

## Chapter 7

### Luke 9:18-22: An African hermeneutical reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke

*It is a delightful paradox that the more Christ is translated into the various thought forms and life systems which form our various national identities, the richer all of us will be in our common Christian identity.*  
(Walls 1996:54)

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

As was stated in § 4.4.1, an African hermeneutical reading of leadership, conflict and Jesus' identity in Luke's gospel consists of a contextualisation of the conclusions reached from the etic reading of Luke's gospel. The word contextualisation derives from the root "context", which refers to the interpretation of the "object" by the "subject" (Pobee 1992:38). It starts from the clear recognition of one's own identity, one's own value as an individual and as a society, and concludes with the recognition that God speaks to all people at all times, in all places and in all circumstances. Contextualisation is a Protestant approach to the interpretation of scripture, which is a parallel to the Catholic approach of inculturation (Küster 2001:24).<sup>202</sup> Biblical stories narrated from the perspective of a particular context call for reinterpretation when it comes to its application in a different context, at a different epoch. Contextualisation is also a methodology that imposes on the exegete a strong grip from the past. There is an absolute need to understand the past because, "we cannot know where we are unless we appreciate where we have come from" (Gadamer 1979:273, 337; see also Esler 1994:3). The understanding of what God did in the past is a boost to what he is able to do today. Human challenges of the past are an encouragement to face life much more positively in the present, because human problems remain similar and recurrent. Consequently, there will be a move from what the text meant to its original audience to what the text means to Africans in their context in the twenty-first century. It is therefore an approach that attempts a solution to the several crises of conflict and leadership that plague the African continent.

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<sup>202</sup> While contextualisation targets a particular context as its focus, inculturation is mostly interested with the incarnation of the gospel into specific cultures.

An African hermeneutical reading within the context of this study is the application phase where the analysis of leadership, conflict and Jesus' identity in Luke's gospel is applied to the African context, taking into consideration its socio-cultural, political, religious, ecological and historical realities. Rather than take off from the context of African realities, this hermeneutical reading will take its root from the context of the original audience of the gospel before proceeding to emphasise on the relevance of the "good news" of Jesus to the African context.<sup>203</sup> It is about how the question of Jesus' identity and his leadership approach can be addressed and interpreted within the social, cultural and religious context of the African people. In so far as the etic reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke is facilitated through a study of first-century Mediterranean worldview, an African hermeneutic reading of Luke is possible only when the study of the African context is taken seriously (Ukpong 1994:40).

Just as it was the case with the context of New Testament texts, the African context is that of a "high context" society, compounded with the existence of a variety of cultures. This diversity has caused any study in Africa to become a huge and complex activity, considering the fact that each African community has its cultural practices, codes and symbols that are only known to them (Hyden 2006:11). The epithet "African" therefore relates to a very vast continent, with a great diversity in terms of peoples, culture, beliefs and language. Pobee (1992:58) has remarked that Africa is not only a polyracial and a polyethnic continent, but it is also polycultural in terms of its structure. It is such a rich diversity that makes it difficult to localise Africa within the context of this study. However, the term Africa will refer to the whole continent,<sup>204</sup> but particularly to black Africa, or Africa, south of the Sahara. Comparatively, the African context has a lot in common with the Mediterranean Bible than the Western and American worlds would do

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<sup>203</sup> Rather than being another theological slogan, contextualisation is about a non-negotiable application of leadership, conflict and the implications of Jesus' identity to a specific context. In this case, it is a movement from text (Lukan text) to context (African context), and not the reverse (see § 4.4.6).

<sup>204</sup> The study in African context is an eye-opener for the development of authentic theological reflections in other contexts so that the meaning of Jesus as the Christ is understood and interpreted within these contexts.

(Rohrbaugh 1996:2). Consequently, a few more directives will guide non-African readers from a different context who, paradoxically, need an etic reading to further understand the relevance of Luke 9:18-22 and the realities of the African context.

The hermeneutic reading of leadership, conflict and Jesus' identity in Luke will be divided into two phases. The first phase deals with the diachronic application of SSC (see § 6.1, above), focusing on the comparison between first-century Palestine and the twenty-first century African context. This phase will be treated in two sections. The first will deal with the socio-cultural values of the African context, while the second treats the socio-political, economic and religious realities of the African context as a result of its contact with Europe and North America. This phase will be concluded with an African (attempted) response to the question: "Who is the Christ?" In the second phase, emphases are laid on the hermeneutical reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke's gospel. It will offer a contextual reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke by making use of the sociological theories of power-syndrome leadership theory and that of labelling and deviance, respectively. This phase will also be concluded with a hermeneutic reading of Luke 9:18-22, with reference to leadership, conflict and identity. It is therefore an effort to make meaningful Jesus' identity and his life within the context of Africa, and his implied response to the present vices that cripple Africans and reduce them into a situation of constant need.

The work in this Chapter is not apologetic to support the fact that contemporary Christianity has effectively become a strictly non-Western religion in terms of its concepts, as Barrett (1970:50) had predicted more than two scores ago. Rather, while agreeing with Bediako (2000:3) that Christianity is a universal religion, this hermeneutical approach strives to interpret Jesus' leadership, as well as the conflicts that he faced as a result of his identity in terms of an African worldview. Besides, this approach is not geared towards developing a systematic theology on African Christology. Rather, it is an approach from a New Testament perspective that facilitates the understanding and application of Jesus' leadership pattern within the African context. Secondly, it is about the search for an African response to the question of Jesus' identity: "But who do you (*African*) say that I am?" (Lk

9:20a). This search passes through a scrutiny of some African models for the identification of Jesus as the Christ. Certainly, Africa forms part of the nations to which the disciples were assigned to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins with respect to that which they had witnessed (Lk 24:47-48). The understanding of this “good news” implies a grip of his person, his works and the conflict that was inherent in his identity. In this case, mission would refer to the contact between this good news and the cultural context of the African audience (Küster 2001:17).

## **7.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL VALUES OF THE AFRICAN CONTEXT**

### **7.2.1 Introduction**

Conclusions from the etic reading of Luke’s gospel attest that there is a close connection between Jesus’ person, his leadership and the different conflicts in which he was engaged in with his contemporaries. This conclusion was enhanced by the analyses of important values of first-century Mediterranean society. Even though Jesus was not born in an African society, its context inhibits characteristics and factors that can influence human relationships and probably cause the same effects as was the case with the context of first-century Palestine. The main issue addressed in this Section is the question whether Jesus would face the same problems if he was born within the context of Africa. From this perspective, a study of the socio-cultural values of the African context will lead to an analysis of its social relations, social dynamics and its cultural dynamics. Besides, it remains a fact – as was stated in § 6.2.1 – that the social behaviour of individuals is highly dependent on their social relations, social dynamics and cultural values. It is for this reason that the analysis of these aspects of social relations is a requisite to an adequate African hermeneutical reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke’s gospel.

### **7.2.2 Social relations of African societies**

In the context of African society, social relations will be studied in terms of models such as kinship, dyadic personality and the relation of patronage-clientism. As mentioned above, Africa has a lot to share in common with the Mediterranean context. By implication, only specific issues will be raised at

this juncture, so as to avoid a duplication of what has already been raised in § 6.2.

### 7.2.2.1 Kinship

In African societies kinship is defined in terms of relationship to the household, the family<sup>205</sup>, the clan or village, the tribe, the nation and the colour of the skin. Households and families are linked by the same ancestral relationship. As a result, African people live in clusters known as clans and tribes, sharing a common history and almost the same culture.<sup>206</sup> This implies that kinship is defined in terms of blood relationship; and especially with “the house” (Geschiere 2000:11). In short, it is an ascribed status, because one is born into a family or a clan. Kinship is one of the strongest forces in traditional African life because it controls social relationships between individuals. That is why in Africa it is possible to understand and interpret almost all concepts concerned with human relationships through the kinship system to which they are identified (Mbiti 1990:102). Playing a referential role, it reminds individuals of the original founder of their family, clan or tribe. Hence, people belong to families, clans and tribes by means of their family name or the name of their ancestor with which they are identified. As a consequence, tribal identity is not transferable. However, the definition of kinship varies when Africans find themselves out of their respective clans, tribes and nations. For example, a South African and a Cameroonian would more easily become a family when they meet in Paris for example, than when they meet in Ghana.

The system of kinship in Africa has an effect on societal life. For instance, relationships become more intimate, depending on kinship. Hence, members of two different kin groups would obviously look at each other with suspicion, fear and distrust. As a boundary map of security and identification,

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<sup>205</sup> The composition of an African family is that of an extended family. It comprises of children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces; brothers and sisters.

<sup>206</sup> Because of the negative connotation attached to the word “tribe”, authors like Mbiti (1990:99) have sometimes preferred to use the terminology of “people” or “peoples”. Whatever the case, several households form a family, while several families make up a clan. In the same way, clans put together form tribes from which nations are built. Unfortunately, as a result of the balkanisation of Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1885, clans and tribes cut across nations. Hence, members from the same clan or tribe can be found dispersed in many other neighbouring nations. Clans and tribes are distinguished by their cultural practices. Quite often people from the same clan speak the same language; but this is not the norm.

it fosters an atmosphere of conflict, prejudice, xenophobia and ethnocentrism among individuals. It has an adverse effect on development because employment in certain areas is only offered to the indigenes, while “outsiders” are considered as “strangers” or “come-no-gos”.<sup>207</sup> As a mark of identification, members from a dignified ancestral lineage bear more esteem than those from a little known clan, who may suffer from stigmatisation as a result of labelling and deviance.

By being born into a family, Jesus approves of the importance of kinship; yet, he defines it differently. Although Mary was still in a situation of betrothal to Joseph, she was promised a baby – Jesus (Lk 1:26-38), who eventually became a member of Joseph’s kinship, from the lineage of David (Lk 2:4; see also 3:23-38). This redefinition of kinship is in fact beyond blood relationship. It is a new household which comprises of all “those who hear the word and do it” (Lk 8:21). In this new dispensation, there are no boundary maps of segregation. It is a new household of mutual concern where those who are saved have the responsibility to save and serve others (Lk 10:5-12). It is also a new family where people are invited to share its benefits with each other; not on the basis of friendship, but motivated by love and concern for one another (Lk 5:1-11, 27-28; 6:13-16; see also Lk 14:12-14, 15-24).<sup>208</sup>

#### **7.2.2.2 Dyadic personality**

Mbiti (1990:106) expresses the sense of solidarity and the sacredness of the human community in Africa in terms of “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am”. In the same vein, Appiah-Kubi (1997:66) remarks that in Africa, “a man is truly a man in community with others”. Pobe (1992: 66), on his part, declares that “to be is to belong and live in a kinship group”. These expressions confirm the fact that individual life in Africa is meaningful only when it is shared, because a “member of the tribe, clan, the family, knows that he does not live to himself, but within the community” (Stinton 2006:144; Mulago 1969:139). In other words, individuals do not exist nor live in isolation. They exist as corporate bodies and owe their existence to one another. The

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<sup>207</sup> “Come-no-gos” is a derogatory slogan in Cameroon, which refers to “settlers”, who are not members of a particular kinship. Such members are treated with suspicion and contempt.

<sup>208</sup> Through the call of the disciples, Jesus sets an example of a new homogeneous community that is formed from a heterogeneous kinship combination.

community serves as a mirror to each individual and at the same time offers assistance whenever and wherever necessary (Gehnam 2000:51).

In Africa, dyadic relationship is defined in terms of identity and kinship. Individuals are perpetually recognised as being in a communal relationship with their kin members. It is therefore believed that death does not sever the bond between the living and the dead. That is why the dead are called “living dead” because they remain revered. Death ceremonies in this case are a means to renew the link between the living and the dead and also serve as a sign of solidarity among the living. The physical absence of the dead simply means that they are on a journey. In the case where the family of the deceased does not desire their return, certain rites are performed to this effect (Dickson 1997:80).

African communal life also goes beyond kinship structures in order to include other relations such as friends and even the environment. Generally speaking, life in Africa is that of dependency, expressed vertically through fellowship with the living, the dead and the yet to be born and horizontally through fellowship with kinship and other neighbours, including the environment (Mbiti 1994:36). People and relationships in Africa are much more important than any other thing because people depend on the community as a form of security.

In the African context, children do not only belong to their family of birth, but also to the community at large. The fact that Jesus’ birth was propagated and celebrated even by shepherds in the field (Lk 2:15-20) is not strange to an African. What may sound strange is his rejection in Nazareth by his peers. In principle, they were supposed to project and encourage Jesus in his ministry as “a son of the soil”. The fact that Jesus also went about doing works of charity (healing, teaching and preaching) is seen by the African as honourable, because it is the responsibility of children to be a blessing to their community and to outsiders. What remains a paradox for the African is that, in spite of his benevolent services, he suffered from the rejection and humiliation of the Jewish elite (and the Jewish peasantry) and was finally killed as a criminal. It is a paradox that constitutes one of the difficulties in explaining Jesus’ identity within the African context. Fortunately, his resurrection after three days offers a clue to this problem. Besides, Jesus’ attitude also adds meaning to the African notion of a dyadic community. His death and resurrection meant that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be

preached to all nations (Lk 24:47). In Jesus therefore, the world has become a dyadic community of love and compassionate individuals, who do not live for themselves, but who live for the sake of one another.

### 7.2.2.3 Patronage and clientism

The relationship of patronage and clientism is exercised at several levels of the African society. African communities live in a sort of feudal system of land tenure controlled by local chiefs and some rich elite who own vast pieces of land. Access to this land for the purpose of exploitation is either dependent on the payment of some tribute or on the basis of patron-client relationship. Conditioned by the situation of misery, most families are obliged to subscribe to the latter option for the purpose of subsistence. The second level of patron-client relationship coincides with the advent of slavery and slave trade. In the later part of the nineteenth century there was a surge of interest in Africa among Europeans and Americans, caused by the industrialisation and urbanisation in Europe, Britain, and France, and later in America. This was known as the period of “the scramble for Africa” (Hyden 2006:14), which went along with oppression and dehumanisation acts of slave trade. During this period strong and energetic men were used in European and American plantations as clients to their respective European and American masters. In like manner, traditional leaders either used war captives from neighbouring tribes or their proper indigenes as clients in their palaces where they served as clients. The third form of patronage and clientism relates to the African sense of solidarity and community life. This form could be termed as “patronage in solidarity”. It is a practice where people offer mutual assistance to each other. This is recurrent during periods of harvesting, clearing, funerals and other activities such as monetary transactions called “njangi”.<sup>209</sup> It is patronage and clientism characterised by acts of charity, generosity, mutual concern and benevolent services to each other. This practice enhances the life of individuals, as well as the reputation of the whole community. This is identical with Jesus’ call for generalised reciprocity (Lk 14:12-14).

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<sup>209</sup> “Njangi” is a form of financial mutual assistance where friends contribute an equal amount of money at specific intervals. At each sitting the amount raised is given to members in their turns, without interest. In the short-term this mutual assistance enables people to easily get access to what they might not have been able to get, if they had depended on their personal resources. The only binding rule in such gatherings is the faithfulness of each member to contribute to all other members, right to the end. This method of mutual assistance has fostered economic development and social cohesion in most regions of Cameroon



Two new forms of patronage and clientism have emerged in Africa after the independence of African states. Rich and influential elite in public and private firms have become very instrumental in the developmental process of their localities by simply becoming benefactors to these communities. They sponsor important projects such as schools, health and road infrastructure and provide their respective communities with other social amenities of great importance. In some cases, individuals also opt to build churches for their communities. The natives play the role of clients by offering gratitude and praises of goodwill to the elite in their respective professions. In order to alleviate the situation of misery and poverty within their respective communities, many African nations play the role of patrons as they provide social services such as housing and other aspects of service delivery to the population. They also offer financial support to the socially impaired persons. Their attitude *vis-à-vis* their communities does not deter most of them from still serving as clients to their former colonial masters and other world economic giants, and at times, for personal gain and interest.

Apart from the third form of patronage and clientism in Africa and to an extent, the fourth form, all the other practices serve individuals rather than the community. Whatever the case, the human practice of patron-client relationship in Africa is that of exploitation and dependency. In Luke's gospel, Jesus offers himself as God's broker, who empowers all individuals to become unconditional brokers (patrons and clients) to each other. In the story of the Good Samaritan, he challenges the attitude of the lawyer (Lk 10:25-37). During the Last Supper, he offers the real meaning of patronage; patronage in mutual service (Lk 22:14-23; see also Lk 22:27). His self-giving ministry is an example of sacerdotal service that is expected from members of his new household (Lk 22:22; 24:26). His relationship of tolerance, perseverance and forgiveness towards the disciples is an indication that he reforms all traditional and cultural practices and places community interest at the centre of his mission.

### **7.2.3 Social dynamics of African societies**

For the sake of brevity the description of the social dynamics of African societies will essentially be reduced to definitions of the basic concepts of

respect and integrity, African moral values and the effect of ethnicity and cultural diversity on African development.

### **7.2.3.1 Respect and integrity**

In comparative terms, respect and integrity is to Africa as honour and shame is to first-century Mediterranean society.<sup>210</sup> Respect and integrity form the basis of African identity. Hierarchy and respect are based on age (seniority), titles and the social status of an individual. Elderly people and people of high social status are considered as points of reference in the society. Since the respect accorded to an individual constitutes one's integrity, the values of respect and integrity go hand-in-hand. Adults are due respect from juniors because they are considered to have a higher status. While adults have the duty of protection and providence, younger ones have the duty to respect, care and obey the elderly and to remain humble in their presence. They are expected to tell the truth in all circumstances. Respect for the elderly in Africa is the equivalent of respect for the educated in the West and North America (O'Donovan 2000:21).

Titles in the African context are either ascribed or acquired. Ascribed titles are inherited from dignified families and title holders, while acquired titles are awarded through meritorious services.<sup>211</sup> For instance, good deeds earn its benefactors a title which elevates their status and dignity above ordinary community members. In effect, Africans attach a lot of importance to titles and work relentlessly for them. They feel more dignified when they are addressed by such titles. They are an important value, because they bring along social recognition, honour and respect and dignity.

In the African context Jesus would be a title holder because of his benevolent services. Ironically, in Luke's gospel, he refused to be addressed

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<sup>210</sup> This assertion does not imply that these values are absent in either contexts. The difference is to be found at the level of the importance that African people attach to "respect and integrity" as a socio-cultural value and that which the Mediterranean society attached to honour and shame as core values of their context.

<sup>211</sup> Titles are so important in Cameroon. As such, many people decide to become benefactors in carrying out developmental projects within their communities so as to earn traditional titles as recompense. These titles are usually accompanied with special attire that confers authority and power on the recipients. In the Nweh-tradition in the South West region of Cameroon, royal titles such as "Mbe", "Nkem", Nkwetta and "Mafua" are prominent. One of such examples is the name "Mbe-ngu".

by any of these titles such as 'Lord' (Lk 5:8; 9:54; 11:1); 'Master' (Lk 8:24; 9:33, 49) or 'Son of David' (Lk 18:38, 39) because he considered them as misleading. Likewise, he did not earn respect from the religious leaders of Luke's gospel, who instead despised him and challenged his activities (Lk 20:1-3). Curiously, his Nazarene peers did not even recognise the dual honourship that had been bestowed on him at baptism (Lk 3:21-23). Even though the disciples sometimes showed signs of honour, they disrespected him by discussing issues relating to his eventual successorship in his presence (Lk 9:46; 22:24). Jesus' reaction testifies his disapproval of their attitude as a sign of arrogance and disrespect (Lk 9:48; 22:25-27). Conversely, Jesus did not show respect to the Jewish elite, who were the official custodians of the Jewish customs in the traditional way of compliance, acceptance and complicity. Also, he refused to show blind respect towards the Roman elite as society would have recommended. He challenged beliefs and practices that were in dissonance with his goal; such as exploitation, oppression and the excessive love of money (Lk 12:1; 16:14; 19:45-48; 20:20-26, 46-47).

From a hermeneutical point of view, Jesus' stance does not disagree with the African value of respect for the elderly nor does he despise the recognition of social status and titles. Instead, through his teachings and his attitude, he reforms the African notion of respect and titleship. Henceforth, respect as a value is useful, but not in terms of what society defines. Rather it is observed in accordance with God's purpose for the world; his kingdom principles of mutual love and compassion and the respect of human dignity. On the other hand, by avoiding to be identified with the messiahship title and other human titles, Jesus equally defined the understanding of titles in a new way. The effectiveness and the importance of titles lie in their usefulness for the service of mankind, and not for self-aggrandisement. Relevant titles are those that are used to bring people together, rather than exploit and scare them. In this sense, Jesus' approach to identification challenges the African use of titles and the values of respect and integrity.

### 7.2.3.2 Moral values

The African society puts great emphasis on strong ethical living, calling on individuals to be self-disciplined. People are expected to be self-conscious of their attitude in their daily practice and living; by such an attitude they contribute in maintaining the cohesion and identity of their communities. Consequently, life is an on-going struggle to be and remain a good citizen and thus become an example to others. Moral values are therefore concepts that safeguard African community life and maintain its social identity intact. These values mostly deal with relationships. Concretely, moral values in Africa are those that deal with issues of justice, mutual assistance, truth, decency, respect for the elderly, love, a sense of holiness, compassion, right and wrong, good and bad, faithfulness in keeping to agreements, friendship, honesty, self-control, generosity; protecting the poor, and the avoidance of stealing (Mbiti 1996:12). These are qualities that refer to “good character” because they contribute to societal happiness.<sup>212</sup> It is believed that these values reflect the nature of God and his expectations of human beings. For this reason, every individual is obliged to respect them; if not, God will react negatively.

As moral values, they go beyond the clan and ethnic consideration and become applicable to every African citizen. They serve the same purpose as the moral prescriptions in the Torah because they deal with life and relationship within the society at large. They are like boundary marks that qualify and define an individual’s attitude as a dignified member of the African community. As such, life becomes a perpetual challenge towards perfection. The punishment administered to defaulters of these values varies according to tribes. In some cases innocent people are sometimes victimised by their enemies and accused of crimes they did not commit. This has often caused families and tribes to retaliate and nurse conflicts. To an extent, Africans have lived in respect of these values. Unfortunately, things have changed drastically because of external (e.g., civilisation and democracy) and internal factors (e.g., imitation and competition). Notwithstanding, Luke’s Jesus is the

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<sup>212</sup> In the African society human beings are not inherently considered as evil in essence. Instead, it is what they do that is qualified as “good” or “evil”. They are simple instruments through which “good” and “evil” are perceived. People are therefore qualified evil or good, in terms of what they do, and not the reverse.

Christ who upholds and encourages a society of ethical living. It would therefore be an easier task, if the question of Jesus' identity in the African context were to be approached from the perspective of African moral values.<sup>213</sup>

### 7.2.3.3 Ethnicity and cultural diversity<sup>214</sup>

Before the advent of colonisation, African societies already lived in clusters distinct from each other by the various languages that they spoke. At a later age, colonialism became instrumental in fostering and strengthening ethnic composition through the colonial policy of divide-and-rule. This era marks the beginning of ethnicity and its consequences, when ethno-cultural diversity became part of the continent's character (Ike 2001:285). Out of a search for security and insurance, ethnicity was the obvious basis for collective action (Collier 2009:52). As a consequence, an average child in Africa is socialised in ethnic division from birth (Mompoti & Prinsen 2000:626). Rather than foster the development of Africa, this rich variety in terms of ethnic groups and cultures instead became a breeding ground for hatred, xenophobia and conflict. People thought of themselves first as members of ethnic groups before thinking about the welfare of their nation (Obeng 1999:15; Collier 2009:51). As a riposte to this situation of misery imposed by history (colonisation, apartheid and exploitation), and as a result of their skilful arts in hunting, most African societies simply developed an attitude of war and violence. In this vein, Africa could be characterised as an agonistic society, in the light of first-century Palestine.

Ethnicity and violence (as synonyms) have thus become a threat to national and continental unity in Africa. Osaghae (2005:84) has rightly observed that "of all the claims that rival those of the state – to autonomy, self-determination, and loyalty of citizens – none, it can be argued, threatens

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<sup>213</sup> This approach proved successful in Athens with Paul (Ac 17:22-34). Paul simply moved from the "known to the unknown" by validating and reshaping the worship system in Athens.

<sup>214</sup> Briefly defined, ethnicity as a social phenomenon which is concerned with negative interaction between ethnic groups develops when these groups compete for rights, privileges, and available resources. It is characterised by strong feelings of pride, self-esteem and exclusion. It manifests itself through cultural stereotyping, prejudice and socio-economic and political discrimination (Mompoti & Prinsen 2000:626). In Africa ethnicity is a strong source of conflict.

its existence as much as those made by ethnic groups” (Osaghae 2005:84). Sometimes the conflicts and their ethnic representations are further exacerbated by spilt over from neighbouring countries where ethnic groups have their tentacles. This is the example of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Vlassenroot 2000:60). At other times, these conflicts are also encouraged by the involvement of external factors such as former colonial powers, or foreign companies that transcend ethnic and country boundaries and interfere, at times quite blatantly, in favour of one group against another.

The intricacies caused by ethnic groupings in Africa have made ethnic conflicts a difficult task to manage because they have long term consequences. For instance, the situation of political instability in Africa is partly due to the problems posed by ethnicity. Bloodshed and recurrent retaliations from neighbouring tribes continue to be a threat to peace. In Africa, democracy is wrongly understood to mean exclusively multiparty politics. Hence, most political parties are formed on the basis of ethnicity; a situation which incidentally increases the risk of *coups d'état*. The fact that power rests in the hands of one group for too long at the expense of the other also becomes a source of strife and unhappiness.

Indeed, it was within a similar context of ethnicity in Palestine that Jesus ministered. Just as he reacted in the case of first-century Palestine, Jesus by implication condemns any society that is built on ethnic principles. His approach of de-categorisation and his application of the theory of “similarity-attraction” are relevant and apt for Africa, as solutions to conflicts caused as a result of ethnicity. Jesus is therefore the Christ who destroys boundaries of exclusion imposed by all forms of ethnicity, and builds a new community of mutual and compassionate love. Through his politics of inclusion, he builds an ethnic free society, where South Africans and Cameroonians do not need to address each other as brother/sister only when they are in Europe. It is a society of those who hear God’s word and do it, irrespective of their tribe, nation or colour of the skin.

## **7.2.4 Cultural values of African societies**

Africa is a rich continent in terms of cultural values, as mentioned above. For the sake of precision and relevance, only two of these values, namely rituals and ceremonies, as well as the notion of “evil” and “bad” people, will be examined.

### **7.2.4.1 Rituals and ceremonies**

A ritual in the African context is a set form of carrying out a religious action, with the aim of communicating a message of religious significance to the public (Mbiti 1996:131). In Africa, there are a variety of rituals, depending on the circumstances. For instance, individuals perform rituals for the purpose of the transformation of status (e.g., birth rite, marriage, coronation and enthronement) and acceptance within the community (Appiah-Kubi 1997:66). For the community, they take the form of ceremonies and are thus considered as an expression of gratitude (e.g., good harvest), a request (e.g., fertility) and a sign of protection against calamities such as wars and raids. Rituals and ceremonies are avenues for the African people to celebrate life, as a corporate group. Just like it was the case in the first-century Mediterranean context (see § 6.2.5.2), rituals and ceremonies in Africa have a purely religious connotation. They serve the purpose of group cohesion, strengthen its identity and security and ensure continuity between generations. They are carried out only within specific families, clans or tribes, because each African community has its regulations and procedures governing ceremonies and rituals. In whatever community, these are sealed by meals which occupy a central place because they symbolise fellowship with both the living and the dead.

In view of the above description, neither Jesus’ attitude towards rituals and ceremonies, nor that of the scribes and the Pharisees in Luke’s gospel is a surprise to the African people. Even though meals are shared during these events as a symbol of solidarity, such solidarity is not transferable to neighbouring communities. Each family, clan or tribe has its ritual priests (male or female), who perform on specific days prescribed by that community. In other words, rituals and ceremonies are still avenues of segregation and exclusion in Africa. Jesus disagrees and condemns such attitude of

exclusivism, thereby transforming the meaning of rituals and ceremonies (see § 6.2.5.2).

#### **7.2.4.2 “Evil” people and “good” people**

The concepts of “evil” and “good” people in the African context are more or less the equivalent of the terms “clean” and “unclean” in first-century Mediterranean context. Evil people are those who are considered as the enemies of the society and are consequently not supposed to mingle with its members. Good people on the contrary may be those who live a worthy life. They live in respect of moral ethics prescribed by the society and are therefore accepted as worthy community members.

Africans are always animated by the quest to preserve life and have control over all that which can impede on community solidarity. In this wise, the term “enemies of the society” refers to those who, by their nature or attitude, are liable to destroy group cohesion.<sup>215</sup> They are a category of people who cause fear, misfortune, suffering and panic in the society. To a larger extent, they cause death, which for Mbiti (1999:165) is a devastating incident in Africa, in spite of the advent of Christianity. As enemies, they are considered as bearers of evil, because according to most African belief systems, God is not the origin of evil (Mbiti 1990:199). Those who constitute this category are adulterers, robbers, liars, thieves, murderers, rapists and those accused of disrespect, disobedience, sorcery, magic and witchcraft. People infected with contagious diseases such as HIV/AIDS are considered evil; they suffer from stigmatisation in the likeness of lepers. It is also the case with outsiders to a specific clan or tribe. These two classes of people are also considered in the same category as evil people.

Evil persons are polluted and thus considered as deviants. Such persons are also liable to pollute the rest of society, if sufficient care is not taken. As a dyadic community, the pollution of an individual implies that of the family, the clan and the tribe. In this case, the family or clan becomes labelled and identified with the crime committed. In order to purge itself of “corruption” and maintain its sacredness, enemies of the society who have been identified

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<sup>215</sup> Apart from human enemies, there also exist natural enemies such as drought, earthquakes, famines, epidemics, illnesses, devastating insects, floods and landslides.



in the case of witchcraft and sorcery are simply ostracised from the community and cursed. When the crime is judged grievous (e.g., murder and robbery), its culprits are simply killed. This is a measure to ensure the survival of the rest of the clan. Victims of this social class are ostracised and cursed or killed because the crime committed is considered as a means to destroy the sacrosanct nature of community life. Any breach of social order is evil, sacrilegious and unacceptable. For the situation of a mild crime such as theft, disrespect and disobedience, the victim is caused to pay a penalty. Either ostracised or caused to pay a fine, the rehabilitation and integration of such persons passes through the ritual of purification. It is assumed that during this rite the offence and the victim are cleansed by a traditional priest. These rituals vary from one community to another.

Social order and peace are looked upon as sacred components of life. Consequently, wherever social order is jeopardised, the African response is aggressive and immediate, with the intention to safeguard the serenity of community living. Unfortunately, evil and good are subjective values because something is evil and punishable only in accordance with the society's prescription. Evil persons are those who have been caught in the very act; if not, they remain free citizens in the likeness of good people. In a nutshell, the description of someone as "evil" or "bad" is a human appreciation and a cultural means of drawing boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders". Jesus' approach to cultural maps of division is uncompromising. The importance attached to the respect of African cultural maps of identification make the custodians of the African culture hypocrites in the likeness of the Pharisees. They demand respect of moral values, but afflict a judgmental attitude towards others. In this context, Jesus' teachings on repentance and forgiveness become necessary.

### **7.2.5 Conclusion**

From the analyses above it stands clear that there is a correlation between socio-cultural values of the African context and those of the Jewish context. Hence, conclusions from the etic reading applied to the socio-cultural context of the Jews in § 6.2 remain relevant and adequate for the African context. For instance, Jesus recognises the African notion of kinship because he was born

within the context of a family and grew up with his followers as members of the new extended (fictive) family. However, just as he did within the context of Luke's gospel, he reforms kinship and a dyadic community in Africa and defines these concepts in terms of those who effectively "hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21; 10:37). It is a definition of a new community of life lived in relationship with one another. His application of kinship goes beyond ethnicity and religious consideration to include all Africans, who are also considered as sons and daughters of Abraham (cf. Lk 13:16; 19:9). His success in defiling the *status quo* through his Sabbath activities (6:1-5, 6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6); his teachings on repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Lk 15:1-7, 8-10, 11-32; see also Lk 5:23; 7:48); his reforming, transforming and challenging rhetorical responses (Lk 6:3-5, 9; 13:14-16; 14:5; 20:4; 20:21; 22:67b-69; 23:3b) and his struggle to destroy cultural maps of division and hatred, influenced by the myth of social control, are testimonies of his willingness to expand his mission of freedom to all nations, including Africa (cf. Lk 24:47).

As a (fictive) family person, Jesus shares in Africa's community problems as a corporate member; and not as a "stranger". As an insider, he remains conscious of the realities of human context. However, he corrects, reforms and complements the traditional conception of community life in Africa. Solidarity concerns are no longer limited to family, clan and tribe; they must be extended to include the whole human race. A reinterpretation of the meaning of rituals and ceremonies in the African context attest that the confirmation of Jesus' dual honourship (identity) at his baptism (Lk 3:21-23), identifies him with the rest of humanity. His baptism thus became a ceremony of solidarity that identified him with the Jewish community and the universal community of God's people. Through his baptism, he began a new community of like-minded people, who are united by the baptismal water of the forgiveness of sins. Tribalism and ethnicity are therefore exposed as enemies of development because they breed hatred, prejudice and ethnocentrism. In summary, Jesus would definitely face the same opposition that he faced with the Roman authorities and his Jewish counterparts, if he was born in Africa. In this light, Luke's gospel remains relevant and adequate for the African society.

## **7.3 THE SOCIO-POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC REALITIES OF THE AFRICAN CONTEXT**

### **7.3.1 Introduction**

In comparative terms, it has been concluded from a socio-cultural perspective that Jesus would face the same problems of conflict and identity if he were to exercise his leadership within the context of the socio-cultural values of Africa. With this remark, it becomes necessary once more, to study the perennial problems of the African context, in order to see if this conclusion remains applicable. There is no doubt that the realities of the context of Luke's gospel conditioned the nature of the conflicts that Jesus faced as a result of his identity, as well as the various leadership approaches that he adopted. In the same way, the realities of the African context surely have an impact on the African search for a response to the question of Jesus' identity. They equally have a bearing on the approach Jesus would use, in order to carry out a universal liberation that constituted part of his mission and ministry.

Since reading the Bible is a trans-cultural activity, it is always an ordeal task of trying to apply the findings of one context into another context, because of the risk of ethnocentrism and/or anachronism. Fortunately, this worry has been taken care of in the etic reading, where models have been applied in the reading and understanding of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke's gospel. It is in this light that the understanding of the socio-political, religious and economic realities of Africa is a prerequisite for the application of the etic reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke's gospel into its context. The difficulty in reading and applying the gospel in the African context is further compounded by the fact that life in Africa has so far been influenced by two worlds: a typical African worldview and a "foreign" worldview imposed as the result of colonisation. For this reason, the realities of the African context will be examined in all its spheres; social, political, religious and economic. These are the realities that affect the gospel message and life in Africa, in its entirety. Mindful of the impossibility to discuss the realities of the African context in the space available, the issues that will be mentioned are those that are really relevant to this study!

### 7.3.2 The social realities

The social problems of the African context will be summarised in four main areas, namely exploitation, tribal wars, moral decadence and poverty. These are some of the most important areas which generate the problems that make social life in Africa unbearable. Although Africa suffers exploitation from the outside world, emphasis will be laid on exploitation which comes from within; that is, exploitation meted by some Africans on others. Social life in the African continent is already so deplorable that instead of looking for possible solutions to liberate its inhabitants from this impasse, a few “powerful” elite still use the present context in order to exploit and render fellow Africans more vulnerable. An example of this is traditional rulers, known as “Chiefs” or “Fons”, who serve as the custodians of the society. They serve as intermediaries between the administration and their various localities. In other words, they are a political arm of the administration. Instead of working for the interest of the people, they sometimes connive with government authorities in order to exploit their subjects. This is done through oppressive and exploitative policies which favour them and give assurance to their offices. Their success is also due to the fact that in their capacity as “elders”, they command respect and obedience from the population. The hierarchical nature of African societies favours such attitude, where exploitation is found at all levels of the society with elders demanding respect and obedience from the young. In most cases, this becomes a relationship of exploitation imbued with anger, tension, agitation and conflict.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of Africa has caused a growing number of refugees as a result of tribal confrontations between tribes that sometimes cut across nations. The balkanisation of Africa went along with the institution of arbitrary geographical boundaries which are still contested in some areas of Africa.<sup>216</sup> An example is the boundary negotiations (at the time) between

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<sup>216</sup> In this new arrangement, some people without a common historical experience or linguistic affinity were forced by such artificial boundaries to become united. Others who shared the same heritage were instead caused to separate (Winchester 1995:347). It is a situation which constituted a breeding ground for further and elastic conflicts within African states as a result of political discontentment.

Nigeria and Cameroon as to who owned the Bakassi Peninsular.<sup>217</sup> The African attachment to the notion of kinship has also created a climate of suspicion between in-group members and out-group members. Hence, within nations, tribes clash with each other as a struggle for the maintenance of social identity and social pride. For example, there is the case with the Yoruba and the Igbos in Nigeria; the Hutu and the Tutsi or the Bantus and the Nilotes in Rwanda and Burundi; the Bafumbira and the Banyarwanda in Uganda; and the Bali and the Bawock, as well as the Bafanji and the Balikumbat in Cameroon.<sup>218</sup> These conflicts are quite often fanned by unscrupulous leaders for selfish aims (Obeng 1999:15; Gorus 2000:105). Such power strife has generated enmity between nations, provoked bloodshed, homelessness and sexual abuse that have traumatised many families. Ethnocentrism on its part has thus become an important factor in determining employment patterns and the distribution of developmental projects. In fact, tribal wars are one of the main sources of insecurity and political instability in Africa for which liberation is yearned.

Today, African societies seem to suffer from a problem of moral crisis championed by mismanagement, embezzlement, the misappropriation of public funds and worst of all, the eternal evil of bribery and corruption. These are vices that have eaten deep into the very fabrics of African societies because they have affected every department and almost every individual, be it religious or secular (Obeng 1999:16; O'Donovan 2000:168). Obeng (1999:16) even mentions the disgusting attitude of mortuary attendants who request bribe in order to secure a place for a corpse, pending burial. Community property and communal interest in Africa are paradoxically losing their essence in favour of private property and selfish interest. As a consequence of such lost of moral values some corrupt and insensible political leaders even connive with foreign powers in order to devastate and drain African resources, as well as transform African soil into a dumping place of nuclear waste!

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<sup>217</sup> It is only of recent that the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon over Bakassi has been resolved. Yet several of these kinds of problems still exist among many African states.

<sup>218</sup> For more on ethnic conflicts and their consequences on Africa, see Goyvaerts (2000). He has edited a series of essays written by many scholars.

Most African societies have further been crippled by poverty, which has become a real threat to life. At the origin of massive accrued poverty are rich patrons, who do not cease to use their power and their position to impoverish feeble peasants. Drawing inspiration from the G8 research group report, Shu (2004:7) remarked five years ago that, Africa was the only continent that had not made considerable efforts in eradicating poverty in the past 25 years. This situation of poverty has also been aggravated by that of starvation, sicknesses and deaths. Today, the death rate in Africa is on a constant rise because of the peasants' inability to afford for the facilities that can enable them to withstand threats caused by epidemics and other illnesses such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. In fact, the situation has been rendered worse by the fact that Africa has often been identified with HIV/AIDS. Poverty has also encouraged the rise in crime wave, because those who are hungry and unemployed are liable to become thieves. In view of the present trend of events, it is obvious that if solutions to the problems of poverty and unemployment are not quickly sought, then crime wave, suffering and poor health will escalate in an alarming rate in a few years to come (O'Donovan 2000:143).

It is within the context of such misery, despair and want, coupled with the passive and complaisant attitude of the powers-that-be, that Jesus' attack on the Pharisees and the scribes is pertinent. African elite need to understand that for Jesus, service to humanity is the core drive for leadership. Still within this context Jesus' words that "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Lk 5:31) are relevant. They challenge the *status quo* and appeal to the African suffering masses.

### **7.3.3 The political realities**

The political situation of Africa is contained in the description of its leaders (big man) in the following remarks by Harden:

A big Man who looks like this: His face is on the money. His photograph hangs in every office (and every street) in his realm.... He names streets, football stadiums, hospitals and universities after himself (and his wife). He insists on being called doctor or ... "the big elephant" (or "lion man") or... "the wise old man" or "the national miracle". His every pronouncement is reported on the front page (and

retorted by his supporters as a means to show loyalty and to safeguard their positions). He sleeps with the wives and daughters of powerful men in his government.... He scapegoats minorities to shore up support. He rigs elections. He emasculates the courts. He cows the press. He stifles academia. He goes to church.... He blesses his home region with highways, schools, hospitals, housing, projects, irrigation schemes and a Presidential mansion.... His enemies (and political rivals) are detained or exiled, humiliated or bankrupted, tortured or killed. He uses the resources of the state to feed a cult of personality that defines him as incorruptible, (immune), all knowing... and kind of children. His cult equates his personal well-being with the well-being of the state.

(Harden, in O'Donovan 2000:169; my emphasis in brackets)

These remarks portray a bleak picture of the political situation of Africa, headed by corrupt, fearless, proud, selfish and tribalistic leaders, who rule with impunity and the lack of Christian love and concern.<sup>219</sup> For the sake of power and authority, they rig elections and indulge in occult practices in order to protect their offices. Prior to election sessions, they formulate slogans and make empty and false promises of prosperity that pamper the electorate and sometimes alienate the opposition (Chepkwony 1999:245). The aftermath of elections is a period that is most dreaded in Africa because it goes with violence and protests, resulting in conflicts and killing. In this context, the legitimization of power is more of a farce than a matter of credibility. For the sake of security and assurance, the incumbent generally put their political opponents in jail for an indefinite period of time and/or quite often, they are simply eliminated physically.

At the bottom line of such a desperate political picture lie two fundamental issues. The first is centred on the question of how people become leaders in Africa; the normal democratic way of choosing and legitimating leadership by way of election having proven to be a failure. The second revolves around the wrong definition of leadership to mean authority, power, self-enrichment and self-aggrandisement. Once in leadership, most people think of what they can derive from their position, rather than what they

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<sup>219</sup> Collier (2009:2) has ironically observed from empirical knowledge that in mature democracies in the West and America, political leaders put on smiling faces. Conversely, in Africa where democracy is a farce, official portraits of political leaders stare down on every corner of the country with "a menacing grimace". Each of these effigies speaks on its own; they indicate the leaders' state of mind as to whether they intend to serve or they intend to be served.

can give in, by way of service. Out of fear, those who become leaders surround themselves with ethnic relations and other stooges who are willing and ready to serve their interest. These two issues are even compounded by the advent of democracy and its adverse effect on African societies. In the early 1990s, democracy was erroneously presented as a key to the solution to African problems (Chepkwony 1999:243). Unfortunately, this came with its consequences fostered by multiparty politics and its associates such as dictatorship, anarchy and enmity.<sup>220</sup> In the name of democracy, public demonstration, boycotts, strikes and even elections have turned African societies into conflict zones between the forces of law and order and the demonstrators.

Most African countries ensured their political independence as early as 1960. Regrettably, some leaders still owe allegiance to their former colonial masters as they continue to impose inadequate policies from “outside”. The latter are sometimes at the origin of the political instability in Africa, because their opinion is still important when it comes to making the choice of who to be the head of state. Although African states have become independent, they still depend much on foreign powers to dictate the pace of political activities within the nations. In short, it will not be an exaggeration to affirm that to an extent, Africa is still politically dependent. It is in such a stalemate that Africa, just as it was the case with first-century Palestine, looks forward to a day of total liberation and effective independence when Africa would be able to stand on its own feet. In this respect, Jesus’ credentials as the Messiah become very relevant for the African people. His teaching and his idea about leadership remain a threat to African leaders (see § 6.4.3.2 above).

#### **7.3.4 The religious realities**

The religious situation of African societies can be located in the missionary approach of Christianity in the early days. Parratt is certainly right that “Western missionary Christianity had some serious shortcomings. While Christianity itself was deeply important, it was felt that the form in which it had

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<sup>220</sup> Multiparty politics in Africa is still a farce because every effort is still done by political leaders to extinguish their opponents. In this vein, Chepkwony (1999:244) is right to observe that democracy in Africa is full of contradictions (Collier 2009:11).



been presented had failed to penetrate the heart of African personality” (Parratt 1997:3). The reality of this thought can be expressed at three levels. Firstly, Africans were trained to accept that to adopt the Western way of life was an outward manifestation of Christian conversion (Obeng 1999:23). In this case, Christianity was a matter of cultural conversion, rather than that of Christian or religious conversion (Kirby 1994:69). Hence, there was a cultural degradation, which made the indigenes to feel neither as Africans nor as Europeans or as North Americans. This situation is partly the cause of some religious resurgence in many African countries today, where the search for an authentic Christianity has become prominent. Kirby (1994:57) strongly upholds that the defections in the mission founded churches are the cause of an increase in the number of African independent churches. Their eagerness is the search for cultural and Christian authenticity.

Secondly, there is an inadequacy in the area of leadership training where most African theologians receive training in the West and the USA and then return to Africa for its implementation where the context of training has changed. Consequently, in spite of their teachings about Jesus, the church in Africa still seems to hardly meet the needs of the African converts. Thirdly, there is no doubt that messianic expectations were essentially Jewish in nature. The question now is to know how the missionaries interpreted Jesus as the Christ who could solve problems posed as a result of African realities. If at the time of Jesus his contemporaries found it difficult to identify him with the Christ, how much more would it be today, when he is expected to be interpreted in a different context, and in concrete terms? All of these problems cited above have pushed most Africans to sit on two seats of syncretism.<sup>221</sup>

It is just obvious that “whenever the church grows so rapidly that the converts are not properly taught the Scripture, and the meaning of Jesus and

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<sup>221</sup> Syncretism is a type of compromise wherein two incompatible and irreconcilable aspects from one culture or religion are incorporated into another religion without scrutiny. In this light, Gehman (2000:272-273) defines two types of syncretism: deliberate syncretism and spontaneous syncretism. From the context of the church, he defines deliberate syncretism as that coming from the leadership of the church in their conscious struggle to accommodate the gospel to other religious practices and cultures. As for spontaneous syncretism, this concerns the ordinary Christians who “mix things which do not mix”, because they seem frustrated. An example is that of Christians who attend church service in the day, and when trouble strikes, they secretly move to the traditionalists. It is curious to note that ordinary Christians are not the only ones who go to the traditionalists by night; some leaders have also done same, especially when they feel that their “power” and/or leadership role is threatened.

its effects on the life on the converts, there is bound to be a relapse into syncretism” (Gehman 2000:281). This is a reflection of the present African situation, where most people who believe in Jesus still sneak out by night in order to consult a soothsayer when faced with inexplicable happenings. The situation even seems worse when they prostitute from one church gathering to another throughout the week in search for spiritual satisfaction. While ordinary believers seek for spiritual alternatives, theologians delve into a search of identifying Christ within the context of African realities. Unfortunately, by doing so, they have plunged him into a sort of identity crisis where the models with which he is identified conflict with each other. At the origin of this search is African misery in an age where Jesus does not seem to offer an answer as the Christ. This is the context where Jesus needs to be preached as the universal Christ, who attends to peoples’ crisis and offers adequate responses commensurate to the realities of their daily life.

### **7.3.5 The economic realities**

Patron-client relationships in Africa have created a situation of dependency where poor citizens rely on the rich elite due to the scarcity of land, poverty, the high rate of unemployment and the lack of other social amenities such as health facilities. It becomes more disheartening when the prices of goods produced by these farmers at the local level are determined overseas, without taking into consideration the constraints faced by their producers. On the other hand, foreign nations in their capacity as patrons treat their African clients with impunity. They sometimes provide loans, which at a long run further push these countries into a serious situation of eternal indebtedness. It is a regrettable attitude which causes indebted countries to remain poor and dependent, while donor countries continue to function as dictating patrons.

Recently, Africa has become a continent of raw material for the industrialised nations in Europe, America and Asia (especially China). Hence, deforestation and the abusive exploitation of its mineral resources have left its economy fragile and even less competitive. According to Biblical testimonies, God from creation gave human beings the responsibility of stewardship over creation (Gen 1:27-30). Unfortunately, both the flora and the fauna have been exploited for egoistic and unpatriotic reasons. Human beings have manifested

a careless and exploitative attitude towards the environment, depleting earth's resources that were meant for the good and welfare of human beings (Obeng 1999:10). Other factors that affect African economy are those of pollution, degradation, the deterioration of the ecosystem as the effects of global warming and the destruction of the environment. All these have resulted in the present ecological crisis to which Africa has become a victim. This situation has created another vicious circle in Africa, where poverty having become the source of deforestation, the deterioration of the ecosystem and the effects of global warming on their part are liable to cause more families and nations to become poorer and indebted.

In general terms, Africa is a continent of economic dependency, encouraged by wrong political motivations. The system of taxation is that from which governments derive part of their funds for public projects. Unfortunately, this sector has rather become oppressive mechanism on local traders. The heavy taxes that are levied by these structures rather deter than encourage and foster commercial activities. Luke's Jesus is the Christ who stands against economic exploitation, as well as for the wellbeing of all individuals.

### **7.3.6 Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the realities of African societies seem identical with those of first-century Palestine where peasant Jews suffered under the leadership of the Jewish elite, as well as the oppression of the Roman colonial leadership. As a counter effect, the contact between Africa and the external world has instead strengthened African solidarity in the form of tribalism and ethnocentrism with all their consequences. Rather than helping Africans, exposure to the external world has pushed them to go for the search of the "modern" and the "civilised" at the detriment of the natural life style to which they were accustomed to.<sup>222</sup> This contact has brought more sorrow than happiness, as depicted by Desmond Tutu:

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<sup>222</sup> This is not a discredit to modernism and civilisation. The fact is that, so far, Africans have been groomed to think that what they are and what they have is not yet the best, because the best is found only in North America and in Europe. It is sometimes a wrong approach when a specific lifestyle is imposed on people, rather than encourage them to develop their personal God-given talents.

The worst crime that can be laid at the door of the white man ... is not our economic, social and political exploitation, however reprehensible that might be, no, it is that his policy succeeded in filling most of us with self-disgust and self-hatred.

(Tutu, in Ndung'u 1999:261)

At this juncture, only a true presentation of Jesus' identity as the Christ seems the right solution for African problems. An analysis of the socio-political, religious and economic realities of Africa transmits African's feelings of the messianic expectation in the likeness of that of the Jews. These feelings indicate the urgency for the presentation of Jesus as the expected Messiah, whose activities and impact were not limited to the surrounding of the Mediterranean context. Jesus' identity as the Christ and the way he tackled conflicts by his leadership approach within the socio-political, religious and economic context of first-century Palestine remain active and applicable in all situations, at all times and in all places. The only requisite is that his real identity should be presented, and his teachings should adequately be interpreted and applied as solutions to perennial existential problems of every human society. In other words, it is time for Africans to discover that the solutions to African problems are located in the knowledge of who Jesus is and its concrete application in all spheres of individual lives.

## **7.4 WHO IS THE CHRIST? AFRICAN MODELS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS AS THE CHRIST**

### **7.4.1 Introduction**

The question surrounding Jesus' identity is not quite new in African theological reflections. Many attempts have already been made by theologians since the 1960s in order to offer an African response with respect to the question "who is the Christ?" Unfortunately, this debate has so far been so academic that the common believer still finds it difficult to see how Jesus is the Christ who is actively participating with Africans in order to liberate them from social, economic and political alienation that haunts its population and puts the whole continent on its knees.

As a solution to this difficulty, Fochang (2006:1) has proposed a study on African Christology.<sup>223</sup> In his opinion this is an approach that bridges the gap between academic theology and grassroots theology. Whatever the case, the analyses in this thesis are not so much interested in the parody responses from the crowd (Lk 9:19). Rather, they are more interested in Peter's response and the implication of these responses according to Jesus (Lk 9:20b-22). In this vein, Fochang (2006:2) is certainly right that Peter's response to Jesus' question was culturally oriented, within the context where the concept of the messiah was known and understood. At this stage, the difficulty of the African theologian lies at two levels. Firstly, it is a search to interpret and explain Peter's response from the Jewish to the African context. Secondly, it is the issue of retranslating and re-explicating Jesus' implication of his identity and leadership, implied in his response to his disciples, in such a way that Africans find themselves not only as part of the problems to which Jesus faced, but also as part of the solution to the present crisis that plagues the African continent.

Just as the Jewish expectations of a Messiah were contained in their past heritage, African response to the question of Jesus' identity passes obligatorily through a search into the sources of African theological reflections. These reflections have coincidentally been at the origin of the current models used by some African theologians in order to understand and explain the relevance of Jesus as the Christ in the African context. A re-examination of these areas will illuminate this research, in an attempt to offer a sketch, from a New Testament perspective, of an African response to the perennial question of "who is the Christ?" This sketch will be offered through the lens of an African hermeneutical approach.

#### **7.4.2 Sources for African theological reflection**

Mbiti prescribes the following aspects as the pillars or the sources for theological reflection in Africa: the Bible, the Christian heritage, the traditional African heritage and the living experience of the church in Africa (see also

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<sup>223</sup> In this study Christology will be understood to mean issues evolving around the identity of Jesus, what he said and did, and the significance of his person and work for humanity (see Cullmann 1959:1; Keck 1986:362).

Küster 2001:58; Stinton 2006:22).<sup>224</sup> As an important primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the Bible remains the basis of any Christian reflection. It is also a source of inspiration for personal perceptions about God, and a reference to what he already accomplished in the life of his people through the activities of Jesus Christ. Besides, it is a reservoir of testimonies of the early believers on how they lived their Christianity, professing Jesus as the Christ and how it affected their lives.

The Christian heritage of Africa is about the theology of the earlier church as it was taught to the African in the era of colonisation and missionary activities. This refers to the manner in which the missionaries understood the early believers in their interpretation of God's intention through Jesus and how they themselves interpreted Biblical texts and applied them to the existential realities of Africa. In another dimension, a reflection on the Christian heritage of Africa concerns African apprehension of the Christian tradition. For example, for both the Jews and the Christians of the early church, the confession that *Jesus is the "Christos"* was very fundamental in their belief system because it constituted the core of salvation history. Although the early believers encountered difficulties in trying to reconcile Jesus' suffering with his messiahship, they were nevertheless convinced that Jesus was the Christ (Longenecker 1970:62). The main issue in Africa has been centred on how this reality can be transmitted within a context that knew little or nothing about Jesus and the Christ.

A study on African traditional heritage is a reflection on the past that Africa had lived and experienced. This concerns its history, its culture and its primal religions. It is a history of misery, polished by slavery and slave trade, apartheid, colonisation, the loss of human and economic potentials and the dilapidation of its natural resources. It is a history of bitterness, pregnant with sentiments of anger, violence and retaliation. From a cultural perspective, Africans are inclined towards traditional values such as titles (see § 7.2.3.1). This attitude has probably motivated the choice of the models used by African theologians in an effort to define Jesus' identity (see § 7.4.3 below). It is

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<sup>224</sup> According to Stinton (2006:23), Mbiti equally opines that further investigations could be gathered from the African Independent Churches. This prescription is backed by the fact that these churches seem to possess "an authentic expression of African Christianity". Whatever the level of authenticity, such investigations need to be done with caution.

therefore very important, from an African perspective, that Jesus was addressed in honorific titles such as “Lord” (Lk 5:8; 9:54; 11:1); “Master” (Lk 8:24; 9:33, 49); ‘son of David” (Lk 18:38, 39) and “the Son of man” (Lk 9:22).

In addition, some basic cultural beliefs and practices still have a strong hold on the African people. This is the case with the respect for the elderly, solidarity and responsibility towards one another, as well as hospitality and sharing. In fact, it is believed that through sharing, one shares with God. Lastly, religion constitutes the richest part of African heritage since it shapes all spheres of its life and activities (Mbiti 1996:10). Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that Africans may be very religious (Mbiti 1990:1), their religion – as opposed to Christianity – is in most cases oral (Bediako 2000:17), and has no historical founder or a sacred history (Parratt 1995:78; Mbiti 1996:16-17).

The living experience of the church in Africa is an important aspect of theological reflection since it contains facts that describe the realities of the African context. These realities are mostly about the contemporary socio-economic and political context of Africa. As a matter of fact, reliance on the African past is a theological assertion, because it enhances the understanding of the foundation on which to build a new theological thought, with respect to African realities. The study of these four pillars must therefore be taken seriously for any relevant theological reflection in Africa. They are not only a source of information for theological reflection in Africa, but also, they guard against ethnocentrism and anachronism.

#### **7.4.3 Some African models for identifying Jesus as the Christ**

Just as some Greek titles such as “Lord” were transferred to Jesus in order to identify his person with his works; African theologians have rightly or wrongly applied some models which have facilitated their understanding of the question of Jesus’ identity. Thus far, models for the identification of Jesus in Africa have either been drawn from inculturation theology or from liberation theology. These are the two main streams that have guided contemporary

studies on African Christology in particular and African theology in general (Nyamity 1994:64; Küster 2001:59; Fochang 2006:3; Stinton 2006:49).<sup>225</sup>

#### 7.4.3.1 Inculturation models

The three inculturation models that are common in African theology each has its own approach with regards to the Bible as point of departure. In the first approach the Bible directly confronts the African realities. The second option is thematic and focuses on the study of particular themes from the perspective of the African cultural worldview. In the third approach a comparison is made between Biblical Christological themes and African traditional and cultural values. The starting point of this approach is Jesus' teaching. In this approach three models are commonly used by African theologians with as point of departure, the perspective of the African worldview of dyadic community.<sup>226</sup> These models are Jesus Christ as ancestor,<sup>227</sup> Jesus Christ as the medicine-man and Jesus Christ as chief.

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<sup>225</sup> Many theologians have criticised this division that was championed by Nyamity. Mugambi (1995:9-10) for example, describes it as being "too sharp", while for Küster (2001:208) it is arbitrary. Küster rather prefers a dialectical process, which is a discussion between the Bible and African worldview. Either plausible or not, these classifications are not mutually exclusive. Rather, their synthesis helps in distinguishing the various contexts that elicit the search for African Christologies as well as the methods employed in their construction. Secondly, they have remained a guide and a springboard for the discussion on African Christological models. Consequently, the debate on the two streams could simply be termed as that of a "false dilemma" (Martey 1993:30). However, a more synthesised approach is recommended for a concrete study on theological investigation in African, especially in the light of contextual theology. One of such approaches would be the use of models as earlier suggested in § 4.4.6 (Stinton 2006:51).

<sup>226</sup> Stinton (2006:146-218) has done an elaborate study on other models such as Jesus Christ as Brother, Mother, Lover, Leader, Chief-diviner and Ancestor spirit.

<sup>227</sup> The fact that Pobee (Pobee, in Fochang 2006:4) considers Jesus as the "Great ancestor" (Küster 2001:63) implies that African ancestors are to be categorised. In this regard, African theologians are not unanimous on where to situate Jesus with reference to the ancestral Christological model. This view is further bolstered by the fact that not all the dead are considered as ancestors in Africa (Stinton 2006:113). Ancestors are sometimes called the "living-dead" (Mbiti 1990:81-89). This means that even though they have died, they are considered alive. This description of dead-living qualifies them to be equated with Jesus in his live protecting role.



#### 7.4.3.1.1 Jesus Christ, the ancestor

To identify Jesus as the African ancestor is to compare him with the ancestral functions of a mediator.<sup>228</sup> In Africa, ancestors are called the source of life and an obligatory route to the Supreme Being (Küster 2001:63). They are present among the living in their role as mediators between God and human beings. The relationship between the African notion of ancestor and that of Jesus is that they both watch over lives in their respective roles as mediator. It is assumed by Africans that just like ancestors; Jesus plays the role of mediator between the living and the dead (Bujo 1992:25-26; Appiah-Kubi 1997:65; Kabasélé, in Stinton 2006:136). It is thus believed that it is this mediating role that makes Jesus the Christ. Consequently, from the African point of view, his messiahship title is equated with that of the African ancestor.

The description of Jesus as mediator draws its inspiration from Biblical sources. In spite of Bujo's (1992:81) idea of referring to Jesus as the proto-ancestor to make the ancestor-model sounds more plausible, the African model of ancestor to understand Jesus remains inappropriate. The aspects of humiliation, suffering, rejection and death and the forgiveness of sins, which make Jesus' messiahship function meaningful, seem absent from the African concept of ancestor. From an African perspective, ancestors are constantly re-enacted and legitimated through rituals. For Jesus, there is no greater legitimation of honour and identity other than the one that he had at his baptism (Lk 3:22); from the crowds and the disciples (Lk 9:19-20); at the transfiguration experience (Lk 9:35) and by the centurion (Lk 23:47). Any attempt to legitimate Jesus' identity which is non-Biblical is a distortion of his leadership functions, and hence misleading.

Unlike African ancestors there is no human descendants' blood relationship between Jesus and the living because he transcends kinship

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<sup>228</sup> In an African context, a mediator functions when people of higher status require to be approached indirectly through a third party. The idea of intermediary fits well with the African view of the universe where it is believed that God cannot be approached directly. Access to him is possible only through some special personalities or some spiritual beings that are considered "higher" than ordinary human beings and closer to God (Mbiti 1975:63-64). Although this may be applicable in Christianity, direct accessibility to God has been made possible through Jesus' death. Although he stands as a mediator, all believers have free access to God through his death.

relationship. Fourthly, still from the African definition of ancestor, Jesus was born as a Jew and cannot automatically become an African for the purpose of theologising.<sup>229</sup> Fifthly, each African household, family, clan or tribe has their particular ancestors. Unfortunately, Africans do not have a universal ancestor; because kinship is not transferable. By becoming an ancestor, Jesus is assimilated to a household Christ or even an ethnic Christ, which is contrary to Jesus' stance on inclusivity and universalism. Lastly, even though he died a violent and shameful death, he was resurrected and remains eternally alive; he is not dead-living; he has both human and divine qualities. It is therefore erroneous to affirm that through death Jesus merited ancestorship (Fochang 2006:4).

#### **7.4.3.1.2 Jesus Christ, the medicine-man<sup>230</sup>**

Illness, at many times as a result of poverty, unemployment and sometimes malnutrition, is an important factor that has increased misery and frustration in Africa. Illness in Africa has a social dimension because quite often it separates its victims from family and society. At times disease and misfortune are seen as having a mystical cause which must be sought and uprooted (Appiah-Kubi 1997:72). For this purpose, the assistance of a medicine-man is usually solicited because he is considered as a life-giver. The functions of medicine-people are so intricate that they are often associated with prophetic functions, as well as those of diviner and herbalist. Since healing was one of the central elements of Jesus' activities, it is believed that through his own suffering he participated in human healing. The comparison between the role of the African medicine-man and that of Jesus in its holistic dimension derives from the notion that Jesus simply revitalised the healing techniques of the Galileans. This model of Jesus' function as an African medicine-man is very popular in Africa, because it is one of the rare models that seem to cut across the whole continent (Fochang 2006:5). Just as medicine-people in Africa fight

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<sup>229</sup> This idea is also bolstered by the fact that in Africa, ancestorship is non-transferable. Consequently, even if personally, I were to believe in the concept of African ancestry, I will not accept Jesus as my ancestor because we do not share the same African family blood.

<sup>230</sup> The name "medicine-man" does not imply that only men are involved in this exercise. It is a generic name used in Africa as a patriarchal society, referring to both women and men who contribute to the restoration of life in Africa.

mystically in order to rescue life, Jesus is conceived as victor over worldly forces.

The fact that Jesus himself testified that his suffering as the Christ was a necessity for humanity (Lk 24:27, 46) justified his life-giving function. The bread which he broke with the disciples brought them life and recognition because it symbolised his body (Lk 24:30). He resuscitated broken memories and revived lost hope within the community of his followers through his resurrection (Lk 24:8-10). Notwithstanding, the life that he offers is different from that which any other human being can provide. Fochang opines that healers such as “soothsayers, herbalists and all kinds of medicine men are pillars of social life” in Africa (Fochang 2006:6). Jesus was a healer; but not in the likeness of a soothsayer. He was not just a “medicine man of all kinds”.<sup>231</sup> The African model of Christ as a healer in the light of a medicine-man only helps to enhance the understanding of Christ in his healing role; it does not offer a definite response to the question of his identity. As the Christ, he overlaps the African model of a typical African healer (the medicine-man) with all its implications. Jesus’ identity as life-giver is more adequate than that of medicine-man in all respects.

It therefore seems very daring to associate Jesus with healers in Africa in general terms simply because he offers holistic healing. Not all healing in Africa is Biblically acceptable. In some cases traditional healing goes hand-in-hand with mystics, incantations, invocations, the burning of candles and incense. Jesus’ healing functions were wholesome, spontaneous and public. In its wholesome dimension, Jesus offers salvation which no one else can provide (Ac 4:12).

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<sup>231</sup> According to Fochang (2006:6), the medicine man is also called “nganga’ in the Bantu language. Consequently, it is also appropriate in some African localities to identify Jesus as “nganga’ (Parratt 1995:85). “Nganga” could also mean magician or a sorcerer, as is the case in the Nweh language in the Lebialem Division, the South West region of Cameroon. Jesus was not a magician, fortune teller or sorcerer. Even though his healings were identified as miracles, they were different from magic. Those who address Jesus as “nganga’ are those who do not understand that in Jesus’ mission miracles played the role of a pointer to God’s glory and greatness.

#### **7.4.3.1.3 Jesus Christ, the chief**

The model of Jesus Christ as an African chief is based on the translation of the Greek *ku&riov* (“lord”), which is taken for an African chief (Stinton 2006:191). In terms of leadership functions, chiefs in Africa combine social, political and religious roles within their respective communities. As social leaders, they assure social cohesion and act as legislators or custodians of land and culture. Politically, they have power and authority over their subjects; assure their protection and have the power to deliver the community from unpleasant expectations. Their religious functions compel them to offer sacrifices to ancestors on behalf of the community. From the Cameroonian perspective, the chief is an equivalent of a king. Jesus was addressed as Lord; a title which depicted his kingship functions. Küster (2001:59) remarks that the identification of Christ as chief is in perfect conformity with the very essence of Bantu power, where Jesus as the Christ is considered to have realised all the prerogatives of a Bantu chief. According to Biblical testimonies, Jesus was strong, generous and wise. Through his death, he demonstrated the willingness to defend and sacrifice for his community.

Jesus Christ as Lord loved his community and defended his followers against all forms of oppression and exploitation. By giving up his life as a necessity (Lk 9:22; 24:27, 46), he confirmed the messiahship title of leadership, where he reigns as king forever. In his lordship, he exercised power and authority as a servant (Lk 22:14-22, 27). On the contrary, African chiefs have a lot of power, surrounded by wealth, prestige and self-aggrandisement. They still have followers who serve in their palaces as slaves. Their rites of initiation are still full of mysticism and include a lot of traditional practices such as incantations and invocations, which are in dissonance with Biblical principles. In many African societies, the chiefs are also not easily accessible unless through the courtesy of an intermediary. Jesus’ understanding and application of lordship opposes the African conception of chiefs. It is also a challenge for chiefs to use their powers for the service of the entire community.

#### 7.4.3.2 Liberation models

The Bible and the contemporary African context form the point of departure of the liberation stream. In these models, there is an effort to interpret all present forms of emancipation witnessed in Africa and other vices that engulf the African continent such as oppression, exploitation, disease, poverty and misery, with the lenses of Scripture. The emancipation model focuses especially on the empowerment of the African woman. It is an approach that rehabilitates the women folk as contributors in Jesus' mission to establish his kingdom on earth. In this respect, highlights of women's contribution to Jesus' ministry in the Bible are brought to the fore as an encouragement to contemporary women. For instance, Jesus had female disciples (Lk 8:2; 23:27, 55; 24:22; cf. Lk 24:6) and was interested in their wellbeing (Lk 23:28-29). In Africa, theology that recognises and rehabilitates women as partners in Jesus' mission has been done as a form of feminist theology. Unfortunately, this approach has often degenerated into a discussion on Jesus' gender and sex. Such discussion seems of little importance in an era where suffering and oppression do not discriminate between sexes. To insist on Jesus' gender or sex, as a means of defining his identity, is just another way of deforming it to one's taste (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:33). Schüssler Fiorenza is correct to suggest that relevant feminist emancipation theology is that which presents Jesus as one who is involved in the liberation of wo/men,<sup>232</sup> that is, a theology that takes the plight of the whole mankind into consideration.

There is also an on-going striving in emancipation theology in the area of HIV/AIDS, where stigmatisation is doing more harm than good with regards to infected and affected families and individuals. Current victims of HIV/AIDS can be compared to the marginalised in the Jewish context that lost their identity as a result of some bodily defect. Luke's Jesus embraces, rehabilitates, liberates and empowers lepers and people who suffered from all types of diseases (Lk 4:38-41; 5:12-14, 17-26; 6:6-11; 7:1-10; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19). These examples of Jesus' activities identify him as the Christ of social liberation who reforms, transforms and rehabilitates.

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<sup>232</sup> For Schüssler Fiorenza, the term "wo/men" is beyond sex. It refers to both women and men who are marginalised, exploited and oppressed.

African societies have suffered from the bondage of several social, economic, political and ecological ills fostered by poverty, misery, hunger, marginalisation, ignorance, tribal wars, misplaced priorities, bad policies and exploitation from within and from without (see § 7.3 above). This situation of bondage has kept these societies in a constant situation of urge for liberation. It is a situation of dependency that has put African societies in the same context as that of Luke's gospel. The liberating attitude of Jesus thus serves as a guide to define meaningful African Christologies. The liberation models of defining Jesus' identity are therefore an attempt to develop theological reflections which explain how Jesus as the Christ responds to the problems posed by the African context, which is by nature that of misery. In other words, the liberation stream is an approach that aims at presenting Jesus in terms of his intention to set humanity free from all forms of oppression.

#### **7.4.3.3 Concluding remarks on African models of Christology**

From recent research it is clear that African theologians are focusing more and more on exploring the meaning of Christ for African society and its realities, as well as the significance of this identity for the lives of Africans who continue to shuttle between Christianity and alternative religions in search of a solution for their daily crisis. All the inculturation models used for the identification of Jesus as the Christ in Africa, as indicated above, follow an analogical approach. In spite of the fact that this approach has some inspiring conclusions, African theologians must be conscious of the dangers of pitfalls which are inherent to this approach. There is no doubt that African models for the understanding of Jesus' identity are buried in their own social experiences wherein concepts such as family relationship and the myths surrounding leadership are fundamental. In an attempt to use African models to elucidate the significance of Jesus' identity as the Christ, theologians have read African categories into Scripture, whereas adequate Christological models must remain faithful to Biblical teachings as the source of all Christian theologies. For these models to remain sustainable they must also be open to challenges and criticisms from other cultural settings.

In like manner, the models of Christ derived from the liberation stream are proper to the African situation of suffering, misery, envy, evil eye,

sickness, exploitation, poverty, wars, stigmatisation and the dependent character of Africa. Yet, the fundamental question asked by most African traditionalists today is whether Jesus, as a liberator, had Africa in his agenda? If the answer is yes, then why is Africa still in a perpetual situation of dependency and need? Even though this is a legitimate question in view of the present stalemate of Africa, Jesus' liberating activities did not end in history. Secondly, the liberation offered to Israel at the time did not exonerate its context from further crisis. What remains certain is that the liberation offered by Jesus is for all humanity and remains on-going. Relevant African Christologies must therefore explain Jesus as the Christ, who eats with African sinners, identifies them as "sons and daughters of Abraham", destroys boundaries of ethnicity and superiority, and introduces its peoples to a form of living that is commensurate with the precepts of the kingdom. Adequate liberation models are those that place the three dimensions of Jesus' missionary vision of preaching, teaching and healing (cf. Lk 9:1-2) on the scale of equal balance. The failure to give equal weight to these activities has sometimes been at the origin of the growing fanaticism in some churches today.<sup>233</sup> Viable African models for the identification of Christ need to be based on his person, his activities and his attitude as he broke through the huddles of first-century Palestine.

The fundamental truth is that Christianity is a religion with foreign concepts which should be presented faithfully without distortion in other contexts. A search for similar components of Christianity within traditional religions has sometimes been the cause of syncretism among African Christians. There is no other adequate identity that can be offered than that which was offered by Peter and reinterpreted by Jesus himself (Lk 9:20-22).

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<sup>233</sup> Many religious groups have accentuated on the meaning of Jesus as the Christ in his healing performances and as a result, they have substituted the preaching and the teaching ministry with the healing ministry. Worship services have become scenarios for healing, sometimes heralded with publicised posters. The emphasis on this aspect of ministry has further been spurred by the glorious call for the use of "faith extenders" such as the cross, consecrated water, olive oil, prayers, the laying on of hands, singing, dancing, playing of drums; testimonies from dreams and visions; the incessant shouting of "Amen", "Hallelujah", and "in the name of Jesus". Mbiti (1994:34) lauds this approach because, for him, it enables its participants to relive Biblical events in the life of Jesus and in the early church. This seems to be a misinterpretation of Jesus' missionary approach. In the time of Jesus there was no clear calendar of activities for these ministries. The three were sometimes carried out simultaneously and spontaneously.

Further attributes that characterise Jesus are those that are found in his preaching and ministry. There is a danger in trying to co-opt traditional models in a bid to explain who Christ is. Even though it may seem difficult to transmit the meaning of Jesus as “the Christ,” because it is also contained in personal experiences of Jesus’ self-disclosure as it was the case with the crowds (Lk 9:19), relevant Christology is that which can face challenges from other contexts, as stated above. As a clue therefore, some explanation of who the Christ is, could be developed by emphasising his attributes such as Lord, Provider, Protector, Enabler, Supporter, and Guardian. These are Christian metaphors that remain true irrespective of continent, colour, status, gender or age. Besides, the best way of dealing with Jesus’ identity is probably by offering an interpretation of what it entails to say “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Lk 9:22).

In conclusion, although research in the area of African Christology has become the centre-piece of African theology today, it is time for African theologians to make a halt in order to evaluate the various models that have been used so far (Mugambi, in Stinton 2006:44). This evaluation appears urgent, especially in an era when African Christianity is becoming a reference to the rest of the Christian world.<sup>234</sup> For this task, African liturgies must insist on celebrating Jesus as the Christ of justice and liberation (Otieno & McCullum 2005:71; Nyiawung 2009:26).

#### **7.4.4 Who is the Christ? An African hermeneutic response**

An African hermeneutic response to the question of Jesus’ identity is very intricate in view of the difficulties involved in explicating his person and the meaning of “the Christ” in the African context. However, an exploration of

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<sup>234</sup> Stinton’s (2006) efforts are to be lauded for its credibility. However, there is still need for African theologians of African origin to emulate in his footprints by making an autopsy of the various methodologies so far employed in defining Jesus’ identity in African theology. Such an evaluation will also have to attend to pertinent issues such as the contradiction at the level of the appreciation of the models that have so far been used. For example, while it is almost unanimous within most African communities that Christ can be likened to an African ancestor, some theologians (like Abraham Akrong from Ghana) still see God as another ancestor (Akrong, in Stinton 2006:191). This affirmation lacks an explanation on the relationship between God and Jesus in this context, as well as some clarity on the African understanding of the Trinity.



Luke's gospel offers us an idea as to how these difficulties could be curbed. It also offers a shape of how Christologies from all contexts (including the African context) can be approached.

#### **7.4.4.1 Problems involved in the African understanding of Jesus' identity**

The problems involved in the African understanding of Jesus' identity are situated at the levels of 1) dissonance between missionary teaching and African realities, 2) the problem of theological training, 3) the differences in theological approaches and 4) the African strong belief in the concrete rather than the abstract.

The dissonance caused by the Christian message carried by missionaries to Africa frustrated what would have served as a preparatory ground for the presentation of Jesus as the Christ who identifies with Africa. It was an inadequate message because it did not take African realities into consideration. The presentation of Christianity in Africa gave the impression that God hated Africa. Instead of the Christ of liberation, a colonial Christ was presented as a gift. He seemed to have been the Christ of apartheid who condoned with ethnicity, hatred and killing. He was not presented as one who was ready to lead Africans from their situation of a "dark continent" to that of a "continent of light" in the likeness of Europe and America. Their teachings were in sharp contrast with those of the Christ who, in Luke's gospel, is involved in social transformation. Jesus was presented as if he came to replace the existing African knowledge of God (Stinton 2000:32). There was no apparent difference between the Christ of compassion and their practice of hatred. This wrong presentation made Africans to see Jesus as a stranger; an outsider; a racist and a discriminatory Christ.

Missionary teaching equally failed to take the realities of the African context into serious consideration. The African situation was sometimes misinterpreted and applied against its beliefs (Oduyoye 1986:9). For instance, the use of drums was forbidden; African languages were considered barbarous and replaced with colonial substitutes as a means of redemption. It was a teaching that uprooted the Africans from their contextual realities and caused an identity crisis within its setting. That is why, in spite of the many

moral teachings that were offered, crime wave and other vices such as hatred, corruption, tribalism, favouritism and tribal wars and other forms of violence continued to sprout. Instead of insisting on the wholesomeness of salvation which Jesus offered (Lk 7:50; 17:19; 18:42), missionary teaching inclined to focus on the hereafter. They failed to arm people with the necessary tools that could enable them to confront the present realities of health, poverty, misery and hunger which haunted them on a daily basis (Stinton 2006:63). Even when salvation was preached, it was about the concerns of individuals, rather than those of the community in particular and humanity in general.

In fact, “most missionaries insisted that an African must become an ‘honorary white’, as a precondition for becoming a Christian” (Mugambi 1989:56). This preaching was inappropriate because it delineated African people from their identity. In order to produce pious believers the missionaries preached prosperity and a cajoling gospel which left Africans more passive than active. It was a missionary approach that gave the impression that the church as an institution was a business enterprise with little or no concern for the human condition. This was a distortion of Jesus’ identity. Rather than presenting a Christ who challenged cultural practices, a Christ who stood against African tradition and culture was offered. Consequently, while the African skin looked Christian, deep inside they remained typical traditional Africans.

The problem of theological training continues to be a serious threat to a better understanding and consequent interpretation of Jesus’ identity in Africa. Theology elaborated from the West and North America has so far been considered as the “official” theology of the entire church (Ela 1994:18). The curriculum of theological studies in most African seminaries still remains Western or American, just the same as Western philosophy is still taught in African universities with Western realities. The present context of African theological education must reflect the fight for global justice, the fight against the destruction of the environment and its consequences of global warming and other related issues that affect the general wellbeing of peoples everywhere (Kinsler 2008:7). Fortunately, of recent, there have been great developments in the area of social-scientific criticism, the introduction of

public theology and the theology of development in South African universities and seminaries. There has also been some resurgence at the level of the WCC with the introduction of *Theological Education by Extension* (TEE).<sup>235</sup>

Unfortunately, the idea to build a strong theological training system in Africa is still jeopardised by disagreements in theological approaches. Churches do not yet agree on how to arrive at an appropriate African response to the perennial question of “who is the Christ?” Even where they seem to agree the focus is still not the same. For example, while the Roman Catholic Church proposes inculturation as the right approach, the Protestants prefer contextualisation; yet, African Independent Churches simply prone a return to African identity and culture. Interdenominational tensions, quarrels and competition, which Oduyoye (1986:9) describes as “Christian tribes’, still render Africans’ quest to speak in the same tone fragile. In the face of this, Pobee wonders: “Are we preaching the same Christ? – Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics? If so, why are we at each other’s throat?” (Pobee, in Stinton 2006:36). For Africans to have a unanimous voice, they must strive to avoid further internal divisions and rivalry and instead use the diversity of its context as a bolster to its theological enrichment. They must jointly face the problems of leadership crises, political instability, misery, poverty, illnesses, hunger, exploitation, the present context of global warming, and the effects of democracy. African religious diversity needs to become an encouragement that grants full liberty for its inhabitants to perceive and respond to Jesus’ identity in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their own mentality and experience (Stinton 2006:4).

Lastly, there is a religious revolution in Africa today with a strong quest for the concrete at the detriment of the abstract. Faith in Jesus deals with the abstract which the African ignores. The worship life of African spirituality is based more on the concrete. That is why there is a growing yearning for supernatural manifestations in the form of signs and wonders instead of a strike on holy living (O’Donovan 2000:226). This outcry dismisses the fact that holy life includes love, compassion, solidarity, generosity and the search for a

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<sup>235</sup> It has been the quest of the WCC since the 1960s to make theology available to all peoples in all places. However, such programmes can be relevant only if they address relevant issues of economic injustice and the general ecological crisis in the world, taking individual contexts into consideration. For more on this topic, see Kinsler (2008).

peaceful living. It seems abstract and absurd to speak of a Jesus who participates in solving African problems when people continue to die of starvation daily. Consequently, it rather seems easier for Africans to believe in “faith-extendors” that are palpable and seem closer than believe in Jesus, who is not physically visible.

These are new problems that African theologians need to tackle with extreme urgency; if not, most of its believers will continue to live a life of syncretism. Besides, Africans more easily relate with members of their family, clan, tribe or nation than they would with an “outsider”. In the case of Jesus, he was born a Jew. This aspect is a hindrance to the inclusion of Jesus within the African worldview.

#### **7.4.4.2 An African hermeneutical reading of Jesus’ identity in Luke’s gospel**

Most of the African models used in order to identify Jesus as the Christ are either family or ethnic inclined. This is a situation that brings Jesus back to the same problems that he tackled in Luke’s gospel. His solution through the method of de-categorisation and the theory of “similarity-attraction” was a revolt against ethnic perceptions of his identity (see § 6.3.4.2 and 6.3.4.3 above). From an African perspective one of the ways through which Jesus could be identified as the Christ is through a hermeneutical reading of the healing nature of his ministry. It is a model that summarises the meaning of his person and work as God’s broker. It also portrays the shortcomings of African models for the identification of Christ.

Among all the struggles in which human beings are involved the struggle to preserve, keep and enhance life remains primordial. Because of this, it sounds more appropriate to highlight Jesus’ attribute as the source of life.<sup>236</sup> The life that Jesus offers is life to be protected and not to be destroyed. He is the manifestation of the life which God wills that all individuals should share. His healing activities inaugurate a new age which is the fulfilment of the messianic hope manifested by the presence of God’s kingdom in the midst of

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<sup>236</sup> In this context, life goes beyond the biological in order to embrace the whole of human existence; it is life understood “as the totality of the dimensions which constitutes the human as a person” (Bujo 1992:21).

his people (Lk 17:21). Through healing, he provides life in its fullness. He does not only restore life through healing and exorcism (Lk 4:38-39, 40-41; 5:17-26; 6:6-11; 7:1-10; 8:26-39, 43-48; 9:42; 11:14; 13:10-13; 14:1-6; 17:11-19; 18:35-43) but also, he provides life by raising the dead (Lk 7:11-15; 8:49-56). In view of its holistic character, Jesus could be identified in Africa as the Christ of salvation; the Christ of liberation and the Christ of rehabilitation.

To identify Jesus with salvation means to explain how he saves the world, including Africa, as Saviour. Jesus destroyed the Jewish elite's myth of social control (see § 6.3.4.1 above) by offering salvation to the "sinful" woman (Lk 7:37-50); the leper (Lk 17:11-19); the blind beggar (Lk 18:36-42) and Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). He also offered spiritual healing to the disciples by removing the veil that obstructed them from hearing and understanding (Lk 24:31, 45-49; cf. Lk 8:24-25b; 9:12-13, 40, 54; 18:15-17; 21:7; 22:49). The presentation of Christ as Healer is an alternative way of describing his salvific work. In his healing activities, Jesus cannot be compared to the African medicine-man, because he is the bringer of salvation. In fact, he heals attitudes, cultures and relationships. By offering salvation to the lepers (Lk 5:12-16; 17:11-19), Jesus healed prejudice, stereotypes, rejection and the stigmatisation from which they suffered. The healing that he offers is holistic; it depicts his nature, his saving power and his saving grace. In this aspect, he alone is capable of offering such healing.

Jesus as the Christ of salvation does not only have concern for the soul (the hereafter), but he shows concern for the physical body and the here and now (Lk 9:13). Since the concept of saving is recurrent in African thought, where people live in a perpetual situation of fear and desperate need (Appiah-Kubi 1997:68), Jesus' identity as the Christ of salvation seems fitting. As a herald of African and the world's salvation he plays the role of God's broker in the sense of a mediator. In this role he can not only be equated to an ancestor. Instead, as mediator, he plays the role of God's broker. And as broker, his healing is an extension of the saving benefits of God (Stinton 2006:106) to the whole Africa and the world.

The description of Jesus Christ as liberator ties with the redeeming nature of his ministry. The liberation offered to the Jews in general and the lawyer in particular (Lk 10:25-37) freed them from their parochial

understanding of God's holiness to mean exclusivism. As a liberated and changed Jew, the lawyer was urged to emulate good examples of liberation through his services and concern to others (Lk 10:37). Once called and liberated, the disciples and the seventy two were henceforth charged with the responsibility of saving, transforming and liberating other's lives (Lk 9:4; 10:6-9). The liberation which Jesus offered was beyond human understanding; that is why he refuses to be identified with titles that had political and human overtones. As liberator he de-categorised and reformed the Jewish society in order to build a society of free citizens with healed relationships. He impacted liberation on the Jewish society through preaching, teaching and admonition; all of which remain relevant today, and in all contexts.

Liberation has become a serious preoccupation to the African people and the world at large in the twenty-first century. It expresses the hope for a divine intervention to the human crises that plague the society and disrupt social harmony. In these circumstances, the liberation which Jesus offers to Africa and the world is social, economic, political and ecological in nature. It is his liberating vision that adds meaning to the content of his ministry. The idea of deliverance is contained in the African's daily aspiration. In this case, the liberating power of Jesus becomes the hope of Africa and the world at large. It is liberation from uncertainties, fears, evil powers, death, witchcraft, sickness and other forms of epidemic, poverty, misery, oppression, exploitation, corruption, injustice, natural disasters, tribal conflicts, as well as refugee and HIV/AIDS stigmatised status. These are issues which have placed Africa in the state of emergency, and deprived its citizens of the joy that came with Jesus as the Christ (Lk 2:10; 24:52). Jesus as the Christ is the liberator of all that which keeps Africa and humanity in bondage and less than what God had intended human nature to be (Appiah-Kubi 1997:70). Just like Christ was crucified, Africa seems to carry within itself the "hidden Christ" (Ela 1994:99), who has been crucified alongside Africa's social, economic and political crisis. His resurrection, as a sign of victory over oppressive forces, is the assurance of a new beginning for Africa and the world.

Jesus as the Christ was engaged in works of restoration and rehabilitation. By destroying the fences of hatred and segregation he built a new household (fictive family) with a new status. In this new dispensation the

reciprocity of services is requested and guided by the spirit of compassion. Henceforth, members of this new household will be inspired with the principle of compassion: “be compassionate even as your Father in heaven is compassionate” (Lk 6:36). Through the forgiveness of sins Jesus seeks, saves, restores and rehabilitates the lost of the world (Lk 19:10). Through the rehabilitation of the non-Jews all human beings are rehabilitated as daughters and sons of Abraham with equal status (Lk 13:16; 19:9). Through his saving grace, his redemptive prowess and restorative activities, Jesus as the Christ stands as an answer to every human need as echoed in this Cameroonian song:

Christ is the answer to every human need;  
Christ is the answer to every human need;  
Christ is the answer to every human need;  
Christ is the a-an-swer.

#### **7.4.4.3 An African approach to the question of Jesus’ identity**

The approach to the question of Jesus’ identity in this section is not only African *per se*. In principle, it is a Biblical approach derived from the conversation between Jesus and the disciples in Luke 9:18-22. The first approach stems from the crowds’ spontaneous speculations, while the second approach comes from Jesus’ participatory leadership approach of leadership (§ 6.5.2.2 above).

##### **7.4.4.3.1 Spontaneous theology**

Although it was concluded from an etic point of view that the answer to Jesus’ identity would hardly draw unanimity (§ 6.6), the place of personal perception and individual experiences still remain important. These are responses that come as a result of a personal encounter with Jesus. In view of his life-sustaining role, the way through which he communicates his love and compassion to various individuals can never be identical because it is dependent upon individual contexts, perceptions and interpretations. For instance, when Jesus decided to stay focussed on the Jerusalem journey, he found it imperative to inquire first, whether those who followed him had understood who he was; and if they were conscious of the consequences of

their decisions (cf. Lk 14:28-33). The conjectures echoed by the disciples portrayed the spontaneous character of their feelings: “And they answered, John the Baptist; but others say Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets has risen” (Lk 9:19); as well as those of Peter: “the Christ of God” (Lk 9:20). The crowds’ responses were spontaneous because they came from their personal experiences of what they had seen Jesus doing. Peter’s response was another spontaneous confession of faith which depicted his perception of what Jesus was doing. These spontaneous responses became an effective source of inspiration for Jesus. Through them, he became aware of the limitations involved in their knowledge of his identity. As a result, he offered an enriching Christology which was a complement to the crowds’ and the disciples’ speculations. It was a Christology which associated Jesus’ person with the events that will eventually befall him: suffering, humiliation, rejection, death and resurrection. By not dismissing either the responses from the crowds’ or from the disciples, Jesus seems to validate personal experiences as an important source of theological discussion.

By validating personal experiences as a source of doing theology, Jesus posed a fundamental problem of how to translate such individual experiences into acceptable truths. It is in this vein that “spontaneous theology” seems to offer a clue. As an enigmatic figure, Jesus continues to reveal his identity to individuals, on a daily basis (§ 5.8 above). The response of such revelation is often translated into songs and other declarations that offer Jesus a variety of models (identities) that remain contestable because they are not easily communicable. Spontaneous theology is therefore an attempt to rehabilitate personal experiences and perceptions in the process of theologising. It aims at transforming individual experiences and perceptions into universal and acceptable knowledge. Personal experience is very important in the development of theology. Unfortunately, there are as many human experiences as there are human beings from different cultures and different contexts. For instance, African understanding of Jesus fashions him in terms of human need, and this is not absolutely wrong. He is Christ the healer for the sick whose health has been restored; he is the provider for the hungry who finds food and the liberator to the oppressed who finds solace. Regrettably, these are personal perceptions that are not transferable; yet,



they offer a clue to Jesus' identity. However, for viable experiences to survive, they must be tested by Biblical teachings. In this respect, spontaneous theology has the dual task of exposing empirical knowledge about Jesus' identity to open challenges offered by contemporary realities and thereafter seeking to authenticate its result with Biblical testimonies.

The African worldview presents a rich variety of Christology. The models used in order to identify Jesus as the Christ reflect African spontaneous perceptions of what these models mean in the African context. They also depict the African sense of spontaneity involved in their worship life. Such spontaneity is often translated into songs, wishes, proverbs and prayers. The spontaneity involved in the African response to religion has so far been an important foundation for the development of African Christology. Such spontaneous spirit is a factor that can further be helpful in developing lasting Christian theological concepts by way of constituting a sought of reflective theology (Bediako 2000:9). In this venture, the role of academic theologians resides in their ability to transform such spontaneity into acceptable universal principles of faith that can further enrich the community's commitment towards God and towards one another.<sup>237</sup> In other words, adequate African Christology must take its roots from spontaneous theology.

#### **7.4.4.3.2 Community participatory theology**

Twice, and within the context of a dialogue, Jesus inquired to know if his followers knew his identity (Lk 9:18 and Lk 9:20). The responses to these questions, as well as Jesus' concluding remarks, give weight and credence to a participatory approach in doing theology. The fact that Jesus did not reject nor comment on the responses from the crowds and the disciples is an invitation for theology in the light of humility. It is theology which shows respect to individual responses to the question of Jesus' identity. It is in this vein that African models for the identification of Christ within the African

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<sup>237</sup> It is necessary at this juncture to make a distinction between the "academic" theologian, who wishes to study and develop theology critically as an academic exercise, and the "ordinary theologian", who spontaneously expresses an understanding of how God manifests himself through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. For the latter, these thoughts are spontaneous and most often oral; whereas for the former they eventually become scrutinised, developed, assessed and written down.

context must be treated with respect, in spite of its shortcomings. With respect to participatory theology, there is need to understand each model from its context. It is therefore a combination of all these models that gives a glimpse of Jesus' identity.<sup>238</sup> Participatory theology on its part is a theological approach that gives ear to the various perceptions of Jesus' identity and thereafter exploits the various contributions in order to provide a theology that empowers, reforms and equips individuals to take part in developmental issues that affect their context.

The emic and etic reading of Luke's gospel attest to the fact that Jesus fulfilled his obligation as a member of a dyadic community by fully participating in all human experiences (Parratt 1995:82). For example, by mingling with "sinners" (Lk 5:30; 7:39; 15:2); tax collectors (Lk 5:27-32; 19:1-10); lepers (Lk 5:12-16; 17:11-19); the sick (Lk 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 18:35-48), the poor (Lk 12:13) and the rich (Lk 14:1; 18:18), he inaugurated and proved the efficacy of participatory theology. Through the limitations that he witnessed he was able to perceive community needs and their expectations. Consequently, the place of the community, in building transformative theology, is also important in delivering Africa and the rest of the world from the present economic, political, social and ecological impasse. In this connection, community participatory theology is about participatory decision-making and consensus-building that can inspire human beings and enable them to reflect on theological solutions to the problems that they face on a daily basis (Otieno & McCullum 2005:73). Participatory theology enables individuals to identify themselves as worthy citizens endowed with potentials that can assist them in their efforts to self-empowerment.

From empirical thoughts, one of the ideal ways of building communities today is by empowering its citizens to be productive and spiritually alert and assertive. This is especially important for the case of Africa, with its multiplicity of ethnic groups (Mompoti & Prinsen 2000:625). This refers to the recognition of individuals as important and necessary contributors in community development. The present economic, social, political and ecological impasse calls for participatory theology wherein all the

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<sup>238</sup> It is simply a glimpse because Jesus' self-disclosure is on-going and dynamic.

stakeholders involved in the transformation of humanity are each accorded a place of choice in the search for long lasting solutions. On the table of such dialogue both scientists, ecologists, politicians, sociologists and economists can, on an equal basis, confidently engage in a search for an answer to the question: “Who is the Christ?” with focus on the development of Africa and the world. Such discussion could give birth to an interdisciplinary theology that has human beings and their environment at the centre of discussion. It is within the context of such discussion that people need to be reminded about the fact that the world is God’s and everything in it (Ps 24:1).

Spontaneous theology and community participatory theology have the same objectives. They are a result of the combination of Jesus’ dialogue approach and investigatory approach. Through dialogue and investigation, the audience is encouraged to unveil their understanding of Christ and his relevance to their various needs. The aim of both theologies is the society and the welfare of God’s people. In other words, spontaneous theology leads to investigatory and participatory theology, the end of which is the theology of community development or community participatory theology. The theology derived thereof is theology from the people, by the people, and for the people in response to their contextual realities. These approaches to theology could be a solution to the problems of inadequacy in missionary teachings about Jesus. These teachings instead seemed to have created dissonance in African believers. That is why most of them are not yet convinced about the presentation of Jesus as a remedy to the African problems. However, through the approach of spontaneous theology and community participatory theology, Africans could be empowered to understand Jesus and confidently confess him in their expression of faith as “the Christ of God”.

#### **7.4.5 Conclusion**

African responses to the question of Jesus’ identity are similar to the crowds’ speculation in Luke 9:18-22. A paraphrase of the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples presents another dialogue between Jesus and African Christian theologians as follows.

Now, it happened that while Jesus was praying alone, African theologians were with him. After having heard from them who they and

other Africans considered him to be, he remarked: Even though for the Africans I could either be an ancestor, or a medicine-man or a chief or one of the African images of high repute, for you African theologians, and especially for you Mbengu<sup>239</sup>, I am the Messiah of God. In spite of the above responses, I am the Son of man. It was because of these same (mis)interpretations of my identity by your Jewish counterparts that I suffered humiliation, rejection and was killed. This, however, was temporary because I was vindicated and my true identity was revealed when I was raised after three days; and henceforth, I will reign forever.

A few remarks can be sought from this dialogue. The responses from Africans and their theologians are spontaneous and they reflect the religious understanding and experiences of African reality. Secondly, even though Mbengu's response is similar to that of Peter (Lk 9:20), their contexts are different. Thirdly, these responses also expose a certain level of expectation on the part of the Africans with respect to their contextual realities. Fourthly, just as it was the case with Jesus' followers (Jewish), African responses to Jesus' question do not associate his identity with the leadership crises that he faced and which eventually resulted in his suffering, rejection, humiliation, death and his vindication by God. Fifthly, Jesus' identity as "the Christ of God" is non translatable. Lastly, although Jesus' response is in the past, it indicates that his identity is being distorted, even by Africans today. By implication the wrong application of leadership in Africa is an indirect contribution to the crisis for which Jesus suffered and was humiliated and killed. Whatever the case, the important element in this dialogue is that it grants a clue to African existential realities and apprehensions, and constitutes a starting point for the development of a strong African Christology.

Jesus' situation of suffering, rejection and humiliation identifies him with the African context. Just as he suffered humiliation and rejection in the hands of worldly authorities, the African people have become victims of the problems posed by the effects of colonisation and democracy. Like Jesus, Africa and her people continue to suffer; they are humiliated, rejected and asphyxiated by colonial and insensitive authorities. The Christ who was raised by God is the One who stands to resurrect the African people and the rest of suffering humanity from all forms of socio-political, economic and ecological

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<sup>239</sup> Mbengu is an arbitrary name, representing a response from a convinced African Biblical reader, who, in spite of his knowledge of African realities, believes that a name cannot be translated from one culture into another else he runs the risk of anachronism.

impasse. He stands as an embodiment of African crisis. In this picture, Africa symbolises suffering humanity. Consequently, Jesus' victory is that which the African can legitimately appropriate, because while he reigns as the Christ, he has offered the forgiveness of sins to oppressive authorities (Lk 24:47).

In view of the rich variety in the African responses to the question of Jesus' identity, it stands out clear that it is the believer's relationship with Jesus that actually defines Jesus' identity, not only in eschatological terms; but also as a present reality. Jesus declares that he will acknowledge before God's angels whoever acknowledges him presently, before men. Conversely, he will disown before God's angels those who now disown him publicly (Lk 12: 8-9). The most appropriate titles that seem to give a glimpse of Jesus' identity are those which are attributed in terms of relational images because they are less controversial and universal in scope. They also depict a personal relationship that Jesus establishes with individual persons. Consequently, all answers to the question of Jesus' identity are relevant insofar as they reflect the feelings and perceptions of an individual. Yet, there is absolute need for such knowledge to be shared and transmitted universally. It is in this respect that spontaneous theology finds its place within the market place of theological reflections in Africa. Besides, democracy had so far been presented as a solution to the present world crisis. Unfortunately, according to an unknown author in Otieno and McCullum (2005:73), "What is important is *not* that a state be democratic, but that it provides justice, equality and dignity for its citizens. Democracy, after all, is *not* a solution, *only* a method". In this vein, community participatory theology also finds its place as a means of empowering individuals to develop viable Christologies that respond to social realities of each context.

## **7.5 A CONTEXTUAL READING OF LEADERSHIP AND CONFLICT IN LUKE: POWER-SYNDROME LEADERSHIP THEORY (PSLT)**

### **7.5.1 Introduction**

Leadership in Africa (both secular and ecclesiastical) is a very complex issue because of the complicated nature of the historical heritage and the cultural context of Africa. A contextual reading of leadership and conflict in Luke is about the examination of leadership as it is practised in Africa, vis-à-vis

Jesus' prescription in Luke. It is also about the exposure of conflicts that are inherent in the practice of leadership in Africa. Thirdly, it is about the impact of leadership by African leaders on the life of its people. For this purpose, the use of "power-syndrome leadership theory" seems appropriate as a means of analysing leadership in Africa in all its dimensions. It is a theory that explains why conflict inherent in leadership is always viewed negatively by African leaders.

### **7.5.2 Power-syndrome leadership theory (PSLT): Principles and functioning**

According to leadership principles, the simple fact that one is in a position of leadership implies that one has authority. However, in addition, leaders need "power" in order to execute such leadership authority through the functions which they perform. Such "power" is offered by followers through the legitimation of their leadership. Hence, they are referred to as having been empowered (see § 4.2.3 above). In other words, authority is inherent in leadership, while power is conferred. Once at the disposal of the leaders, such power is often either used for the benefit of the followers or misused for the interest of the leaders. Power-syndrome leadership is a situation where leaders grab power and refuse to let it go when their tenure of office is over, or when such power has been delegitimated by their followers.

In Africa, power and leadership have become syndromes because they are either considered as an inseparable pair, with one unconditionally leading to the other, or simply because they are understood as synonyms. Secondly, the myth surrounding leadership in Africa is that of "once a leader, one remains a leader; and for life". This has probably been influenced by traditional leadership wherein access to leadership is hereditary. Hence, once chosen (and not voted), traditional leaders rule till death. This way of acceding to leadership is different in political circles and at the level of local churches, where people hold elective posts. Thirdly, when the theory of "leader for life" does not seem to succeed, the incumbent naturally decides on whom to take over. The new trend in Africa today is that heads of states are gradually building dynasties instead of lasting democracies. In this new setting power and authority are transferred from father to son, or to some very

close relations (spouse and sycophants).<sup>240</sup> Fourthly, leadership in Africa is not based on skills or merits; rather, it is judged by ethnic sentiments and by the number of sycophants who surround the leaders. It is in this case that the old adage of “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” remains very applicable in PSLT.

Three relevant observations to the practice of PSLT were made in § 3.3.2.3 with reference to the relationship between itinerant/resident leaders. It was observed that in the early church the transfer of leadership from the itinerant leaders in the early Christian communities to resident leaders implied social transformation and change, which went along with conflict and opposition (Horrell 1999:320). Secondly, resident leaders misused their powers in order to write letters, which they later ascribed to Paul and also enacted other laws that sustained their authority (Horrell 1999:334). Thirdly, the transition between itinerary and resident leaders was not very smooth because quite often the former left office without departing with the functions (power) that they had hitherto exercised. In contemporary African society the situation is similar, and sometimes worse. For example, some followers often decide to remain loyal to out-going leaders in order to prove the inefficacy of in-coming leaders. In addition, most people who aspire to, or who are already in leadership positions, are at times torn between the struggle to gain (more) power; the struggle to protect power and the struggle to keep power (§ 4.2.3). In PSLT, the above description depicts the ugly side of leadership because it paints the picture of how leaders become unpopular.

Leadership in Africa becomes unpopular in several ways. The first is through the manipulation or mutilation of texts. Leaders, who wish to stay in power for some time, extend their mandates through extra-constitutional amendments (Winchester 1995:349). As such, constitutional amendments are regular in most African countries; always at the taste of those in leadership. The second point concerns the accumulation of wealth. Most African leaders are wealthy; and because almost everybody is corrupt, leaders sometimes find it difficult to accuse their followers of the same crime in which they are

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<sup>240</sup> It is disheartening that Africa holds the trophy of longest serving heads of states in the world. These are leaders who prefer to die in office rather than opt to resign, even when their health situation is at risk. In fact, the language of resignation is still farfetched in the African leadership pattern.

personally involved.<sup>241</sup> Thirdly, leaders quickly seek for occult support, through the practice of witchcraft and sorcery, in order to secure their leadership positions. It is generally believed in Africa that without “extra power”, leadership cannot function effectively (Geschiere 2000:132). As an alternative, other leaders surround themselves with sycophants who become accomplices because they only tell their patrons what they desire to hear. Together, they build devilish mechanisms to sustain themselves in power for as long as possible. The fourth, and most unpopular leadership medium in Africa, is election. It is clear that the democratic way of becoming a leader is through elections because they have the potential of making governments accountable and legitimate. Accountability plays an important function in this medium; it limits the power of a leader in terms of checks and balances and mandate. Unfortunately, African leaders have wilfully ignored the role of legitimation which helps to improve on leadership performances. Democracies have relegated public participation in the managing and directing of national life to occasional competitions that elect stooges who dance according to government tone (Cochrane 1991:67). Below is a brief picture of an electoral period in most African countries.

A year or so before election, the incumbent usually becomes unnecessarily good and generous; especially within their ethnic regions or within regions that had hitherto been neglected in terms of developmental projects. The incumbents suddenly become popular as they make new and unrealistic promises. It is a sort of patronage that requires ethnic loyalty, as well as sympathy from the electorate.<sup>242</sup> In most cases, political parties are formed on the basis of ethnic affinity. Consequently, elections are by ethnic affiliation because leadership is considered as a myth where some clans and

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<sup>241</sup> Presently there is a vast campaign in Cameroon against government leaders who are involved in cases of corruption and the misappropriation of public funds. This campaign is carried out in the name of “operation sparrow hawk”. The main issue is not even about the arrest of leaders who have been involved in corrupt practices. It is about the amount of money that has so far been recuperated from such operations, and the amount that has been effectively ploughed into state’s coffers, without having passed through other obscure sources.

<sup>242</sup> In Cameroon it is common for ethnic groups to express loyalty to the incumbent by addressing motions of support which are generally read and publicised on the public media, over and over. This is often done quite early, before the year of election. It is believed that this attitude assures the latter of the support from the former, and thereafter spurs the latter to engage in developmental projects within these regions.



ethnic groups believe that they hold the sole monopoly.<sup>243</sup> In another instance, the incumbent tries to win the sympathy of the public by searching for a foreign or national scapegoat. This is usually the situation where foreign countries are often accused by the incumbent for mingling with the internal affairs of the nation and for sponsoring opposition candidates. Also, in order to ensure absolute success, candidates involved in the election sometimes dive into the ordeal practice of bribing the electorate.<sup>244</sup> In this process people are either lured to cast their votes for a particular person, or they are advised to cast their votes more than once. Another issue is that of intimidation and the use of violence in order to scare the opponent's sympathisers so as to fill ballot boxes with winning votes. Quite often incumbents cause their opponents to be disqualified on the basis of their ethnic roots or they are simply accused on charges of corruption and/or other vices. These mechanisms are aimed at purging competent contenders out of the race.<sup>245</sup> In this regard there is also the issue of the miscount of votes, which is an attempt to favour a particular candidate. In this case, ghost voters are occasionally carried from "outside" in order to influence the results through these "votes". Worst of all, the electoral calendar is at times kept secret and announced only when all the contenders are not ready. To further frustrate opposition candidates, money allocated for election campaigns is often disbursed very late, especially at a time when it cannot be used effectively for the purpose assigned.

The above description is an image of leadership in Africa, with its obvious consequences of bad government. They further explain why the aftermath of election is usually dreaded in Africa. When it is not well prepared and managed, it frequently results to a period of tension and agitation,

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<sup>243</sup> One can quickly imagine what generally happens when a leader from a particular ethnic group does not win election. It is in this particular case that African states define a variety of democracies, different from that which is practised in the West or in the United States. In Cameroon; it is known as "advance democracy", while in Nigeria, it is "participatory democracy".

<sup>244</sup> Collier (2009:31) observes that within the context of elections, there are usually two types of bribery; it is either retail or wholesale. It is retail when individual persons are bribed to vote for a particular person. It is wholesale when election officers are bribed to change election results at the end of the exercise to favour a particular person.

<sup>245</sup> This topic will be discussed in detail later (see § 7.5.3 below).

rancour and grievances, dissatisfaction and grumbling, a period of civil disobedience and confrontation. In most cases, the losers become “rebels”, freedom fighters, or even terrorists. In fact, election has become an important source of conflict in Africa. Rather than enhance democratic principles it has brought political instability and hatred among its citizens (Collier 2009:41). Rather than being the most appropriate way of legitimating leadership, elections in Africa have become an important source for the delegitimation of leadership. One of the direct outcomes of a delegitimated leadership is bad governance. In such cases people show their disloyalty through a vote of no confidence addressed to leaders. The most popular method is through *coups d'état*, where bullets instead of ballots have often helped other opportunists and power hungry individuals to pave their way to power. Statistically, Collier (2009:8) has observed that, since 1945, there have been about 82 coups in Africa, with 109 attempted coups that failed and 145 coup plots that got nipped in the bud.

In Africa, leadership is often delegitimated for a variety of reasons. When leaders fail to deliver the expected goods they are usually rejected by objective citizens. When the society is witnessing some crisis and is in search for innovative and creative prospects, an appointing finger is generally directed towards leaders. It is within this context that charismatic leaders often emerge as “bringers of solutions”. Leaders also suffer from delegitimation from their followers when their mandate is overdue. This becomes an opportunity for other inspired and talented persons to aspire to leadership functions in order to prove their worth. In addition, ethnic and tribal influence has a strong effect on the delegitimation of leadership. Some leaders are disliked simply because of their ethnic origin. In short, the leaders' worth, as well as the results from their leadership ought to be a measuring rod for the legitimation of leadership. Unfortunately, the input from human sentiments, coupled with the dissonance caused by internal forces (depression, fear, distrust) and external forces (demands from the hierarchy), cannot be neglected. The fear of being delegitimated often forces leaders into more and uncontrollable errors. In the face of all these, it remains the leaders' responsibility to persuade their followers of the reasons why they ought to remain loyal and supportive. It is also the responsibility of the leaders to keep

in mind the ethics of the profession, as well as the target of their mission and to convince their followers to understand the direction of their decisions. This is done through investigation, dialogue and the delegation of power. Through this approach, leaders iron out their differences and their misunderstanding with their followers.

At the basis of all these shortcomings lies the fundamental question: Why do people “hang” on to power, even at their own detriment? Within the context of PSLT, most African leaders would wish to die in power because they fear to be prosecuted when power must have been stripped from them. This is due to the poor records of events that they might have left while they were still in office. For instance, they might have misunderstood leadership to mean corruption, embezzlement and the misappropriation of public funds and property; an opportunity to rule and command; an occasion to exploit, extort and trample on people’s rights and finally as a stepping stone to retaliate and manifest tribalism and ethnic injustice. When leadership is misunderstood to mean self-projection and personal aggrandisement, leaders hang onto power because they fear to lose honour, fame, status and the dignity attached to the offices they are holding. Thirdly, some people may dread to leave office because they still wish to hang onto the material benefits that are attached to their office. At times, they also boast of the support they gain from foreign bodies in order to further cement their positions as leaders. Fourthly, some leaders feel that, apart from them, no other person is capable to sustain the community as they did. This is a conception that kills initiative and the nurturing of new leaders. Fifthly, leaders about to leave office, dread that their loopholes might be exposed by their former collaborators. This is the situation with those who have committed uncountable atrocities. Above all, the most dreaded horror for some leaders is what could be termed “retirement fever”.<sup>246</sup> The summary of these responses is that leaders hang on leadership because of FEAR.

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<sup>246</sup> Quite often, those who might have failed to prepare for an adequate retirement period feel threatened when they are about to face the reality of nature. Hence, at its approach, they become miserable and even sick. To ‘combat’ retirement, they either cut down on their official ages, or they lobby to maintain their positions. This is ridiculous! In normal circumstances, the period for retirement ought to be that of joy; the joy for having served with humility, sacrifice and satisfaction. Unfortunately, for some, it is a period of wretchedness and misery.

Having worked honourably, it is always a worthy gift when leaders leave leadership in the most respectable and cheerful manner. The best and memorable leaders are those who leave office just at the time when they were still expected to stay on! Conscious leaders are those who retire with dignity; they are those who understand leadership to mean service. They recognise that they had been on the right track during their tenure of office. These are those who might have prepared for the survival of the institution after when they must have left. Above being shrewd (Lk 16:1-9), their leadership must have been legitimated in the most honest way. From the study of PSLT, it stands clear that leaders are in the best position to define the nature of their leadership; they have the possibility to either make or mar it. Above all, the most effective leadership is that which is mandated by the hierarchy and by those for whom it is performed.

### **7.5.3 The effects of labelling and deviance in PSLT**

As discussed in § 3.4.2.3.2, labelling and deviance has an adverse effect because it contributes in building a society of division, exclusion and hatred. People are labelled and ostracised as deviants out of the labeller's intention and interest. By deciding who is a deviant, the labeller attracts sympathy from the public and thereafter lures the latter to legitimate the deviant attitude of the victim. This approach has been very common within the political setting in Africa. Unfortunately, the church is gradually taking the cue in this practice as a result of secularisation. For the case of power-syndrome leadership theory, power drunk leaders use the strategy of labelling in order to blackmail, discredit and purge their opponents. The aim of this practice is to consolidate the incumbent's leadership, whether it has been legitimated or not. Some leaders also acquire labels such as *L'Homme lion*, which portray their leadership capabilities.<sup>247</sup>

Quite often, victims of deviance are known as opponents or aspirants to the leadership position which has hitherto been occupied by the incumbent. They are thus described as enemies of development and continuity; power

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<sup>247</sup> *L'Homme lion* is the label of the Cameroonian Head of State. It depicts his ideology to act powerfully in the likeness of a lion. Also, considering that the lion is often referred to, as the king of the forest, the label stands as a symbol of power and authority to rule. As a reminder, the lion does not serve; rather, it rules, commands authority and expects others to tremble.

hungry citizens, impostors, weak, illiterate, unpatriotic, inexperienced and “outsiders”. These negative labels are aimed at portraying the opponent’s incapability to function in such offices. At the same time, they project the incumbent as a natural leader. Sycophants boost up their machinery through slogans such as “a winning team is never changed” and “it seems best to deal with a known devil; rather than applaud an unknown angel”. In Africa, the relationship between incumbents and other aspirants is generally that of mutual suspicion, tension, hate, malice, pretence and mutual rejection. Out of ignorance, opposition is dreaded in African leadership because of the false impression that has so far been developed vis-à-vis conflict. On the contrary, opposition plays very vital functions within democratic systems. They serve the purpose of controlling and checking of leadership excesses, as well as provoking innovation and creativity through the challenges from opponents. The critique from other leadership aspirants makes the incumbent more alert and assertive; and causes them to self-criticise their leadership. It is therefore irrational when members of the opposition are labelled and ostracised as deviants; rather than being embraced as partners in societal development.

The failure to recognise the worth of opposing voices within a system and the fact that conflict is always considered from a negative perspective are some marks of Africa’s underdeveloped status. These marks have adverse effects on both individual leaders and the society at large. The most important adverse effect on individual leaders is fear, with its related consequences. For instance, it is the fear to be criticised, to innovate, to perform poorly, to take risk or to be delegitimated that sometimes pushes leaders to commit more errors. Such leaders frequently suffer from stress and other cardiac related problems; they panic and even become aggressive. As a result, they use forceful and violent means to restore confidence within the society, rather than use Jesus’ dialogue and investigative approaches. The fear nursed by leaders normally spills over on their leadership functions.

At the level of the economy, there is a massive increase in the area of the transfer of technology and brain drain. Today, most African men of valour prefer to work outside their respective countries because of poor economic policies reflected in excessive taxes and poor financial motivation. According to Mwakikagile (2004:82) between 1985 and 1990, Africa had lost 60.000

scientists, doctors, engineers, technicians and other experts to Western Europe and North America. In the political domain, there is instability and mistrust. This atmosphere justifies the number of *coups d'état* registered in Africa in the past years, as mentioned above.

In the social domain the population continues to live in excessive fear and distrust. The fear to innovate increases the chances of bad and inappropriate policies, which in turn make poor citizens to remain poor and indebted, while the rich continue to tap from the have-nots. It is a situation that renders Africa and its peoples as “Heavily Indebted Poor Citizens” (HIPC). The heavy rate of indebtedness also implies Africa’s dependent position, depicting the level of recurrent suffering and misery.

In the religious sphere, dishonesty, embezzlement, mismanagement, dictatorship, anarchy and the loss of confidence in its leadership is at the origin of the empty pews that are witnessed today in some churches. In short, labelling and deviance does more harm on leadership than it does well or repairs. The perfect solution to the problems posed by power-syndrome leadership theory is found in an adequate knowledge of Jesus as the Christ. Even though he was aware of his divine origin, he never hung on leadership, nor did he dread his opponents. Instead, he challenged them to perfect in their leadership skills. For those who had limitations that could impede on their understanding of his leadership, he filled them up. Through this, he left a perfect example of leadership to emulate: “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37).

#### **7.5.4 Jesus’ concept of leadership *vis-à-vis* PSLT**

Jesus’ understanding of leadership was already discussed in detail in § 6.4.3.2. The main issue in this section is to examine how these leadership precepts outlined by Jesus are a challenge to the African understanding and application of leadership. Essentially, it is about how Jesus, as a leader, dealt with opposition and conflict. As mentioned previously in § 5.1, Jesus established several relationships in Luke’s gospel that characterise the nature of the conflicts that he faced with his contemporaries. Two of these relationships – the relationship with the Jewish elite and the relationship with the Roman elite – are relevant for this study because they are concerned with the character groups that opposed Jesus on the subject matter of his

leadership. Contrary to the spirit of fear and rejection that haunts most African leaders, Jesus was animated with the spirit of zeal, enthusiasm and acceptance, vis-à-vis his opponents. Fear is an indication of doubt and defeat, while enthusiasm is an indication of confidence and success. Jesus' strength stemmed from the fact that he had the legitimation of his Father and of those he served. Secondly, the strong conviction that he developed for his mission, coupled with his constant reliance on God, enabled him to remain focused, purposeful and unperturbed. Lastly, he recognised the worth of his followers in leadership and therefore included them in his leadership by way of dialogue, investigation, training and sharing through the delegation of power.

The tension between Jesus and his opponents manifested itself in several ways. Firstly, he labelled the Pharisees as pompous leaders (Lk 11:42-44), hypocrites (Lk 12:1) and lovers of money (Lk 16:14). Scribes were described as pretenders (Lk 11:46-48) and criticised as ostentatious leaders, extortionists and exploiters (Lk 21: 46-47). Herod was identified as a "fox" (Lk 13:32).<sup>248</sup> Caesar on his part was ironically described as a usurper, because

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<sup>248</sup> According to Oakman (Oakman 2008:265), Sepphoris as a derivation from the Hebrew word, "bird", was the capital of Herod "the fox" (Lk 13:31-33). In later years, this capital was moved to Tiberias (Keck 2000:56). This is the background of Luke 9:57-58, which is often judged as the only Son of Man saying that goes back to Jesus. In the context of this pericope, the birds of the air are the Sepphoreans, and the fox is Herod. Thus, the elite in Sepphoris have everything they need, but the peasants have nothing (cf. Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 8.1). Of the land which the Romans gained by conquest from their neighbors, part they sold publicly, and turned the remainder into common land. This common land, they assigned to such of the citizens as were poor and indigent, for which they were to pay only a small acknowledgment into the public treasury. But when the wealthy men began to offer larger rents, and drive the poorer people out, it was enacted by law, that no person whatever should enjoy more than five hundred acres of ground. This act for some time checked the avarice of the richer, and was of great assistance to the poorer people, who retained under it their respective proportions of ground, as they had been formerly rented by them. Afterwards the rich men of the neighborhood contrived to get these lands again into their possession, under other people's names, and at last would not stick to claim most of them publicly in their own. The poor, who were thus deprived of their farms, were no longer either ready, as they had formerly been, to serve in war, neither were they careful in the education of their children. Thus, in a short time there were comparatively few freemen remaining in all Italy, which swarmed with workhouses full of foreign-born slaves. These the rich men employed in cultivating their ground, of which they dispossessed the citizens. Caius Laelius, the intimate friend of Scipio, undertook to reform this abuse; but meeting with opposition from men of authority, and fearing a disturbance, he soon desisted, and received the name of the Wise or the Prudent, both which meanings belong to the Latin word *Sapiens*. When elected as tribune of the people, Tiberius took the matter into his hands. He was probably inspired by Diophanes the rhetorician and Blossius the philosopher, who was an Italian from Cumae and a friend to Antipater of Tarsus. He might have also been incited by Cornelia, his mother, or by Spurius Postumius, who was a rival of Tiberius. When the latter returned from his campaign

he did not own anything (Lk 20:20-26). These labels in contemporary Africa would imply rejection and expulsion. Jesus instead used them as teaching aids and as a method to provoke its victims to a change of attitude in their understanding of leadership. Analysing the language that Jesus used *vis-à-vis* his opponents, France (1990:22) and Desjardins (1997:75) conclude that he was the cause of the events that befell him. This may be a misinterpretation of Jesus' intention because Jesus' arrogant language was such that it instead appealed to consciences. He mostly used rhetorical answers, as well as an aggressive tone, in order to incriminate his opponents and prove them defeated (see Lk 20:1-8, 20-26, 27-40; 22:66-71). Although these opponents constantly sought to eliminate him, his approach was that of reformation, transformation and acceptance. He did not develop hatred for political and religious leadership in first-century Palestine; rather, he was against their use of institutions for selfish aims (Lk 19:45-48).

Jesus did not stand against the religion and the practices of the faith in which he grew, as suggested by Desjardins (see § 2.5.3 above). He disagreed with the misinterpretation and the misuse of religious and political institutions. For instance, he criticised the manipulation of texts for egoistic aims. In his opinion, the Jewish regulations must be respected as long as they take the interest of humans into consideration (Lk 13:15-16). He opposed the misinterpretation of God by human structures which gave a false impression of what God required of leadership. Jesus' teachings were contrary to leadership imbued with ethnic colouration of favouritism and exclusion. For him, leadership rests on reciprocal legitimation. While leaders

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and found that his hegemony was at stake because of the prowess of his rival, he engaged in a bold political measure, capable of arousing the people's expectations. Unfortunately, his brother Caius had published in a pamphlet that while Tiberius passed through Tuscany on his way to Numantia, he observed that his compatriots were in a situation of want and the country was full of barbarian slaves. Many other posters were pasted on porticoes, house-walls, and monuments, requesting Tiberius to recover the land for the interest of the poor. Foxes were also seen as being impure. A decree of Antiochus concerning Jerusalem and its temple stated that: "It is unlawful for any foreigner to enter the enclosure of the temple which is forbidden to the Jews, except to those of them who are accustomed to enter after purifying themselves in accordance with the law of the country. Nor shall anyone bring into the city the flesh of horses or of mules or of wild or tame asses, or of leopards, foxes or hares or, in general, of any animals forbidden to the Jews..." (Josephus, Ant. 12.146). Summarily, when Jesus spoke of "foxes" and "birds" (Lk 9:57), he referred to the atmosphere that surrounded Herod's leadership. It was a reign of social segregation, misery, cruelty and turmoil. For more on the sociological meaning of "fox" in the context of Jesus, read Oakman (2008:261-272).



need legitimation and empowerment from their followers, followers expect the legitimation of their support from leaders through their encouragements and openness. Jesus showed this example by exposing his ministry plan to his disciples and by explaining to them the various intricacies involved in leadership (Lk 9:18-22).

Jesus' approach to leadership was participatory and educative; based on respect for the "other". Even though he sometimes listened to his followers, he never took them for sycophants. He rebuked them when their faith was shaken (Lk 8:25; 9:41) and when they nursed false leadership ambitions (Lk 9:48; 22:24-27). He drew their attention to the abuse of power and the dangers of boasting (Lk 10:19-20). His teachings set the tone for true moral behaviour (Lk 6:27-42), the correct attitude towards wealth (Lk 12:13-21; 18:18-30), and guarded against dishonest leadership (Lk 12:35-48; 16:1-13). Jesus' leadership style of training and empowering his followers was an indication that leaders did not need to fear their post. It was a strategy that rather agrees with Meyer (2002:16), namely that effective leadership means that leaders should know their limits and consequently surround themselves with those who can do well what they cannot do at all.

Jesus did not fear opposition and criticism. Even though the orientation of his mission towards non-Jews brought hostility upon his leadership (Duling 2003:385), he never halted nor withdrew. Rather, he avoided falling into the devil's temptation (Lk 4:1-13; cf. Lk 17:1-4). Also, conflicts helped him to shape and define his mission. They were equally an aid for the understanding of the limitations of those who surrounded him. They enabled him to better communicate with his disciples. Summarily leadership, according to Jesus, must not be in the likeness of the Pharisees, the scribes, Caesar, Herod and Pilate. These are not good examples to be emulated in Africa, because they function as kings of the Gentiles, whose aim is authority, power and lordship. Conversely, Jesus recommended leadership in the portrait of the "Good Samaritan": Go and do likewise (Lk 10:37). It is servant leadership, which entails self-sacrifice. It is purposeful leadership because it focuses on the needs of those for whom leadership is meant.

### 7.5.5 Leadership and empowerment

Empowerment occupies an important position within the context of leadership. Whereas leaders are empowered by their followers to perform leadership responsibilities, followers expect empowerment from their leaders in order to contribute to leadership with confidence and assurance. In like manner, while it is necessary for followers to legitimate the leadership of their leaders, they themselves are well motivated when they know that the latter accept them as collaborators. Empowerment therefore grants confidence to both leaders and followers in the exercise of their respective functions. It is a means to ensure that mission continues after when leaders must have left office.

In Africa, social status is often measured in terms of a person's popularity and by the number of followers. It is the same with leadership. The strength of one's leadership is dependent upon the amount of reciprocal legitimation from leaders and followers, as well as the empowerment derived thereof. Contingent-transactional leadership theory agrees that leadership empowerment means the empowerment of the leaders by their followers and *vice-versa* (see § 6.4.3). In the African context, leaders are empowered through election, appointment or on the basis of hereditary consideration. On the other hand, followers gain their empowerment through leadership training, shared leadership, their engagement as partners and the availability of a fertile and supportive environment for creative thinking (Gill 2006:211, see also Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2002:32-34).

At his baptism (Lk 3:21-23) Jesus received empowerment from the Holy Spirit as a sign of acceptance from God (hierarchy). This was also an occasion for the public presentation and confirmation of his dual honourship (§ 6.3.2.1). During his ministry Jesus also received empowerment from his followers by means of the legitimation of his person and work (Lk 9:18-20; 23:47). In order to demonstrate his support for their ministry, he empowered the disciples by assigning them for important tasks (Lk 9:1-6, 52; 10:1-12; 19:29-35; 22:8-13), and through his practical teachings (Lk 22:14-22; cf. Lk 22:27). By engaging the disciples into an amicable dialogue, Jesus considered them as collaborators. The confidence that they derived from such relationship empowered them to be open to dialogue and to consult him when

they felt threatened (Lk 8:24), when they seemed not to understand (Lk 9:12-13), when they felt deficient (Lk 11:1) and when they were embarrassed by his death (Lk 24:12-27). Because of their cordial relationship the women were enticed to follow him to the cross (Lk 23:49) and thereafter to the tomb (Lk 23:54-24:3). Jesus also sought personal empowerment by constantly committing himself to his Father through prayer (Lk 3:21; 5:16; 9:29; 22:41).

Jesus' application of leadership empowerment is a challenge to African leaders, who rather than seek the empowerment of the electorate, find solace in occult societies and the military prowess of their respective countries. Jesus' example testifies to the importance of empowered followers. For instance, his arrest was delayed by the religious authorities because those who followed him became a natural hindrance (Lk 19:48; 20:6, 19, 26; 22:2). Secondly, the baton of mission was handed over to the disciples because they had hitherto been schooled in leadership principles (§ 6.4.3.2). Jesus knew the importance of leadership empowerment. By empowering his disciples, he ensured continuity and the success of future ministry. Consequently, he could tell them with confidence:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.

(Lk 24:46-49)

### **7.5.6 Conclusion**

A contextual reading of leadership and conflict in Luke's gospel provides a wholesome definition of effective leadership, relevant for the African context. For Jesus, effective leadership means influencing the lives of people through self-spiritual empowerment for social development, economic improvement, political innovation, ecological awareness, as well as total moral transformation. In this respect, leadership can be described as an intricate activity because it influences human activities in all spheres of life. There is therefore no doubt that the present state of underdevelopment in Africa is principally caused by two issues relating to leadership. The first is related to

the problem of the poor understanding and wrong application of leadership (Shu 2004:8). Once people become leaders they either play the role of patrons towards citizens, or they play the role of clients vis-à-vis former colonial masters, their respective appointees or the hierarchy, as the case may be. Second, is about the wrong choice of leaders, coupled with the manner in which people become leaders. Leadership on the basis of friendship and ethnic connection cannot always be adequate, especially when the right people are expected to be put at the right places.

The practice of leadership in Africa indicates a sharp contrast with leadership according to Jesus. His leadership prescriptions challenge leadership practised by African leaders in all its aspects. For instance, there is need for African leaders to consider opposition and conflict as inherent to leadership and as important catalysts for leadership improvement. True and genuine leadership that will free Africa from its stalemate is selfless and patriotic leadership which is carried out in the fear of God alone and for the service of man. It is leadership that is full of vision and innovation; leadership built on sharing and the delegation power; leadership that substitutes fear with confidence; and leadership that is void of ethnic sentiments. In fact, it is leadership that is conditioned by real democratic principles.

## **7.6 AN AFRICAN HERMENEUTICAL READING OF LUKE 9:18-22 IN RELATION TO LEADERSHIP, CONFLICT AND IDENTITY**

### **7.6.1 Introduction**

As it has been observed in § 5.7 and § 6.5, Luke 9:18-22 occupies an important place within Luke's gospel with regard to Jesus' leadership and the conflict he faced as a result of his identity. When read with the lenses of the relationships that Jesus established in the gospel, it challenges contemporary understanding and application of leadership, as well as reflects on the way in which people respond to the question of Jesus' identity. An African hermeneutical reading of Luke 9:18-22 is a reflection on how Jesus' leadership approach challenges the clergy in their day-to-day activities, as witnesses to what Jesus said and did (Lk 24:46-49). Some of the conflicts that church leaders face today are similar to those that Jesus faced in the course of the relationships in which he was engaged in Luke's gospel (as announced

in Luke 9:18-22). Within the context of this study, the crowds in Luke's gospel will be likened in general to those being led by the clergy and in particular to congregational members. The disciples will be understood to mean church or congregational elders. Lastly, the Jewish elite referred to in Luke 9:22 will be compared both to the political authorities of Cameroon and its religious authorities. The clergy play the centre role in this hermeneutic reading of Luke 9:18-22, because they have assumed the legacy left by Jesus.

It is therefore a study from the perspective of the clergy's relationship with the congregation, the elders and all those who are stakeholders in ruling the society: the executive, the legislative, the judiciary and the religious.<sup>249</sup> Inspiration is drawn from the Cameroonian context, as well as the practice of the pastoral ministry within the context of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC).<sup>250</sup> The clergy's role, like that of Jesus, is that of social reformation through information, education and transformation. It is a kind of reformation that begins with the empowerment of individual members of the society. This is an endeavour to continue with the liberation process begun by Jesus. This means the commitment of those who have been liberated to take part in the liberation of others. In this way, a new community can be formed of people who have been saved to serve (Lk 10:6-9). Through education, the clergy provoke political, economic and social change within the society, enabling all peoples to put things right by correcting their past mistakes (see Lk 19:1-10). They equally define Jesus as the Christ who causes revolution within families and tribes, as well as the appeal to consciences. In fact, the church's mission is that of making the world to become an extended clan; that is, a new community of Jesus' fictive family.

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<sup>249</sup> Working from the background of a Protestant theologian, the word clergy is sometimes interchanged with the word "pastor". Pastor, in this case, is used as a generic term, referring to someone who takes care of God's sheep; be it in the Protestant tradition or in the Catholic tradition.

<sup>250</sup> The hermeneutic reading of Luke 9:18-22 is not exclusively about church leadership. Rather, church leadership has been chosen as a case study so as to elucidate the types of relationships that leaders can engage in, with those who surround and influence their leadership. Leaders always have a variety of collaborators who influence their leadership in one way or another. Consequently, all that is said of church leadership is applicable to secular leadership as well.

### **7.6.2 Luke 9:18-22 and the clergy's relationship with the congregation ('the crowds')**

The conversation between Jesus and his disciples in Caesarea Philippi opened with a question which explained his relationship with those who thronged him: "Who do the crowds say that I am" (Lk 9:18b). So far, Jesus had gained much fame through teaching and preaching ("I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose"; Lk 4:43); through his miracles of healing (Lk 4:38-41), raising the dead (Lk 7:14-15; 8:53-55); exorcism (Lk 8:26-39; 9:37-43; 11:14-23) and providence (Lk 9:10-17). These activities seemed to have created a false impression in the crowds. They might have made them to construct an image of Jesus that fitted with their personal expectations. Jesus certainly understood that his fame was understood and interpreted in terms of the social needs of the crowds, rather than in terms of who he was and what the focus of his mission was. Their speculations, as echoed by the disciples, effectively agreed with Jesus' suspicion of false loyalty. Even though the crowds had a glimpse of Jesus' identity, they rightly awarded legitimate praises with wrong intentions to the right person. This picture depicts the image of the clergy within the congregational setting today, where people are cramped with social, economic and political crisis.

The impact of the clergy within the congregation is contained in Jesus' assigned mission to the apostles: preaching, teaching and healing (Lk 9:1-6). Just as the crowds had an influence on Jesus' mission, congregational members and the public at large play a vital role in the clergy's activities. Inasmuch as they are a source of encouragement, they can flatter or derail the clergy through a variety of ways. Through the attribution of gorgeous titles, such as prophet and saviour, they cause the clergy to assume the position that does not belong to them. This becomes an occasion for self-aggrandisement and the acquisition of human pride, which Jesus condemns (Lk 11:43; 12:1; 20:46). Even though Jesus respected the speculations from the crowds, he did not fall into the temptation of claiming to be Elijah, John the Baptist or one of the prophets of old.

The second method of false and suspicious loyalty is by way of granting gifts to the clergy. During his ministry, Jesus gained from the hospitality of

Martha (Lk 10:38-42). Some of those who received healing either opted to serve him (Lk 4:39 9:38) or to follow him (Lk 8:2). He also agreed that “the labourer deserves his wages” (Lk 10:7). This is an indication that he recognised the award of gifts to the clergy as a sign of solidarity, hospitality, sharing and gratitude (Lk 9:3-6; Lk 10:8-10). In the early church, Jesus’ understanding of the award of gifts to the clergy was misinterpreted and misused by itinerant leaders as a means to exploit local congregations (Horrell 1999a:311). This attitude was a fundamental source of conflict between itinerant and resident leaders. Today it has many adverse effects. To start with, it is an attitude that makes the clergy mean. Secondly, it gives a wrong representation of Jesus as the Christ. Jesus does not only disagree with leaders who are lovers of money (Lk 16:14); he opposes those who use his name in order to exploit and extort from people who already look vulnerable and needy (Lk 20:46-47). He equally castigates those who use the church as a means for personal enrichment (Lk 19:45-48).

Today there is a new trend in the PCC, where congregational members applaud the clergy after they had delivered a sermon. There is nothing wrong in showing approval of what the clergy do. However, this is a false method of leadership legitimation because it serves as a double edge sword. It either implies acceptance or rejection, depending on the intentions of the clappers. Lastly, some congregational members are often overwhelmed when a clergy from their ethnic origin is either transferred or posted to their congregation. As an underlying intention, they expect to benefit some special favour from the clergy because of their shared human identity. They become friendly and exhibit false love, solidarity and sharing. Jesus was conscious of the composition of the crowds that followed him; they were both Jewish and non-Jewish. His praise for the Good Samaritan’s indiscriminate compassion designates his stance against ethnicity (Lk 10:37).

The clergy therefore need to be observant and assertive in order to detect the intentions of “the crowds”, who curiously sometimes pretend to know the clergy’s functions more than they themselves. Suspicious and unflinching loyalty from congregational members must call for self evaluation and investigation from the clergy: “Who do you say Jesus is?” The crowds that followed Jesus were a force to reckon with (Lk 19:47-48; 20:6, 19). In

Jerusalem they acclaimed him as King (Lk 19:37-38). Unfortunately, these were false impressions, because they had not grabbed the knot of Jesus' identity and his mission. For instance, in Nazareth his peers had shown an ambivalent attitude: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Lk 4:22). Their attempt to derail Jesus failed because he knew his mission and so remained focus and unperturbed. This is an invitation to the clergy to know and strive towards accomplishing the legacy that had been handed over to the church by Jesus.

The pews have become passionate and demanding, in view of the present situation of misery (hunger, sicknesses, poverty) and the on-going spiritual search. It is a situation that has caused them to develop esteem and, at the same time, a lot of expectations from the clergy. As a result, most people have developed many experiences concerning the question of Jesus' identity; some of which could be misleading. For example, those facing the situation of violence, rape and homelessness are liable to identify Jesus as the Christ of violence. In such circumstances, the clergy is called upon to canalise and reshape such spontaneous conceptions into acceptable confessions of faith that enhance the faith of the believer, rather than draw boundaries of hatred and rejection. It is also their responsibility to assist believers to grow from their perceptions of who Jesus is to a concrete knowledge of what he does in human life. They need to assist people to rise from mere conceptions to concrete convictions about Jesus. Half-baked and prosperity teaching have continuously formed "skin Christians" who quickly fall victims of dissonance between what they are taught and the reality in which they live. That is why they sometimes easily return to their traditional beliefs whenever they are faced with unexplained difficulties. Believers who are not adequately empowered with the meaning of Jesus' identity become as distorted as the crowds that betrayed Jesus (Lk 22:47; 23:4). When all things seem to fail, they waver from their faith with the conception that they had been lured to follow the wrong person.

Jesus' dialogue approach, as well as his response to the question surrounding his identity, reflects the manner in which Christian teaching has to be carried out by the clergy. They are an indication that no one holds the monopoly of the response to Jesus' question: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (Lk 9:18). It challenges the way of teaching catechetical classes and Bible



studies in congregations. In the twenty-first century Africa, the clergy can no longer only assist neophytes to parrot Peter's response: "Jesus is the Christ of God" (cf. Lk 9:20), without knowing the implications of such response. They must also be enabled to discover who Jesus is; and not only to retain and repeat responses from other people's experiences. To involve Christians in the reading and understanding of Scripture is what has been referred to as spiritual empowerment. People must be taught and empowered to interpret the signs of time by themselves and to grow out of ignorance (Artherton 1994:14), because the "evil generation" seems to persist. Each person has an experience to share; and a contribution to make with reference to the question of Jesus' identity. People know the truth of the gospel when they have been given the possibility to wrestle with it. In this context, the clergy is called upon to serve as facilitators or discussion leaders; and not as commanders or bosses (Taylor 1994:1).

### **7.6.3 Luke 9:18-22 and the clergy's relationship with congregational elders ("the disciples")**

From the dialogue in Luke 9:18-22 it is clear that Jesus did not rally the crowds to find out what they thought of his identity; rather, he enquired from his very close collaborators, the disciples. However, from the crowds' response, he seemed to have been motivated to ask the disciples: "But who do you say that I am" (Lk 9:20). This is a discussion that came at a very crucial moment of Jesus' ministry. First, it concerned his growing fame, fostered by his activities of preaching, teaching and healing. Second, it was due to the misconception inherent in this fame as already exhibited in Nazareth (Lk 4:22-30). Thirdly, it was about the wayward attitude of the disciples, since from when they were called. Fourthly, it concerned the antagonism that he already faced with the religious elite. Fifthly, it was a dialogue which served as a check of information. Jesus was about to conclude with his Galilean ministry; he still had the Jerusalem ministry ahead of him. Most importantly, Jesus wished to communicate his identity, as well as its implications, to his followers so that they do not remain unaware of the events that will befall him. Of course, this moment of sharing was necessary

because the disciples were to become legal representatives of his missionary vision.

Within the context of the congregation, this dialogue is similar to the dialogue between the pastor and his close collaborators, those who are congregational elders. Just like the disciples who followed Jesus, church elders are described by the Constitution of the PCC (1998:17) as helpers of the pastor. The variety of their respective professional backgrounds accounts for the rich experiences that they possess. In fact, they are a booster to their new ecclesiastical functions. Coming from within the congregations, they are more in contact with the grassroots than the pastor. In their daily routine the clergy are engaged in more or less four areas of responsibilities. They have sacramental, administrative, evangelistic and pastoral functions; all of which they cannot do alone (Taylor 1994:2). It is in this case that the contribution of congregational elders becomes imperative. It is therefore relevant for the clergy, once in a while, to enquire from the elders: “Who does the crowds and your selves say Jesus is?” (Lk 9:18, 19). For the clergy, this approach is a way of evaluating the content of their messages, as well as the effectiveness of their activities. It is also a methodology that assures the elders of their worth as the clergy’s daily companions.<sup>251</sup>

Jesus’ leadership style derived from this dialogue (as developed in § 6.5, above) is an inspiration to the clergy’s relationship with congregational elders in many respects. For instance, Jesus challenges the clergy to become more effective in leadership training. It is a process that requires courage, patience, endurance and understanding. In spite of the wayward attitude of the disciples, Jesus did not reject nor despise them. Rather, he kept moulding and admonishing them so that they become efficient for the future ministry. Leadership training equips elders and further empowers them to function well in the absence of the clergy (Krass 1992:104). As compared to the elders, the clergy know their mission better because they have been called and trained for that purpose. It is therefore incumbent upon them to constantly transmit the content of their ministry to the elders through training sessions. Through this approach, the clergy enable the elders to “know and understand” (see Lk

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<sup>251</sup> This approach is different from the normal administrative session meetings that the clergy often convene within the congregation.

9:13; 9:45, 49); if not, they will guess, doubt, misunderstand and misinterpret (see Lk 8:25b). Jesus is correct that a blind cannot lead the blind; else, both will fall into a pit (Lk 6:39). Ignorance kills leadership because it generates conflicts, doubts, suspicion and mistrust. Although Jesus' betrayal was purposeful, the training of elders is imperative; if not, they risk becoming distorted, even to the extent where Judas Iscariot found himself. One of the best methods of leadership training is the empowerment of the elders through Bible studies.

The Bible is an essential source of authority and power for an effective Christian leadership like that of the clergy/elders. In the Bible studies class the clergy enables the elders to understand Jesus' identity, as well as what it means for him to be the Christ. Failure to drill elders with the understanding of leadership from a Biblical perspective contributes in encouraging them to live a life of syncretism, just like some Christians do. This approach agrees with the dialogue approach through education. The fourth method of leadership empowerment is through the delegation of power. The delegation of power by the leader signifies confidence, love and trust. By assigning the disciples, Jesus enabled them to be creative and visionary, as well as be confident in their personal abilities and potentials: "You give them something to eat" (Lk 9:13). The best way to become an effective leader is by executing leadership tasks. The clergy therefore needs to create an appropriate leadership atmosphere with their collaborators so as to prepare them for future tasks. Leadership empowerment also means that the clergy shows proof of the fact that they understand and know their mission. Leaders who are easily swayed by the caprices of their followers would hardly accomplish their expected mission. Jesus never gave in to the pressure from his disciples to perform as an earthly king. Rather, he constantly persuaded them to understand that his leadership was different from that of "the kings of the Gentiles" (Lk 22:25). According to Jesus, leadership in the church must be void of following: violence and retaliation (Lk 9:55; 22:51); hatred and ethnic segregation (Lk 8:21); lordship and power (Lk 22:24-26); hypocrisy, pretence, exploitation, extortion and pride (Lk 11:37-52; 12:1; 20:45-47); material and monetary concerns (Lk 9:3; 10:4); fear (Lk 12:4-7, 32-34); hesitation (Lk 14:27-32) and anxiety (Lk 12:22-31). The presence of these vices rather signifies that church

leaders have not mastered the meaning of their leadership in the light of Jesus. Leadership in the likeness of Jesus is compassionate leadership: “Be compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate” (Lk 6:36; see also Lk 10: 25-37). Such leadership is that which overcomes all vices.

Above all, the clergy should be exemplarily prayerful, especially when the elders are spiritually weak (Lk 5:33; 9:18; 22:45-46). Jesus’ use of prayer was a catalyst to his mission and a preparation for the future ministry. It was his use of prayer that influenced the choice of future leaders (Lk 6:12-16), as well as the discussion on the question of his identity (Lk 9:18-22). It led the devil to be defeated (Lk 4:1-13) and at the same time inspired the dialogue with Elijah and Moses (Lk 9:28-36). Finally, it prepared him for his arrest, suffering, rejection and death, as well as his subsequent resurrection (Lk 22:39-42). In fact, prayer spiced Jesus’ leadership throughout his ministry.

In a nutshell, leadership success between the clergy and the elders depends on the level of empowerment that they accord to each other. It is such mutual empowerment which enables both to become effective leaders. It ensures sustainability, continuity and personal nourishment.

#### **7.6.4 Luke 9:18-22 and the clergy’s relationship with the “ruling elite”**

Principally, two other authorities constantly influence the clergy in their daily mission. The clergy are often influenced by the challenges from the political elite and those from the church’s hierarchy, respectively.

##### **7.6.4.1 Luke 9:18-22 and the clergy’s relationship with the “political elite”**

In Luke 9: 22 Jesus explained his identity with reference to the outcome of his relationship with the Jewish elite, who were the custodians of Jewish society. This account incriminated the elders, chief priests and the scribes as those who would suffer, humiliate, reject and kill him. It is a description which gave a false impression that Jesus’ report exonerated the Roman political elite, who paradoxically played a key role in the passion narrative. It is a false impression because the Jewish elite did not have the right of killing, unless this was legitimated by the Roman political authorities. By releasing Jesus to be killed, according to Luke’s story (Lk 23:25), Pilate and Herod simply joined

the Jewish religious elite as opponents to Jesus' person, as well as the ministry which he incarnated.

In effect, although the discussion between Jesus and the disciples concerned the events that already happened in Galilee, it was essentially focused on what will befall him in Jerusalem, the centre of political and religious power. It is in Jerusalem that the Jewish religious elite manipulated the legislature and connived with the executive and the judiciary in order to kill Jesus. The announcement of the resurrection contained in this declaration is a rejection of human ruling, their authority (the executive, the legislative and the judiciary), as well as the vindication of Jesus and the validation of his ministry. It is a projection of his heavenly reign and the recognition of his person and works. This confirmed the fact that leadership in the likeness of Jesus needs to grow beyond fear and anxiety (Lk 12:11-12; 21:12). Jesus' predictions also depicts the clergy's responsibility *vis-à-vis* the governing arm of the society, controlled by the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.

Within the context of the society, the clergy is the custodian of God's kingdom principles, manifested in the process of governance carried out by the political elite. Because of this active involvement, they cannot escape from "doing politics". However, this is not about partisan politics; rather, it is about the clergy's participation in ensuring the welfare of human beings. They are requested to abstain from partisan politics as representatives of the values, principles and presence of the reign of God (Botman 1997:74; *Cry justice* 1993:16)<sup>252</sup>. However, those who are interested in partisan politics are often advised to resign from their pastoral functions. Unfortunately, the clergy often face opposition from political authorities who consider them as intruders. In fact, the clergy cannot remain passive in view of the situation of chaos and misery that plague human society and only wait in order to criticise from the pulpits:

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<sup>252</sup> *Cry justice* is a collection of declarations made by the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon at the dawn of democracy in Cameroon in the early 1990s. It is a prophetic document that denounced both government and individual inhuman attitudes and predicted their outcome. Although this document created sensation within the ranks of the government, some of its predictions, such as the ecological crisis and the increasing rate of poverty and misery, have become real.

Let us not try to sever, for they are inseparable, those principles which affect the problems of earth from those which affect the kingdom of heaven. All unrighteous government whatever, all that sets itself against the order and freedom of man, is hostile to Christ's government, is rebellion against Him, in whatever name and by whatsoever instruments it is administered.

(Maurice, in Atherton 1994:12)

Ela (1986:79) empowers the clergy in their task to the society in the following words:

As all else is organized to strangle the last hope of justice by torture and repression so as to guarantee the multinationals, the banks, the industries, the mines, and the super-farms the most efficient possible exploitation of the country and the people, the Church should once more, by the voice of the bishops (clergy) of Africa, become the voice of the great, silenced masses.

(Ela 1986:79, my addition in brackets)

It is the responsibility of the clergy to remind the political elite of the various mechanisms which they still deploy as a contribution to suffer, humiliate, reject and kill Jesus. Inasmuch as the events that befell Jesus are located in history, they are still enacted today in various forms. For instance, today, the political elite still contribute to humiliate and kill Jesus through the practice of bad policies, misappropriation, extortion, exploitation and corruption. Jesus' response to the Roman political elite remains an inspiration for the clergy. Although he disagreed with the ruling elite, he did not dismiss the need for rule and leadership. He reformed their way of ruling through practical teachings. When he was questioned on the issue of the paying of taxes, his answer was rhetorical (Lk 20:20-26). When he was questioned by Pilate whether he was the King of the Jews, his response was not explicit: "You have said so" (Lk 23:3). Before Herod, he offered quiet-thinking responses (Lk 23:9). This is an attitude that could have caused reformation and transformation within Pilate and Herod. Regrettably, they reacted with indifference. Their reaction implied that they still did not understand Jesus' identity and leadership. It is in this vein that the clergy have the mandate to continue Jesus' mission towards political leaders. In the execution of these functions, church leaders need not fear martyrdom because those who seek to embody the principles of the kingdom in public life are liable to become

vulnerable to attacks from all spheres of society (Moltmann 1993:130; Paeth 2008:165).

#### **7.6.4.2 Luke 9:18-22 and the clergy's relationship with the "religious elite"**

Within the context of this study, church hierarchy constitutes the religious elite because they are the custodians of the church's tradition. For example, in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), Scripture inspires its hierarchy to define the goal and the mission of the entire church. In this case, the clergy are the direct representatives of the Church within their parishes. As a matter of principle, the clergy owe respect, honour and loyalty to the hierarchy. In return, they expect support and empowerment from the hierarchy. In Luke 9:18-22, the Jewish religious elite were reported as Jesus' principal opponents. Although they all stood for the same cause of interpreting God's holiness, they differed both in their respective approaches and in their understanding. Consequently, they refused to legitimate Jesus' identity because he did not operate according to their expectations.

The above description is a bit different from the present day context. Although the Jewish religious elite and Jesus both had a focus on the understanding and interpretation of God's holiness, it was essentially about the reformation of the old religion (Judaism). This justifies why they disagreed at the level of the *status quo*. Secondly, although the religious elite were the custodians of religion, they were not Jesus' direct hierarchy. Jesus did not depend on them; instead, they expected him to validate their leadership. And because the contrary happened, they took him for an enemy and caused his death. From an emic perspective, this is an issue that strikes the reader of Luke's gospel; that the Jewish religious elite antagonised Jesus rather than protect him. The issue at stake in this study is that of the enmity, the antagonism and the misunderstanding that often exist between the clergy and their highest authorities in the context of applying what God requires of the church today. Such enmity is often translated through open confrontation, suspensions, dismissals, accusations and counter accusations and cessations. Jesus did not form a break-away religion; rather, he reformed Judaism from within. He did not dismiss nor sanction religious leaders.

Rather, he accepted them but condemned their practices. One of the errors in the church hierarchy today is that of evaluating the clergy operating from the wrong premise. Their worth is considered in terms of the numerical growth, as well as the financial increase that they provoke within their parishes. It is an evaluation that lays little or no emphasis on spiritual growth. This was probably the error of John the Baptist when he wished to acknowledge Jesus' presence by evaluating him the wrong way: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another" (Lk 7:19). Jesus' response implies that success in mission is to be evaluated in terms of its effects, and not in terms of preconceived expectations.

The tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious elite, implied in Luke 9:22, depicts the deviant attitude from the religious elite of contemporary society. Firstly, it is about the clergy's attempt to mutilate texts in order to suit their egos. Secondly, it is a pointer to the misuse of the church as an institution for personal enrichment. Today there is an increasing interest in money making rather than spirituality. Thirdly, it is a warning against power tussles among the clergy working within the same system. The untidy relationship between the clergy and the hierarchy is often translated into a fight of personal interest. For instance, the hierarchy sometimes have their demands that clash with the realities of the terrain. As a result, the clergy become torn between what the Bible requires, the realities of the context, their personal convictions and the demands of the hierarchy. Lastly, it is about the contribution of present day's clergy in humiliating, rejecting and killing Jesus. In fact, Jesus' reaction would not be different if he were to come back to physical life. Fortunately, he left a legacy to be emulated by the clergy. By alluding to his resurrection, he encouraged the clergy to remain hopeful and perseverant when threatened with opposition, ridicule, rejection and death from the political elite and other colleagues. After all, suffering, humiliation and rejection may be temporary (three days); life lasts forever, with Jesus being carried up into heaven from where he reigns (Lk 24:51).

#### **7.6.5 Conclusion: Luke 9:18-22 and the pastoral ministry**

The conversation between Jesus and his disciples in Luke 9:18-22 is essentially about the intricacy of the pastoral ministry. For example, most



leaders often count more on their legitimation by the hierarchy while minimising the input from their followers. Jesus benefited the legitimation of his Father (Lk 3:21-23; 9:35), that of his followers (Lk 9:19-20), as well as that of those who were hitherto considered as “outsiders” (such as the centurion; Lk 23:47). The configuration of the disciples mentioned in Galilee (Lk 9:18-22), was enlarged to include all of his followers (see § 5.2, above), including, for example, women (Lk 24:6-8). By inference, leaders have the responsibility of exercising servant leadership to God (hierarchy), to their followers, and to the world at large. As servants, church leaders have a responsibility towards one another; towards the church; and towards the world. Their task is that of explaining the meaning of Jesus’ identity as the Christ (Krass 1992:24). It is a legacy of service, left by Jesus.

The pastoral ministry is that of risk bearing, suffering and rejection. The clergy are the target of political authorities and their own hierarchy when they do not seem to comply with their expectations. Jesus gave his life as a price of leadership. It is therefore strange when leaders shun conflict instead of embracing it and striving to make use of it. False accusation, demagoguery, malice and contempt seem to be some natural traps to which the clergy must be ready to confront. Besides, for effective ministry, the clergy of the twenty-first century need to beware of secularism and the misuse of pastoral titles. They need to let their presentation of Jesus as the Christ march with their own attitude. Their appearance in public must push people to perform acts of repentance in the likeness of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10).

From the above hermeneutic reading of leadership and conflict in Luke’s gospel, there are several ways by which leaders approach conflict from a wrong direction. Opposition and conflicts grow increasingly when leaders rather struggle to attract public sympathy or when they look for scapegoats. It is an approach that encourages the creation of factions and dissenting camps. When leaders fight opposition by seceding from the main structure or by dismissing, transferring and rejecting opposing factions, they equally postpone conflict rather facing it up front. Leaders further face the worse situation when they function on the basis of a divide-and-rule system. This is a system of leadership that plants seeds of discord rather than uproot them. Leaders face conflict from the wrong side when they seek the support of the

secular judiciary without having exhausted Biblical prescriptions (Lk 6:37). Jesus' advise is emphatic: "As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drags you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison" (Lk 12:58). It is indeed an error to fight conflict and opposition with falsehood, flattery and unrealistic promises or to fall prey to ethnic sentiments. Leadership, opposition and conflicts are inseparable. Consequently, they need to be managed with a lot of care and tact.

Most often, conflict within the context of leadership arises as a result of factors such as envy, the evil eye, suspicion, mistrust, misunderstanding, ignorance and misinterpretation. Effective leaders revoke these shortcomings through a variety of mechanisms. One of the best ways to face conflict is by adopting a compassionate attitude. This refers to compassion for mission, as well as compassion for all the stakeholders involved in the leadership process. Inspired by compassion, leaders build viable relationships of understanding through dialogue. The dialogue approach enables leaders to respect their collaborators, as well as acknowledge that their opinion is not always final. Each individual within the community has a role to play; no matter how minimal it could be (Taylor 1994:1). Dialogue also enhances trust, confidence and assurance in leadership. In this approach, leaders and followers seek mutual legitimation by investigating and evaluating each other. Through evaluation they are both educated on their deficiencies. Leaders evade or manage conflicts adequately when they treat everyone without bias and when they show knowledge of their mission by being assertive, alert, focus, purposeful and committed. Such leaders do not build on falsehood nor do they surround themselves with stooges and sycophants. Above all, in servant leadership, the leaders resort to work and manage opposition and conflict as part of leadership.

## **7.7 CONCLUSION**

From a socio-cultural, political and economic context, Africa is closer to the context of Luke's gospel than any context from the West or America. Just as it was the case with Lukan context, the African response to the question: "Who is the Christ?" can only be discovered in terms of who he is and how he

intervenes in responding to the social, political and economic realities of the African context. This is, however, a difficult task because in Biblical interpretation it is sometimes difficult to translate concepts that are not part and parcel of a traditional worldview into its system of beliefs (Mbiti 1994:28).

Taylor agrees with this difficulty when he argues that:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church Universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of her total, uninhibited humanity, would they be accepted?

(Taylor 1963:16)

This assertion implies that Christianity is essentially a “white man” religion, which is not true. In which case, Christ would be a “white man” God. The fact that Christ’s mission was championed by the “white man” does not mean that he owns the monopoly of the Biblical interpretation of Jesus’ identity and its implications in the life of the believer. Rather, it simply places the “white man” as accomplishing Jesus’ commission to the disciples (Lk 24:47-48).

A hermeneutic reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke, indicates that life in Africa has been influenced by two worldviews: the African worldview and an external worldview characterised by its contact with Europe and North America as a result of colonisation. This situation is partly responsible for the African attitude of revolt, agitation and conflicts encouraged by tribalism and ethnicity. Exposure to the outside world has also introduced the African to foreign ideologies such as individualism, civilisation and democracy. These in their turn, have resulted into vices such as corruption, pollution, unemployment, ecological crises, drug abuse, injustice, moral collapse, homelessness and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS. It is in this context that the response to Jesus’ question: “Who do the crowds say that I am” (Lk 9:18) is sought by way of contextualisation.

From the above analyses an African contextualised reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke’s gospel has illumined the Lukan text

to appear in a new light because it has been interpreted from within a new context. This reading has also facilitated the discovery of new responses as a result of new questions emanating from the texts' contact with new realities. It is a reading that permits the new African reader to identify with the text in a more convincing manner. It has also been an approach that has opened up new perspectives on the text, as well as broken up the myth of established readings resulting from traditional exegetical approaches.

One of the reasons for a contextual reading of the Lukan text is an attempt to associate theology with the immense wretchedness and misery which surrounds the African continent (Stinton 2006:50). Such reading is aimed at fitting Jesus' identity within the context of African worldview. This struggle has been the wish of African theologians who have sought to identify Jesus at home with the Africans as the Christ. Unfortunately, their attempt has been faulty in a sense because the models that have been used in this process have rather projected Jesus' human character at the detriment of the divine reality that he incarnated. Even though, Jesus suffered rejection and humiliation and was killed as the Son of man, he remained "the Christ of God" (Lk 9:22). This is the true picture of the Christ that needs to be presented faithfully in all contexts.

Notwithstanding, the African context offers a rich background for the understanding of Jesus' identity. The various models of African Christologies agree with the role of Jesus within the context of suffering Africans. There is no doubt that misery has contributed to a rereading of the Bible in order to discover how the Christ of God attends to human condition. Yet, some basic precautions need to be taken into consideration. For example, even though the historical Jesus was a Jew, the Christ who was anointed and raised from the dead transcends the particularities of human ethnicity in order to become present in all human experiences and contexts. In this way, the name "Christ" becomes the function that Jesus occupies in individual lives, responding to individual situations and creating an indelible impact of hope in the restoration process of Africa.

Hence, for the African, the question "who is the Christ?" could become more specific to address individual punctual situations: "Who is the Christ in my circumstances?" This reformulation leads to several models of

identification because Christ is identified as a result of personal encounter and personal conviction. The Jesus who never fades is the Christ who intervenes in all life's situation. Secondly, lasting Christology is that which derives from the thought expression of the community and is transformed into valuable theological thinking. In this case, spontaneous theology stands as an adequate alternative form of theology liable to solve African problems. It is theology that is born out of the worries of the African community. In like manner, community participatory theology intervenes as a means to empower Africans to face African problems themselves. In other words, African Christology must result in the development of a self-sustainable theology in order to curb the problem of tribalism, abortion, corruption, injustice, poverty, the problems of unemployment and homelessness and the responsible use of money. However, it would be a utopia to think that the study on Jesus' identity can lead to the discovery of an ideal Christianity (Lumbala 1994:78).

In this venture, contemporary study on the question of Jesus' identity must guard against the definition of a Christ who instead becomes a barrier of separation between individuals of the new context and people from other cultural contexts. Conversely, there is need for other contexts to recognise that no context can claim the monopoly of a universal understanding of Jesus' identity and the conflicts that he faced in the course of his leadership as the Christ. Christ can only be discovered in the fullness of the diversity of the various convictions that individuals have, with respect to their contextual realities.

## Chapter 8

### The “gospel of conflict” according to Luke

*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.*

(Luke 22:25-27)

#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in § 4.4.1, this Chapter is the final phase of the research on the question of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke’s gospel. It is a review of the gospel in terms of the conflicts that Jesus faced during his leadership as a result of his identity. From an empirical perspective, there seems to have been growing interest in the study of leadership in recent years. This quest may be influenced by the fact that many more people are developing an ambition to become effective leaders.<sup>253</sup>

Jesus’ leadership in Luke’s gospel, as well as the conflicts in which he was engaged because of his identity, has been dealt with in Chapter 2. Five research gaps emerged from this study. It was observed that:

- So far, no serious studies had been carried out on Luke 9:18-22 as an independent sub-unit within Luke’s gospel in general. Even when this was done, the approach had been that of the traditional historical-critical approach.
- Peter’s response to the question of Jesus’ identity has always been considered as the climax of Luke 9:18-22, at the detriment of the responses from the crowds.
- Sociological (even historical and literary) studies of Luke’s gospel have not often related Jesus’ identity with the various conflicts that he faced in Luke’s gospel. In this vein, Christians have often been trained to parrot Peter’s response in Luke 9:20, without understanding its consequences and without being given the chance to reflect on personal experiences.

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<sup>253</sup> Meyer (2002:25) is correct that “God has put the same potentials in us that he has put in anybody else”. This implies that everyone is born a potential leader. Consequently, innate potentials within individuals simply need to be stimulated through education, interaction, sharing; delegation of power and by grooming others for effective leadership.

- There is need for relevant theology that enables people to be conversant with the faith that they profess, as they participate in finding solutions to present day crisis.
- The last research gap was the lack of an African hermeneutical reading of leadership, conflict and identity in Luke by way of contextualisation.

The first research gap has been attended to in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 3 emphasis was laid on the narrative function of Luke 9:18-22 within the macro-context of Luke's narrative (§ 3.2.4). From the studies discussed it is clear that this passage remains crucial for the understanding of Jesus' identity, his leadership, the mission that he pursued, as well as the controversies he faced. In view of its positioning, it constitutes a point of reference for the rest of the narrative because it summarises the Galilean ministry and sets the tone for the Jerusalem ministry. In Chapter 4 the question of methodology was put under the magnifying glass. The association between a narratological and a social scientific analysis was discussed as complementary approaches to historical-critical analysis. This combination has rendered the study of historical events in this thesis, as well as its socio-cultural context an interpretive and interesting activity. In this vein, the importance of models and theories in studying leadership and conflicts in Luke was highlighted in § 3.5.2.2 and reemphasised in § 4.2 & 4.3. These models illuminate the past and enhance the understanding of the conflicts that surrounded Jesus' identity and leadership in Luke's gospel.

The results of the emic reading done in Chapter 5 indicate that Jesus gave credence both to the speculations from the crowds and Peter's testimony. From this perspective, the place of Luke 9:18-22 within the macro-context of Luke's gospel has been revisited, with reference to the relationship between Jesus' identity and the conflict in which he was engaged. An emic reading of this passage has explained the relationship between Jesus and his contemporaries in terms of their misinterpretation of his identity. Without dismissing the personifications from the crowds, Jesus explained their limitations and indicated the implication of Peter's testimony by offering a complementary response. In this light, he validated the crowd's conjectures

and Peter's response as an emanation from what they observed. Consequently, the strength of the pericope lies in Jesus' complementary remarks, with the crowds' conjectures and Peter's declaration bearing an equal weight. This is the point where the second research gap has been addressed. Besides, with reference to the popular assumption that "the crowd that sang hosanna in the highest to Jesus was the same crowd that shouted 'crucify him,'" the emic reading has proven the contrary. The two events (Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the crucifixion) are very distinct, with two different character groups that should not be understood mistakenly.

The third research gap has been addressed within the context of the etic reading in Chapter 6. This etic reading concluded that conflict is inherent to leadership; and leadership implies an individual who embodies an identity.<sup>254</sup> In this vein, there is a clear relationship between Jesus' identity and the antagonism which he faced with his adversaries. The findings from both the emic reading and the etic reading of Luke 9:18-22 agree that all through Galilee, Jesus' ministry was animated by the question: "Who is this?" This question x-rayed the tension that was developed inwardly by Jesus' adversaries. This idea has further been buttressed by the fact that Luke's gospel was written within the context of an agonistic society (Malina 1996a:64). Consequently, Jesus' approaches in curbing conflict were analysed and prescribed as adequate ways of dealing with conflict that erupt within the context of leadership. By destroying the myth of social control, Jesus proved that no one is indispensable in leadership. Therefore the idea that leadership will collapse if certain persons were no longer leaders, is false (§ 6.3.4.1). Through the method of de-categorisation Jesus dismantled bridges of division, hatred, and exclusion and rebuilt a category-free-society (§ 6.3.4.2). He equally challenged the old structure of society, based on

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<sup>254</sup> Each individual embodies three possible selves or identities: the private, the public and the collective. Each of these identities depends on the goals that people set for themselves and/or the community to which they belong (Abrams 1996:146). In their private selves, individuals know their own traits, attitudes, feelings and behaviour. The collective self is when people acknowledge that life is relevant in terms of the relationships that one establishes with one another. This is common within the context of a dyadic community. The public self is when people are called upon to exercise public responsibilities. Hence, they need public appraisal, which either comes in the form of legitimation or delegitimation.



ethnicity and established an inclusive society – the kingdom of God, whose credentials are dependent on faith in Jesus.

Thirdly, his approach in the light of the theory of “similarity-attraction”, is a method which enables conflicting parties to focus more on aspects that unite; rather than speculating on those that divide (§ 6.3.4.2). A recapitulation of leadership as understood by Jesus has been offered in § 6.4.3.2. In the place of authoritative leadership, leadership by covetousness and corruption and leadership by coercion and power (§ 6.4.2.1), Jesus prescribes compassionate, servanthood, participatory and purposeful leadership. The use of conflict and leadership theories also made it clear that in leadership the decision to innovate must be accompanied with the readiness to bear opposition. Finally, opposition in Luke’s gospel led to the crucifixion of Jesus as he had predicted. From an etic point of view Luke seems to discourage the speculation around the question: who killed Jesus? Neither the Jewish elite nor the Roman elite are to be held as sole responsible. Even though it occurred as a necessity (Lk 9:22; 24:26, 46), the gospel seems to incriminate people of all generations. It is in this way that Jesus’ death for every individual becomes a commitment and a responsibility for stewardship towards one another and towards creation.<sup>255</sup>

The problem of relevant theology was treated in Chapter 7. From a contextual point of view, Jesus valorises personal experience in the process of doing theology. However, his compliments in Luke 9:22 are a warning against the dangers and limitations of such an approach. In this regard, Migliore (1980:45) is correct that Peter’s attitude in Luke 9:20 implies that all Christological titles are both an aid and an obstacle to an understanding of who Jesus is, as well as the meaning of salvation.

From a hermeneutical point of view, three issues have been dealt with, in Chapter 7. First, some African socio-cultural values that breed conflict were examined (§ 7.2); followed by an evaluation of some African models aim to identify Jesus as the Christ (§ 7.4.3). Finally, an attempt was made to offer an African response to the question: “Who is the Christ” (§ 7.4.4)? In this regard

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<sup>255</sup> While for Borg (2006:271) the Romans are to be blamed for Jesus’ death, Schmidt (1983; Carter 2006:x) and Cassidy (1983) accuse the Jews. In New Testament scholarship this debate seems obsolete because it shows a lack of focus on human responsibility and human participation to contemporary world crises.

two sketches have been proposed: spontaneous theology (§ 7.4.4.3.1) and community participatory theology (§ 7.4.4.3.2). These approaches agree that it does not suffice only to testify that Jesus is the Christ. Such a response must be accompanied with a strategy which empowers and equips every individual for the mission that was handed over to the apostles; and which has been passed on to the church and to its individual members today.

As stated in Chapter 2, one of the objectives of this study has been to diagnose, explain, interpret and narrow the chasm between leadership and conflict within the African society (and elsewhere). This study has shown that leaders should not dread conflict when it arises; conflict can be used as a positive ingredient to societal change and innovation. Consequently, in what follows, Luke's gospel will be reviewed as a "gospel of conflict."

## **8.2 WHO IS THE CHRIST? THE GOSPEL OF CONFLICT ACCORDING TO LUKE**

### **8.2.1 Introduction**

According to Malina and Neyrey (1991b:64) Jesus' ministry was "a career fraught with conflict from start to finish" (see also Borg 2006:160). The results of the emic and etic readings of Luke as presented above agree that Luke employs conflict stories in order to achieve his goal of updating Theophilus about the truth concerning the things of which he had been informed (Lk 1:4). Proper attention has so far not been given to this aspect in Lukan studies (Hultgren 1979:19). These readings have also disagreed with Green (1995:65), who suggests that the theme of conflict is only deeply rooted in the opening chapters of Luke's gospel. In fact, Jesus' ministry attracts opposition and conflict from the "early beginnings," where conflict is declared (Lk 1:1-3:28), to the ascension, where new perspectives are defined as a continuation of conflict (Lk 22:1-24:53).

In what follows, four issues will be addressed to summarily justify the point of view that Luke's gospel can be seen as the "good news of conflict". Firstly, as an aid to define and explain conflict, Luke focuses on Jesus' leadership and identity through the question: "Who is this?" At the end of the gospel, the centurion offers an alternative response that will be treated below (§ 8.2.2). Secondly, the handing over of the missionary baton by Jesus to the

disciples will also be discussed as the transfer of conflicts from John the Baptist to Jesus; and from Jesus to the disciples. As such, conflict in Luke is continuous and not closed. Thirdly, the story of Jesus is also the story of salvation that was finalised only through conflict and opposition. As a result, Jesus' death brought about repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Finally, his attitude of acceptance will also be analysed as a way of appreciating conflict and leadership as positive compliments (see Cunningham 1997, Desjardin 1997; Van Eck 2009a:9).

### **8.2.2 Conflict and identity: The centurion's confession**

The place of legitimation within the context of leadership was emphasised in § 3.3.1.3. It was argued that in Luke's gospel Jesus' leadership was legitimised twice by divine agents (Lk 3:21-22; 9:35) and twice by human agents (Lk 9:19-20; 23:47). A special place was then accorded to the centurion's declaration (Lk 23:47) because it came at the close of Jesus' earthly mission. This legitimation cancelled all the conflicts in which Jesus had been involved, as well as inaugurated a new era with new types of conflicts. It is in this vein that Tyson (1986:x) is correct in describing conflict as a literary theme in Luke's gospel.

The immediate context of the centurion's avowal is cosmic manifestations following Jesus' death: the light of the sun failed while the temple curtain got torn (Lk 23:45). From a customary point of view, these cosmic manifestations were an indication that Jesus' death had been quick and brief, unlike the normal traditional long process.<sup>256</sup> Consequently, the tearing down of the curtain confirmed Jesus as "God of the temple" (Karris 1985:106). In the same way, the reaction from the sun seemed to suggest that Jesus' crucifixion was a sign of human injustice.<sup>257</sup> The centurion was certainly familiar with the interpretation of these events. As a response, he praised God for Jesus.

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<sup>256</sup> In the Jewish tradition death and burial was a lengthy process (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:347). It was therefore irregular for Jesus to have died only at a moment in time

<sup>257</sup> With a backing from Old Testament scripture, Karris (1985:105) affirms that in terms of Jewish belief the failure of the sun was usually associated with God's act of deliverance from injustice (see e.g., Jl 2:31; Am 8:4-6). The centurion was most probably conversant with this interpretation.

The larger context of the centurion's declaration is Jesus' ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem with both the Jewish council and the Roman rulers constantly at his trial. This is buttressed by the use of the imperfect of ἤλθον in the expression οὐκ ἀληθεύσας οὐδέ τοις δικαίοις ἤλθον. It denotes a report of repeated actions in the past. Effectively, Jesus' ministry had so far been that of confrontations with both cosmic and human agents. The centurion therefore pronounced Jesus innocent from social, religious and political charges for which he had been persecuted and prosecuted. Firstly, as a verdict in favour of Jesus' social innocence, it is a protest against the disloyalty of the Jewish peasants who had not only doubted Jesus' identity in Nazareth; but who had equally rejected him (Lk 4:22-30). In Jerusalem, they (the οὐκ ἔπισθον and the λαοὶ) even connived with the religious authorities to deliver him up for crucifixion. Secondly, the centurion wished to publicly differ with the religious defiance for which Jesus had been accused in Galilee. His testimony attested to Jesus' source of authority that had been questioned in Jerusalem (Lk 20:1-2). For him, Jesus is not a religious rival with a questionable character. Thirdly, it is a new verdict which contrasts with Jesus' picture that has been painted from his arrest to the crucifixion. Jesus is not a criminal; he had not been subversive, he had not been a "pretender" or "a deceiver". In fact, he did not violate the rules that preserved the society's solidarity and identity. He was indeed "innocent". Therefore, from a political point of view, the centurion declared Jesus δικαίον.

The centurion's pronouncement has several implications within the context of this study. Firstly, it is a recapitulation of Jesus' identity and his leadership activities. Secondly, it is a confirmation of Luke 4:18-19 in general and Luke 9:22, in particular (see the suffering servant in Is 52:13-53:12; 61). In fact, it is a recapitulation of the gospel. Luke's report in Luke 4:16-30 does not find its significance in Jesus' rejection of the Jews (because he refuses to perform a miracle). Rather, it shows the Jews' rejection of Jesus (Franklin 1994: 229). Hence, the centurion's remarks come as a confirmation of the legitimation of Jesus' dual honourship proclaimed and reiterated at baptism and at the transfiguration. When the heavens opened both at baptism and during the transfiguration, Jesus' identity and leadership were legitimated by the divine. He was then introduced into the Galilean ministry and the

Jerusalem ministry. It is in like manner that the tearing down of the temple curtain is symbolic (Lk 23:45). It gives way for human legitimation at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. As a summary of his missionary activities, Jesus who was born with kingly credentials remains innocent at the end (see Lk 1:31-35).

The centurion's pronouncement is also a declaration that x-rays human errors in appreciating Jesus' leadership and the mission which his identity incarnated, including the conflicts he faced. According to Evans (2001:510), the centurion confessed of Jesus what he should confess of the Roman emperor. In fact, he did what all the other human characters who followed Jesus failed to do. With this declaration he therefore shifted his loyalty from the Roman emperor to Jesus. It is thus a mockery to human inability to remain loyal to Jesus. In this vein, it is a correction to what was expected of Pilate (Lk 23:4, 14, 22), Herod (cf. Lk 23:15), the disciples, the Jewish peasantry and the Jewish elite. The centurion appreciated the fact that, in spite of conflict and opposition, Jesus withstood the dissonant atmosphere that characterised his leadership.

The centurion's verdict was equally another personal confession of faith in the likeness of the crowds' and Peter's (Lk 9:19-20). It testified to what he had "seen" (*o(r)a&w*) and experienced personally. It was also a confirmation of the criminal's testimony (Lk 23:41). Jesus' activities, as well as cosmic manifestations, have served as a source of revelation. It is therefore a legitimation from personal experience! He has been opportuned to witness the miraculous deeds which Herod had wished to see but could not (Lk 23:8). It is a result of his personal experiences of the life of conflict that Jesus had lived from the beginning of his ministry. Having observed all the events that marked Jesus' ministry, disfiguring him and dishonouring him, the centurion had become a witness, and so could testify with faith that Jesus was a *di&kaioj*; innocent and righteous, indeed (Esler 1989:203). Innocence and righteousness denote an acquittal from a crime. And for sure, Jesus' leadership had been marred with false allegations that manifested themselves in the form of conflicts. Therefore, within the context, the centurion's proclamation is fitting. Luke had been the gospel of conflict. Having seen God's manifestation, as well as Jesus' steadfastness in his leadership

towards fulfilling God's purpose, he restored Jesus' dignity from a human point of view.

Finally, and most importantly, within a context where honour and shame were pivotal values of the society (see § 6.2.2.1), Jesus' innocence eventually meant a re-launch of conflicts. Viewed from this angle, Jesus' death defines another situation of challenge-riposte where he had become a victor. In such a context, retaliation was obviously pending. The declaration of honour conferred on Jesus was a trigger to new conflicts.<sup>258</sup> The centurion's remarks will further be approved by God through Jesus' resurrection. By implication, human and divine legitimation have both approved of Jesus' identity and leadership. In fact, God had "overturned the death sentence" (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:348) that had been declared by earthly authorities, and joined the centurion in declaring Jesus innocent. It is a vindication which fulfils the predictions of Mary's *Magnificat* (Karris 1985:95). This is, however, not surprising, because Jesus had earlier predicted his death and his eventual vindication in at least four different instances (Lk 9:22; 44; 17:25; 18:31-33); describing these events as a necessity (Lk 9:22; 17:25; 24:26, 46). Notwithstanding, the centurion's ruling cancelled the adversity between Jesus and his contemporaries and re-launched the debate. Henceforth, Jesus is expected to be listened to and understood in his intentions and not necessarily in his actions (Lk 9:35).

In a nutshell, the centurion's remarks are fundamental, because they came from one of the most human authoritative and respectful voices. It is attested that "as a rule the best men in the army were promoted to this rank" (Polybius, in Plummer 1977:539). It is a testimony that approves the conflicts that Jesus faced as a necessary compliment to leadership. Conflicts led Jesus to reform, transform and innovate. It was a reform that concerned both individuals and society at large. Hence, the centurion's declaration does not only summarise Jesus' person and leadership; it also defines the way forward; he remains a *δικαίος*. It marks a new beginning. This is testified by the fact that the gospel, which started with Zechariah in the temple (Lk 1:5) ends with the disciples, still in the temple (Lk 24:53). This is an inauguration

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<sup>258</sup> In this case, the remark that honour was considered as the core of the soul within first-century Palestine must be taken into consideration (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:369).

of a new beginning of missionary conflicts. The model of leadership left by Jesus in Luke is that of risk bearing and suffering; and not that of comfort: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58) – it is a mission of insecurity and discomfort.

### **8.2.3 Leadership: The transfer of conflict to the disciples**

Four character groups are involved in the transfer of leadership in Luke’s gospel. These are John the Baptist, Jesus, Jesus’ disciples and the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ baptism fell within the context of the ministry of John the Baptist, where Jesus became John’s legal successor from the point of view of ministry. It was a baptism that ushered him into a new ministry begun by John. In this respect, Jesus’ baptism could also be understood as an initiation into conflict situations similar to those which John already faced. Two declarations from the gospel make a blend between John’s ministry and Jesus’ ministry as that of pain and conflict. The first is Simeon’s observations: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:34-35). The second is Herod’s remark; “John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And Luke concludes: “And he sought to see him” (Lk 9:9). These declarations became concrete in Jesus’ leadership as he faced fierce opposition which eventually brought him to the end of his earthly ministry when he empowered the disciples to witness in his name.

The transfer of leadership from Jesus to the disciples in Luke 24:45-48 could be explained as the transfer of conflict. From the analysis in § 8.2.2, Jesus’ death did not infer the end of conflict. Instead, it meant that he had regained honour through his resurrection and that henceforth he would reign as victor. By implication, the leadership entrusted into the hands of the disciples was a legacy of inherited conflicts. This is especially evident in the context of first-century Palestine where the competition for scarce resources such as of power, authority and honour was prevalent. However, the disciples had the assignment first to function as witnesses, and second, to proclaim

(*khru&ssw*) repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. This, the disciples would do, in Jesus' name (Lk 24:47). So far, Jesus had instructed the disciples, while he was still with them, to act in the power of his name (Lk 9:48-49; 10:17; 21:8, 12, 17). At this point, the commission is more important because it comes at the end of his earthly ministry. Hence, they are urged to wait for the empowerment from the Holy Spirit. The area of jurisdiction for the disciples extends from Jerusalem, to the ends of the earth (Lk 24:47; see also Ac 1:8). This does not necessarily mean a mission "to Israelites dwelling among all nations" as suggested by Malina and Rohrbaugh (2007:324).

In Luke's gospel Jesus had already undertaken an initiative on behalf of Israel within the context of Israel itself. It has been a mission of healing, teaching and preaching. It had equally been a mission of forgiveness and tolerance (see § 6.4.3.2). John the Baptist had inaugurated the same mission of repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Lk 3:1-14). In fact, it was a mission of such success that urged people to question whether he was indeed the Christ (Lk 3:15). At the point of Jesus' ascension to heaven, the disciples were given the responsibility to pursue the same mission to *ta e!qnh*. Of course, such repentance had already begun at Jesus' death where the multitudes who had assembled, returned home, "beating their breasts" (Lk 23:48; see also Lk 18:13).

There is a link between the commission which Jesus himself received and that which he assigned to the disciples. His initiation was sealed by the Holy Spirit when he was empowered in his dual honourship at baptism and at the transfiguration (Lk 3:22 & 9:35). This is the same empowerment that he envisaged for his disciples, when he urged them to wait for the empowerment from the Spirit (Lk 24:49) – it is an empowerment that will legitimate their leadership and enable them to face future conflicts with boldness because the evil generation seems to persist.

Jesus was aware that conflict was an integral part of leadership. Before hand, he had already warned the disciples against the aggression, opposition and conflict with political and religious authorities (Lk 12: 11-12; 21:12-15). He had equally cautioned them against family pressure and misunderstanding (Lk 21:16-18). It is therefore a ministry for which they have been schooled on



how to face conflicts and opposition. By passing the ministry to the disciples, Jesus confirmed that there is leadership continuity in Luke's gospel in particular, and in the New Testament in general. The history and the role of Israel find their glimpse of light in the leadership and ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus' mission in Luke's gospel was that of continuity from John the Baptist's mission of preaching and the baptism of repentance. At the end of the gospel Jesus commissions his disciples to be his legal witnesses. It is a witnessing that involves the bringing in of more disciples. This continuity from John the Baptist, to Jesus, to the disciples, and then to the church is highly motivated by the centurion's decree: οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ ἄνεμιον (τοῦ δικαίου ἄνεμιον: "Certainly, this man was innocent" (Lk 23:47).

Jesus passed the mission of repentance and forgiveness to the disciples because they had been witnesses (Lk 24:48). From an emic point of view, and from an African hermeneutical point of view, one of the proper answers to the question of Jesus' identity is that which emanates from personal experiences (see § 7.4.4.3 and § 8.2.2). Consequently, contemporary believers have also become new witnesses to whom the disciples have passed on Jesus' mission imbued with conflicts. In other words, Jesus has passed conflict unto the world's leaders as an inevitable component of leadership.

#### **8.2.4 The gospel of conflict: Not understanding and not knowing**

The conclusions from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 all agree that Jesus responded to the rejection that he suffered from his contemporaries (the disciples, the Jewish elite, the Jewish peasantry and the Roman elite) with acceptance. This was also a natural way of minimising the conflict that marred his leadership. In fact, from start to finish, Luke's gospel creates suspension and incomprehension in action, which resolves itself in conflict stories. It is in this context that the whole gospel could be described as a gospel of incomprehension and conflict (not understanding and not knowing), depicted in the question: "Who is the Christ?"

Throughout Jesus' ministry the disciples did not seem to have perceived and understood what Jesus said or did. They did not even identify him appropriately. Worse of all, they were animated with fear (Lk 9:45). As a

result, their relationship was tainted with dissonance, misunderstanding and rejection. In the same way, the women who arrived at the tomb three days after Jesus' death did not know nor remember what he had said while still in Galilee (Lk 24:4-9; Lk 9:22). On their part, the Pharisees and the scribes did not cease to murmur in ignorance and suspicion (Lk 5:30; 7:39; 11:14). In Jerusalem, Jesus' attitude and teaching in the temple caused panic with the religious leaders (Lk 20:1-2). By offering him to be crucified they rejected him as a religious rival. By beating their breasts after Jesus' death (Lk 23:49) as a sign of repentance, the Jewish peasantry proved that they were also ignorant of Jesus' identity (Marshall 1978:876-877). Likewise Pilate and Herod seemed not to have known Jesus' real credentials as the Christ. Hence, they rejected him by giving in to mob pressure. Knowledge and understanding is provided at the end of the gospel by the centurion and Jesus. For the centurion, Jesus did not deserve rejection from his contemporaries; he was innocent. Through scripture and the breaking of bread, Jesus dispelled ignorance from the disciples (Lk 24:27, 30, 44). He is truly the Christ whose death was a necessity (Lk 24:44, 46; see also Lk 9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:26). At the end of the gospel everyone is aware that Jesus is the manifestation of God's presence (Knight 1998:109).

Jesus understood that ignorance breeds conflict and misunderstanding. As a consequence, he responded to ignorance and conflict with perseverance, endurance, steadfastness and acceptance. At the end of his ministry he consolidated leadership by empowering the disciples to accomplish what they had hitherto not been able to do. The forgiveness offered by Jesus (Lk 23:34) as an inheritance was a testimony to his attitude of acceptance. Jesus' compassion was irrespective of the disloyalty of his contemporaries. His strength stemmed from the fact that he knew his mission and remained focus and committed to it. He stood against dehumanising structures and attitudes. He did not reject nor discard the culture and practice of his context. Rather he formed, reformed, transformed and informed his society from within, through his exemplary teaching and through his attitude. In fact, he did not even reject nor ignore any individual; instead, he challenged consciences: "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37; see also Lk 9:14:12-14; 22:14-23). This is what has been called in § 2.2.5 as a "missionary

legacy” for the church. Jesus’ leadership approach demonstrates that the most effective change and reform in a system is that which comes from within, and not from without.

### **8.2.5 Conclusion**

The centurion’s testimony shows that knowledge of Jesus is circumstantial and provisional. This probably justifies why the gospel of Luke could be looked upon as the gospel of conflict. In this case, “good news” should certainly not always be understood in the normal sense to mean welfare. This study has also intended to open another way of understanding “good news” as something negative that can be used positively. In summary, conflict is a universal life experience that is not common only to leaders. However, Jesus’ conflict with his opponents and his leadership approaches open up the way for leadership challenges. In other words, conflicts are an important source of inspiration and motivation. They can spur leadership, if well managed.

### **8.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

“Who is the Christ?” This is the question that animated the discussion on Jesus’ identity and the conflict in which he was engaged in the course of his leadership in Luke’s gospel. Although it is a question which seems simple at face value, its answer appears to be complex and even subtle. It is yet more complicated for an African because it is about the present identity of a person who lived in a far past and in a different context. From an emic perspective, the Christ is an enigmatic figure in Luke’s gospel (see § 5.8). From an etic reading, he is the Christ of reform and social transformation. From the African standpoint, he is the Christ of empowerment and development. These are spontaneous responses, from different angles. In a nutshell, the responses to the question of Jesus’ identity can neither be transposed from one individual (or context) to another, nor can they draw unanimity. They are contained in Jesus’ personal response: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Lk 9:22). This response is that which is lived and shared by individuals in their daily living. It is a satisfactory response if it enables men and women to engage themselves as solutions to the political, social,

economic, religious and ecological problems that plague humanity, especially in Africa.

The Indian tale of six blind men who discovered an elephant offers another clue to the question of Jesus' identity. In this tale the first man felt the elephant trunk and announced that an elephant was like a snake. The second felt the leg and concluded that an elephant was like a tree. The third came in contact with the tusk and proclaimed that it was like a spear. The fourth touched the elephant's side and asserted that it was a wall. The fifth held the tail and announced that an elephant was just like a robe, and the last person, having felt the ear of the elephant, was convinced that it was like a fan. They all had an idea of what an elephant looked like, but none had the full picture of the animal. Bearing in mind the dangers and pitfalls of analogies, this tale depicts possible perceptions of who the Christ is. Even though one could be taught about Jesus' identity, the best image that sticks in mind is that which is lived and experienced by each individual.

With reference to leadership and conflict, the Jewish peasantry's attitude in Luke – coupled with the experience from the period of the Reformation – confirm the fact that people always have the tendency of turning to a new movement when they feel dissatisfied with the former. At times they can be motivated by the enthusiasm of leaders or a simple curiosity to make new discoveries. On the other extreme, there are people who are immune to change; probably because of the benefits they derive from the system. However, Jesus' attitude *vis-à-vis* the Jewish peasantry and his disciples is an inspiration to contemporary leaders. Effective leaders are those who know their mission and consequently supervise the motivations of their following in such a way that they are not lured into error by their enthusiasm or because of pressure. They are leaders who either motivate their followers to stay awake with them, or they keep awake when any other follower has gone asleep. Jesus' experience on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39-46) is fitting in this context. It is dangerous when followers stay awake while the leader is asleep. Quite often, followers stay awake because of the unfavourable socio-political and economic situation in which they live, as a result of poor leadership. Leaders must be conscious of the fact that, as long as suffering and misery persist, its victims will continue to be demanding.

After all, from an African hermeneutical point of view, Jesus has been presented as the Christ who stands as “an answer to all human needs” (§ 7.4.4.2). Paradoxically, the present stalemate of Africa is still frightening. Many people are still dying of hunger and starvation; ethnic and tribal conflicts are still causing an increasing number of homeless people and refugees; most leaders are still self-centred, exploitative and oppressive; churches are threatened by secularism and moral degradation is on a daily rise. With this situation, the African is as worried, as the Pharisees, in respect of the timing of the kingdom of God (Lk 17:21). In this respect, Jesus’ answer remains relevant and assuring: *h9 basilei&a tou~ qeou e0nto\_j u9mw~n e)stin* (the kingdom of God is [within] in your midst). An adequate prayer for the African therefore is that which is inscribed in the Lord’s Prayer: “*THY KINGDOM COME, O LORD*” (Lk 11:2; my emphasis).