can acquire ancestral status without leading a morally good life according to the African moral standards. The ancestor also enjoys the right to regular sacred communication with the earthly kin through prayers and ritual donations. Communication is a sign of love, thanksgiving, confidence, and homage to the ancestors from earthly relatives. The ancestors respond by bestowing physical and spiritual goods to their kins as a sign of love, gratitude, faithfulness, and respect. Nyamiti, (2005:68) lists the requirements which must be met for one to be regarded as an ancestor. First, they must have lived a virtuous life that satisfied the moral fabric of the clan. Secondly, they must have left descendants who remember them. Thirdly, they should have died well; that is, they lived to old age and did not die an unnatural or untimely death. He goes on to demonstrate how Christ's death enabled his passage to ancestorship according to the traditional African conceptions. He takes Christ's death as a qualification for his ancestorship as it is through death that African ancestorship is acquired in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Thus, Nyamiti constructs Ancestor Christology by comparing the African ancestor status with Jesus' life and death. According to Nyamiti, although Jesus did not marry and beget children, he gave birth to the Church. The Church points to Jesus' fecundity. The untimely death of Jesus is explained in the African tradition, a young man who died in the course of defending his community qualified for the position of an ancestor. Therefore, since Jesus died while redeeming his people, he can be allowed to be an ancestor. Thus, Jesus is an Ancestor par excellence. Nyamiti, (1984:15) takes the cult of ancestors seriously to build upon it in his Christology and his ecclesiology.

Benezet Bujo reconstructs African Christology by creating what he calls Proto-Ancestorhood. The reference here is only the God-fearing ancestors who tremendously influence their descendants. As Bujo (1992:73) points out:

When we say we want to use the concept of an ancestor as the basis of Christology, we are referring to God-fearing ancestors. Only in the case of such ancestors can we speak of experiences and examples as indeed a testament left behind for the benefit of their descendants. In this context, it is to be noted that the last words of a dying person are of particular significance. These words are words of life, setting a seal on experiences and examples of one. The final event of a dying person is normative for those they leave behind while withdrawing from the community, yet truly lives on within it, along with other ancestors.

Bujo continues to compare the words of a dying person (for example, the father or mother) with the words of Jesus in John 17 as words of life and experience. They serve as examples of one who continues to live on within the community with the ancestors. According to Bujo (1992:73), Jesus lived up to the African ancestor ideal and to a higher degree. Thus, Jesus brings life and life force in fullness by working miracles, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, and raising the dead to life. Bujo (1992:75) states that Jesus manifested all the virtues and qualities attributed to the ancestors. The similarity in traits between Jesus and the ancestors implies a Christology "from below" for the African context. The title Proto-Ancestor is reserved for Jesus only. Hence, it signifies that Jesus realized the authentic God-fearing ancestors' genuine ideal, transcended it, and brought it to completion. Reference to the root meaning of the term "proto" and its usage is essential for the understanding of Proto-Ancestor Christology. The Oxford Dictionary defines proto as something "original," one from which others develop or follow, according to Jonathan Crothers (1987:60).

Bujo, (1992:75) refers to Jesus' resurrection in which God brought a new creation. This creation, according to Bujo, transcends the first one because it includes the world of the ancestors. The ancestors are included in salvation because of Jesus' resurrection. In his status as a risen Christ, he is not only the Proto-Ancestor but also Proto-Life-Force - the impulse that gives life and vitality. In his position of life force, Jesus identifies with the soteriological role of the African ancestors. The ancestor in this state must be a source of life to all his descendants. Christ realizing this ancestor ideal elevates it to a superior level of fulfilment and becomes a Proto-life force. He does not only have life, but he is also life and awakens others to live (John 11:25). Bujo concludes that after the resurrection, Jesus was exalted to glory, opening a new relationship between human beings.

Besides the preceding two African Ancestor Christologists, others have also developed Ancestor Christology. John Probee (1979:82) referred to Jesus as the great and the most significant ancestor in the Akan language. He added that Christ was superior to our ancestors by being God-incarnate. According to Probee (1979), ancestors are human beings who become ancestors because of death, and so is Jesus. However, he concedes that every image is bound to be partial and half-truth; so is the image of Christ as an ancestor. Kwame Bediako (1994:93) perceives that the cult of ancestors is the product of the myth-making imagination of the community. This myth-making is what makes ancestors sacred, he argues. The proposition is that Jesus is the most significant ancestor for Africans. He claims that Jesus, as the Son of God, lives eternally. Unlike the ancestors who are the sons of the community that live and die, whose memory is eventually forgotten, this makes him more significant than they are. Jesus' closeness to God and his redemptive quality make him the greatest.

1.3 The problem of Ancestor Christology in a postmodern Africa.

The Ancestor Christology poses problems in the understanding of Christ in postmodern Africa. The Church must therefore think anew about how it will credibly present the Christian message in a postmodern context. Therefore, this section evaluates the ancestry problems in the context of postmodern Africa. John Mbiti (1969:85) does not use the term ancestor at all because:

Ancestral spirits or ancestors are misleading terms since they imply only those spirits who were once the ancestors of the living. These terms limit the concept unnecessarily since they were spirits and living dead of children, brothers, sisters, barren wives, and other members of the family who were not in any way ancestors.

Therefore, imaging Christ as an ancestor would be more misleading since those spirits who are no longer remembered turn to be things. Mbiti (1969) strongly advocates abolishing the two terms and replacing them with spirits or the living dead. There are more divergent ways in which Christ differs from the ancestors. Timothy Palmer (2008:73) surveyed eighty students from Nigeria. Out of the eighty students, only three thought Christ should be considered an ancestor, almost a total rejection of the concept. Probee (1979), in his contribution to the ancestor model, seems to be aware that ancestors are essentially human beings who become spirit ancestors because of death. He concedes that every image is bound to be partial and half-truth. This evidence raises doubt about the legitimacy of using the image of Christ as the ancestor.

As noted earlier, Bediako (1994) perceives that the cult of ancestors is a product of the myth-making of the community. The structure of ancestor Christology consists of myths. Diane Stinton (2004:148) conducted intensive research among the Protestants and Catholics and found that both clergy and laity were divided over the legitimacy of the image of Christ as an ancestor. She found that most clergy and laity were reluctant to use the image of Christ. The main reasons why this image remains controversial are: (1) The danger that conceiving Christ as an ancestor encourages people to think of their ancestors as intermediaries. At the same time, the Scriptures teach that we only have one mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ. (2) Africans may be encouraged to worship their ancestors and place them in a position only God should hold by offering them sacrifices and oblations. (3) It seems to make Jesus another human being rather than God incarnate. The Scriptures condemn necromancy (consulting the dead), which is what happens.

On the other hand, Bediako (1994) views the cult of an ancestor as belonging to the category of myth ancestors, the product of the community's myth-making imagination. The postmodernists would find it problematic as their own cultural alienation would dictate this. Probee (1979:97), one of the advocates of ancestor Christology, concedes that "every image is bound to be partial and half-truth." This is adequate evidence that the concept of ancestor Christology is relatively not true. Rorty (1979:79) contends that there is really no such thing as truth.

Postmodernists critique the traditional culture. Thomas E.J., (2002:5) argues that postmodernism attempts to conquer the hitherto reigning traditions and values. Noting that ancestor Christology is based on traditional culture, the postmodernists would not understand cultural metaphors such as ancestors to identify Christ. Postmodernism also critiques modern ideas of autonomous, wilful, and unified ego and displaces individualism with an emphasis on the communal (Sonnet 1993:50). The ancestor Christology is an autonomist

model (Hagaba, 2009: 342), making it subject to rejection by the postmodernists, and an autonomist model widens the difference instead of establishing a common framework in which crafted differences can be resolved.

According to Kevin J. Vanhoozer (2003:11), postmodern turn is seen as a transformation of modern social organization. It proceeds from modernity. In turn, modernity embodies the enlightenment ideals of autonomy and progress gain. Postmodernists reject the idea that there is one universal rational form. Postmodern thinkers rejected the idea that reason names a neutral, disinterested perspective to pursue truth and justice. Postmodern theory disclaims the following modern postulates: 1) That reason is absolute and universal. 2) The individuals can autonomously transcend their place in history, class, and culture, 3) The universal principles and procedures are objective, whereas preferences are subjective.

2. African Theology of Reconstruction

2.1 Reconstruction

Jesse Mugambi is the key proponent of the African Theology of Reconstruction. The basis of Mugambi's reconstruction theology is the biblical narrative of Nehemiah's Reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, which provides the theological paradigm for the reconstruction and social transformation of Africa after colonialism, apartheid, and the end of the cold war. After the defeat of these ills, Reconstruction theology challenges the Church in Africa to actively promote human rights, social justice, peace, and reconciliation amid African atrocities (Gathogo 2008a:328).

In his proposal, Mugambi identifies three areas of reconstruction covering all areas of social life. First is the personal, which deals with reconstructing individual motives and intuitions. The second is ecclesial reconstruction, dealing with the Church's life, including management, structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resource, development, research, family, education, service, and witness. He sees theology as how the Church rationalizes its process of ecclesial Reconstruction (Mugambi 1995:17). The third level is cultural reconstruction, which has five components: i) Politics dealing with the management of social life and finance. ii) Economics dealing with matters of values. iii) Ethics deals with the reconstruction of the system or values. iv) Aesthetics deals with the sense of proportions and symmetry in all aspects of life. v) Religion provides the individual synthesizing everything that individuals cherish as corporate members of the community (Mugambi 1995:17). Therefore, Reconstruction in Africa refers to actions taken in all dimensions of societal life and not a particular sector of human existence.

The reconstruction concept implies the process of review and then moving to create something more suitable to the prevailing situation. It means working out new models meaningful to present-day readers. This research article is hypothetically based on Mugambi's (1995) conviction of the importance of the need for Africans to shift their theological gears afresh. The Bible is replete with cases and illustrations of personal renewal and social reconstruction. Consequently, religious metaphors must be re-interpreted when they become obsolete and irrelevant (Mugambi 1995:12). Reconstruction implies change at various levels: individual, society, Church, and nation.

Reconstruction as a theological paradigm finds its justification in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In her contribution to the reconstruction paradigm, Philemona Njeri Mwaura (2008: 4) argues that the idea of reconstruction assumes a pre-existence framework and urges the Church to rise and reform her structures purposely and decisively. A renewed church should deconstruct the systems of gender-based discrimination. She argues that the reconstruction concept implies a review process and then moving on towards transformation. Mugambi, (1995:12) admits that reconstruction borrows from other engineering and social science disciplines and suggests remodelling, redesigning, and reorganizing certain aspects of society to make it more responsive. Different terminologies parallel to reconstruction are rebuilt, re-assemble, re-establish, recreate, restore, reform, renovate, regenerate, remark, reorganize or remodel. It can also be compared with rethink, rebirth, redo, and re-examine, just as Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again (John 3:3, See also Gathogo 2007:155-186).

Villa-Vicencio, (1992:39) argues that reconstruction as liberation theology stands for radical transformation. He, therefore, recommends a paradigm shift to reconstruction. According to Villa-Vicencio (1992:2), reconstruction is a response to the challenges faced by the Church, which according to its theological task, is to restore justice and affirm human dignity. Given this response, it is hoped that nations would turn away from greed, domination, and exploitation and embrace communal sharing and personal fulfilment. In this regard, reconstruction is a process that entails a transformation of social ills to usher in collaborative sharing and personal efficacy. From a biblical point of view, reconstruction is considered to be a post-exilic theology. In this context, Villa-Vicencio argues that the central biblical motif for reconstruction theology is the post-exilic experience rather than exodus as contextual theologians advocated it,

The reconstruction paradigm is preferable to the inculturation model within which ancestor Christology has been constructed as no longer adequate for African theology. Inculturation was designed to respond to ecclesiastical and colonial bondage that no longer obtain and has been ineffective in responding to multifaceted challenges in a postmodern context. The ancestor Christology is reactive, and there is a need to develop proactive Christology of Reconstruction. Reconstruction is more effective as it highlights the necessity of creating a new inclusive society beyond barriers of geography, culture, historical moment, gender, age, class, ethnicity, and race. The reconstruction approach is interdisciplinary in its process. Therefore, all people and their dealings are inter-related. In utilizing reconstructive motif, as propounded by post-exilic theologians, we endeavour to construct an African Guest Christology that is rooted in renewal of cultural elements. It differs with Ancestral Christology which utilizes artistic model rather than reconstructive approach, and eventually finds itself alienating postmodernists in the twenty-first century Africa.

2.2. Reconstructive Guest Christology

Mugambi (1995) and Gathogo (2015) are some of the leading proponents of African reconstructive Christology; and who sees Christ as an African guest. In the New Testament, Christ is portrayed as one who is always at home with all peoples, cultures, and languages. He is above all other ordinary guests in the African context for his emphasis on the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class, and hierarchical barriers. Christ did not only encounter Zacchaeus but also the Samaritan woman at the well (John.4:26), the Syro-phoenician woman (Mt. 15:21-28), the scribes, prostitutes, peasants, fishermen, the powerful, the needy, women and children. As a guest to Africa, Christ brings gifts like other guests, including charismatic gifts (1 Cor. 12); he welcomes strangers, outsiders, the gentiles, the pagans, outcasts, sinners, and the sick (Lk 4:18-20). Christ confronted social, racial, and sexual discrimination since he was not a respecter of persons or wealth. As a unique guest, Christ broke traditional Jewish practices by eating with tax-collectors and sinners (Mt. 9:10-11). In this regard, he reconstructed social structure, meaning humanity could mix freely without social or religious barriers (Gathogo 2015).

The guest Christology proposal by Enyi Ben Udoh (1988:198), the Presbyterian minister, was developed on the premise that many Nigerians saw Jesus as a guest, stranger, or refugee who needed shelter in Africa. The contrary perception that Jesus was an illegal alien would make him liable to rejection. The notion of this model is that it removes the foreignness of Jewish culture in which Jesus lived to African culture (Gathogo 2015). Therefore, Jesus is transcultural, and culture is subject to him. The kinship relationship allows Jesus and the people to live together as a family, working together as a team for the community goal; in this way, Christ reconstructs a new sense of solidarity, one ethical principle, and a shared destiny.

According to Emmanuel Orobator (1995:30), Christ as a guest is welcomed into our homes after undergoing invitation rites leading to his acceptance and proclamation as the head of the household. That is, the redeemer and authenticator of African ways of life. Christ our guest says: "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in, eat with him and him with me" (Rev: 3:20). Jesus as the redeeming and saving Word enters the family, and is embraced and redeems all in the family. As their unique guest, they hear him, and profess faith in him as Lord and Saviour. Christ becomes the source of blessings for each family who welcomes him. He brings gifts of the fullness of life from the Father. A Swahili word

says, “*Mgeni njoomwenyejiapone* -loosely translated as ‘when a guest comes home, the host benefits.’ Christ, therefore, invites all believers to share these gifts in the Spirit as one family of the Father (Gathogo 2001, 2015). Christ, our guest, as a family member, shares our sorrows (Mt. 8:17). He also shares our life and destiny with us, blessing us with strong and beautiful offspring. He waters the land, and the yield of harvest is bountiful. Hence, it is reminiscent of what the Lord says in Ezekiel 34:26: “There will be showers for blessing.” He mourns with us, feels pain, and gives us rest and peace for our troubled hearts. In John 11:17-44, Christ portrays these attributes to the family of Mary and Martha following the death of their brother Lazarus. As a divine reconstructionist, Christ revitalizes his providence to humanity by manifesting his divine love, attentive care, guidance, and direction (Gathogo 2001, 2015). As the head of the family, he is the father to the fatherless. To the widows, Christ is the substance, essence, both something and everything, everywhere and in all things. Jesus is also recognized clearly by his life-giving breath, which renews, restores, and transforms human life.

In the guest perspective, Jesus is portrayed as a reversal reconstructionist by tracing the trajectory of guest-host-Lord in his encounter with others. This reversal of guest-host perspective, shifting from guest to host, happens on several occasions in Luke and Acts. Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus is a good example. As this story unfolds, Christ invites himself as a guest who turns out to be a host. Christ as a host saves Zacchaeus and welcomes him into the kingdom of God. Other examples in which Christ serves as a host after being accepted include Luke 7:36-50. Jesus is received for a meal by Simon the Pharisee. Jesus’ posture shifts from a guest to a host during the meal. He acts as a teacher offering Simon an explanation of the relationship between indebtedness and love. At the same time, Jesus spoke to the woman who had anointed his feet with authority. He affirms that her sins were forgiven and that her faith had healed her (Koenig 1985:87). In this text, Jesus is received as a guest and becomes a host who announces forgiveness, healing, and love.

Another prominent example of Christ becoming a host after being invited as a guest is the story of the two disciples travelling to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-34). Within the narrative, a stranger (Jesus) is invited into the home as a fellow traveller and guest. And suddenly, he is breaking and blessing bread, a host who is revealing himself to those who thought him dead. This action opens their eyes to the true divinity of Christ, who restored their hope. Goergen (2001:18) portrays Christ as an African host. He argues that an indigenized African Jesus is a host and a Master of Hospitality. The image of Christ as a host is not only African, but he is also a universal host. A host to Africans and non-Africans. He is a host to the poor, those without status, women, men, and children. Christ manifested his solidity with people, welcoming them to the tablefellowship. The tablefellowship in which Christ invites people to a meal is evident in multiplying the loaves and fish (Mt. 14:13-21). He also hosted the crowds, nourishing them with the word and providing them food. In the last meal Jesus hosted for his disciples, he washed their feet and made a blood covenant with them (Mk. 14:24). We celebrate the Eucharist with Christ as our host.

In the encounter of Jesus with Zacchaeus, Christ redeems and reconciles him to God and the community (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus, as a result, is prompted to give half of his possession to the poor (Luke 19:5). The plight of the poor is central to Jesus’ mission (Luke 4:18-19). Therefore, Jesus reconstructed the oppressive societal structures through his mission, death, and resurrection (Gathogo 2015). Zacchaeus’ redemption also has social and economic repercussions on the lives of the children, women, and men. As the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus would bring change at the structural level of the tax system. This transformation would begin with the breaking of corruption in the tax collection system. This transformation may apply to the African tax collection system, where many citizens would experience tax relief free of fraud.

Eating with sinners (Mt. 9:10) and feeding the five thousand, Christ introduced the meal-ministry by emphasizing the importance of the symbolism of meal, which is a common phenomenon in Africa. Therefore, this theology and praxis of his ministry reflect the fundamental value of African hospitality (Gathogo 2001). Sharing the meal binds people together, like taking an oath that binds the parties, as Mutiso–Mbinda (1984) emphasizes.

A meal is perhaps the primary and most ancient symbol of friendship, love, and unity. Food and drink taken in common are apparent signs that life is shared. In our African context, it is unusual for people to

eat alone. Only a witch or wizard would do that. A meal is always a communal affair; therefore, the family usually eats together. Eating together is a sign of being accepted to share life and equality.

Christ reconstructed the ministry of hospitality in which he is the Master of Hospitality. Hospitality symbolizes and embodies African life; the true African is always a host. To be an African is to be a host. Christ as a guest, brings reconciliation between humanity and God. After reconciling us to God makes us a new and better creation (2 Cor. 5:17). As a unique guest, Christ stays with human beings and remains with them forever (Mt. 28:20). He is the master builder of our family. He is one of us and present in our midst—the silent listener in every meal and conversation. Christ welcomes us into the communion and solidarity of the entire family of God, and we are challenged to embrace one another just as Christ has accepted us to bring praise to God (Rom. 15:7). Christ also inaugurated the healing mission. He was healing the world from its sickness, economic mess, oppression, and blindness and sustaining a fulfilling life. His healing ministry is seen in some of his first sermons (Lk 4:18-20). This healing miracle is carried out inside a house, where he could have been a guest (Mk 2:1-12). He also healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38). Many healing miracles were performed away from his home yard. Christ is the great physician of all seasons. His crucifixion and resurrection are seen as the conclusion of victory over the sickness and death that stand in contradiction to God’s reign. Christ as an African guest, brings many gifts, including healing, thereby making it necessary to receive him with great anticipation.

3. The Effectiveness of Reconstructive Guest Christology in the Context of Postmodern Africa

Reconstructive Guest Christology addresses the realities of the postmodern person because it focuses on forms of marginalization like the homeless, hungry, handicapped, sick, and the poor. Reconstructive Guest Christology, unlike Ancestor Christology, resonates with what Christ as a liberator did in his ministry (Luke 4:18-19). The Reconstructive Guest Christology has been proposed as an alternate model that can credibly communicate the Christian message. In its application of contemporary metaphors, the model appeals to African realities and creates new patterns of social transformation in African communities. The metaphors applied in this study which include stranger, host, friend, Lord, and guest, are familiar to postmodernists and could quickly identify with them. These images are authentically African and Christian. These images are expected to help the postmodernists understand Christ and own him.

Christ’s encounter with Zacchaeus demonstrates a reversal of fortunes (Naseri, 2012:17). Zacchaeus is short but stands taller than Jesus (on a tree). He is considered unworthy of Jesus, but he became one privileged in his community to host Jesus. He is a sinner but turns out saved. He is seen as a lover of money but stands with the poor by giving half his wealth. He is seen to be lost but found. The Reconstructive Guest Christology transforms people’s situations. Like most Africans, the communities in Lukan texts have been on the margins and excluded. Christ as the Guest has brought restoration and renewal in the spirit of Jubilee tradition (Luke 4:18-19). Christ has reversed the African destiny; people once taken for granted and forgotten have seen a great light.

In Guest Christology, Christ is first acknowledged as a stranger, then as a guest, and eventually becomes the host. In the Kenya-Anglican’s liturgical book: *ACK Our Modern Services*, Holy Communion service, the ritualistic words used are: “Christ is the host and we are his guests.” In this reversal role, Christ is not only owned within the African culture as a guest but he is also accepted in Africa (Udoh 1988:13). When Christ proceeds from being a Guest to being the Host, he turns out to be a relative, guest-host and the Lord of all. The Guest Christology articulated by Udoh and Orobator (1988) focused on inculturating Christ in African culture, where Christ is welcomed as a guest. As an African guest, Christ brings gifts and blessings to all who receive him. But in Reconstructive Guest Christology, in addition to Christ’s provision of gifts and benefits, he transcends his divine providence by transforming culture, structures, and worldviews and reverses fortunes and destiny through reconstruction. Christ is the solution provider with all the providence he bestows to the Africans. This paradigm shift assists in re-interpreting Jesus’ message to the African postmodernists as our mission and message.

Jesus Christ, who comes into the human epoch through an incarnation as a guest, turns out to be their liberator. Christ, in the process, turns out to be a kinsman, host and the Lord. The kinship relationship allows

Jesus and the people to live together as a family, working together as a team for the community goal (Udoh 1988:244). In this way, Christ reconstructs a new sense of solidarity, one ethical principle and a shared destiny.

4. Practical/Pastoral Implications of Reconstructive Guest Christology

Through Reconstructive Guest-Christology, we learn that to love God with one's whole heart is to love God's people. To desire justice and stand in solidarity with those disadvantaged by the world's social structures, Jesus reached out to social outcasts, tax collectors, and sinners. He is the liberator of those who are poor and the marginalized. Jesus means freedom and equity for humanity. Jesus saves, rescues, redeems and fights for us. For Ka Mana, (1993:8) Christ is more than a liberator; he is the breath of radical renovation. Jesus' incarnation is the Word made flesh (John 1: 1-8). He teaches us what it means to be human and recognizes the dignity of every human being since God created us equally in his image. When Zacchaeus comes to Christ, his family also becomes related to Christ, meaning we also become relatives of Christ. Therefore, we become members of his Church by faith, and Abraham's blessings come upon us (Acts 16:31). An encounter with Christ, our reconstructionist Guest, changes our vision, values, virtues and destiny. Christ is friendly to sinners so that he may save them. He hangs out with sinners, people with no pretence to religiosity like the tax collectors, bringing hope to them. He has a soft spot in his heart for us, speaking to us with words of kindness. His love is lovely, never stopping, never giving up and forever love.

Those who welcome Jesus and share the table with him must also share his concern for justice and love for the poor. We must reach out to people, spend time with them, and share Christ's compassion for the world. Thus, Reconstructive Guest Christology is more practical than Ancestor Christology, which is abstract and non-functional. Christ as the Guest visits us in our contexts, challenges us in our perspectives and invites us to his kingdom of righteousness. The kingdom in which everyone is valued is the type of Christology postmodernists can quickly identify with despite their scepticism.

Considering that liturgy is a practical undertaking, Christ had to be adapted to be an African guest. He is adapted through a cultural rite. The first step of this rite is the liturgy of the Word. Christ is the Word who takes flesh and dwells in our midst (John 1:1-8). The incarnation of the Word is practical. We celebrate the embodiment of the Word made flesh with explicit acceptance as the Word of the alliance of the family. This step implies that God sent Christ to be born as one of us into our family. African ritual process of incorporating aliens into the host culture has practical implications. For example, in the West African culture, the host serves kola nut to welcome the guest into the family. More families join the welcome ceremony—the guest status shifts to kinship. The guest-kin relationship allows Jesus to become one of the family and community. His presence is celebrated, and his voice heeded. It becomes easy for Christ to declare his lordship in his status as guest-kin. Accepting Christ as our guest, kin, and Lord increases a new sense of solidarity, transformation, and a shared destiny. Those who relate with him through the guest-kin-Lord concept take up the task of living in and inviting others to celebrate the new communalism of the kingdom of God.

The image of a host can also be understood liturgically during the final meal Jesus hosted for his disciple friends at which he washed their feet, Christ serves (Lk 22:27). He had not come to be served but to serve (Mk 10:45). He washed their feet taking the lowest nature of a servant (Phi. 2:5-7). Christ is the one who forgives and cleanses our sins. Servant leadership demonstrated in this act of foot washing transcends culture and ideology, which is the liturgical/practical meaning of foot washing. At Eucharist, we fellowship together with Christ being our host, and we are his guests. It manifests both the generosity of God and the hospitality of the Africans. We should respond in gratitude to Christ, who has come to us and has welcomed us to the Lord's Supper as our host. Happy are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9).

5. Conclusion

This research article has identified the limitations of Ancestor Christology, especially in the context of postmodernism who are not well rooted in indigenous cultures. This Christological model is abstract, and since it utilises traditional categories unfamiliar to contemporary postmodernists, its construct does not resonate

primarily with young Christians born and raised in cosmopolitan urban cities. Thus, searching for a modern metaphor for a Guest is more appropriate than Ancestral Christology in the twenty-first century Africa. It is interesting that even though postmodernism is a western concept, the African youths would resonate well with it, particularly when Guest Christology is seen as a postmodern concept. The research article has thus strived to demonstrate the practical implications of such a metaphor, as it cuts across all ages and cultural contexts. Reconstructive Guest Christology demonstrates how Christ, the Son of God, incarnated in the Jewish culture as a guest who turned into a host and transcended in transforming world cultures, structures, and fortunes through reconstruction (renewal and rejuvenation of cultures and trends).

Thus, by inviting Christ into our contexts, he will turn into a guest-host, from which bountiful harvests will be reaped. Restoration of wholeness, justice, dignity, hope, and reconciliation through love are central to Christ's own solidarity with humanity. This attribute remains Christ's gift to humanity which would appeal to the postmodernists as they participate in his divine providence. Certainly, an African Guest Christology will heal Africa from economic strangulation, bandit economy, xenophobia, ethnic-based politics, episcopal autocracy, blind denominationalism, social intolerance, banditry, and religious extremism that lacks a divine guest in its *modus operandi*, among others.

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