

Black Christology and the Two Natures of Christ: Existential and Metaphysical Reflections on Black Theology in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The doctrine of Christology is fundamental in Christian theology for understanding God's soteriological process in human existence. Christology entails God's unique and special revelation to humanity and displays God's active role in human history. Christology carries the philosophical encounter with the loftiness of metaphysics related to God, preexistence, being and the logos. However, this deep philosophical aspect of the nature of God is animated by the incarnation and is, therefore, a historic and existential reality of a transcendent God working in the world. The omnibenevolent Creator steps into history to fulfil soteriology as a downcast human being and as God. The nature of Christ as fully God and fully human is a syllogistic approach to God creating humans through Imago Dei and redeeming them in and through Himself, thereby binding the role of divine and human agency. This research seeks to develop a metaphysic and existential interpretation of Christology as it relates to the black experience. This reflection is critical for black theology as it has a doctrinal value of Imago Dei and the existential aspect of God's love. The one nature (human) bears the humiliation and dehumanisation of Christ through his crucifixion and the display of his body by the Romans, which is both historic and metaphorical for those who have been oppressed, humiliated and dehumanised. This research seeks to demonstrate conceptions and models for hope. Black Christology allows for an independent and existential meaningful interpretation of the life of Christ for blacks and all of humanity.

1. Introduction

Christian theology is deeply shaped by the value and meaning of soteriology, God's process, medium and agent that underpins the methodological soteriological processes. In the Old Testament, the method for soteriological practice is not explicit as in the new covenant though both in OT and NT, soteriology entails the shedding of blood. Though in OT, the role of atonement often meant that the bloodshed was that of animals and not that of God and often restricted to specific days and processes.¹ In this sense, the method of the appeasement of God and

the presence of God operated through the interplay of the existential and ontological aspects of soteriology and divine character. In the Old Testament, God's presence is ontological in its aspects through the indwelling that was present in the Holy of Holies, though the tent serves as a marker of the medium of the existential presence of the being of God to the Hebrews. However, in the new dispensation, the encounter and method of the soteriological process are explicit as it needed God to be born, bleed, die and resurrect. This bleeding aspect meant that God becomes explicitly His image and likeness, which God has predisposed to human beings as creatures defined as *Imago Dei*. Temple theologians pointed out that the words in John's prologue (John 1: 14) are the same as those God used to have an existential encounter with the Hebrews as God pitched His tent in the midst (the existential point of contact with a transcendent being) of His people. Exodus (25: 8) reads: "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." While John (1: 14) prologue reads: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." In both accounts, God's dwelling has a point of contact, in the Old Testament, it is through the tent, tabernacle and temple. In the New Testament, it is premised on two accounts, the incarnation as a momentary divine image and instrument suitable for salvific history in relation to an explicit communication with humanity. The second premise is that of the coming of the Ruach *hakodesh* (רוח הקודש), the Holy Spirit, a person of God who is equal with the other persons in the Triune Godhead but active in the eschatological moment beginning with Christ ascension, the birth of the Church in Act 2 with the Holy Spirit pervading and penetrating all of creation. It is significant to note that even in the apocalypse of John, Christ physiology remains with marks, wounds and the piercing on the side till the Parousia. Barker² (2003) and Wright³ both locate the incarnation and Exodus (25: 8) as God dwelling in the context of the community but more explicitly dwelling in the midst of creation, exactly what the Holy Spirit does today. The tent or tabernacle was a physical emblem of God's meeting place, which will be furthered in the incarnation of God and God possessing full humanity in the hypostatic union. The role of the temple is inextricably linked to the high priest and priests, an Old Testament system that is also a motif that finds fulfilment in Christ as a myriad of a meeting place/temple, offering, and agent (as high priest). Barker (2003a: 65) argued for the importance of reassessing Christian theology with the lenses of temple theology and seeing Jesus as the high priest. The physiology of Christ is critical in Christology because

Christ made his body affirm *Imago Dei*, but it also fits in with the function of the temple (John 2: 19). Barker (2003: 65-66) explains the significance of the symbolism of both high priest and tabernacle, with the latter in OT representing the six days of creation, the whole of creation both visible and invisible creation.

Baker arguments are critical for a biblical representation of the person of Christ in relation to God, creation and humanity. They also serve a role in looking at the text primary within the Israelite paradigm before compounding Christian theology with western philosophy. The western paradigm is not negated but appreciated in giving a lofty language to metaphysical subjects, such as God and the person of Christ. However, in salvific history, there is a crucial centrality of the identity of Christ as it entails the role of being fully God and fully human within creation and compressing all of existence together at a single moment. This aspect of temple theology corroborates and elucidates the value of Christology and both Christ and our bodiliness as being temples. This is expressed in John (2:19) and 1st Corinthians (6: 19). The former represents Christ, while the latter refers to humanity. In the context of this study, this realisation is a serious theological and biblical critique of race, dehumanisation and oppression. Barker (2003b: 168) referring to the transformative influence of the temple Holy of holies were those who entered the temple shared in the nature of God, e.g. Enoch transformed into the Holy One of Ezekiel vision, and in relation to the person of Christ, argues:

Something similar must underlie John's Prologue. A figure from the presence of God, who is the Presence of God, comes into the world, and 'to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God (Jn 1:12). The New Testament develops the idea of the One who incorporates all into himself and thus gives them Life and they become a new creation.

Christ role as the temple, God presence and the herald of a new creation is the agent of substantial transformation. This article seeks to study the person of Christ and draws from both natures an evaluation and appreciation of being in the image of God as a critique of race. The physiology of Christ, which is surrendered to humiliation and dehumanisation is a hermeneutical tool and landscape for black bodies and their suffering. While the full divinity of Christ is instrumental in revealing hope and God's love inherently given to humans.

2. The Two Natures of Christ

To properly construct a black Christology, it is critical that the study ventures into understanding what Christology, specifically the question of the two natures in Christ, imply in western theology. A grasp of Christology will enable invaluable lessons for conceptualising a black Christology that bears witness to the biblical witness and theology. Schwarz (1998: 137-138) points out that the identity of Jesus as identical with God or as a semi-God troubled the early church. The specific contention was around how divinity links with his humanity. This question was of existential necessity to distinguish Jesus from semi-Gods and their divine emissaries on earth to help humans. This is the fundamental controversy concerning the nature of Christ. It is significant to note that Schwarz (1998: 138-140) points out that in the New Testament, there are no trinitarian formulas and that it was Irenaeus who emphasised the unity of God, Tertullian spoke of three persons of one substance while Origen stressed that God the Father is unbegotten God and Christ is the only begotten Son “the perfect essence of God the Father”. Hengel (1976: 1) argued that the early confession of the pre-existence of the humbled one emerged 25 years later after his crucifixion through Paul. He (1976: 1-4) argues that the apotheosis of Jesus occurred in the 40’s already though the pre-existent Christ seemed to obliterate human personality. Thus, the cross and the resurrection are critical to Paul’s view on the incarnation. In the context of the study, the obliteration of Christ’s human personality is significant because it fits in with the black experience though the logic for such an act is different.

Christ’s humanity is possibly neglected because it seems its significance is linked to Calvary and the resurrection only. While for blacks their physiological humanity is denied and not elevated to ontological levels because they were deemed subhuman (see Day: 2012:23). However, an acceptance of the concrete reality of the unique revelation of God in the humanity of Jesus emphasises the circumstances that shroud Calvary, e.g. the political and economic context. These circumstances find coherence with the lived black experience and accentuated the deep meaning of Christology in the human experience and condition. It is worth noting that to a certain extent, one can postulate that it seems that the humanity of Jesus has become irrelevant to the church, and it is taken lightly in light of eschatological concerns relating to the Parousia. It seems we neglect to remember that the Parousia will occur in Christ bodily form marked by wounds from 2000 years ago. The basis of this study is to explicate the humanity of Christ within the divine nature. The physiology and

ontology in humans are critical even when thinking about the Son who the Father has sent and has died for us. Christ death has physiological and ontological significance especially in reflections of race. Lang (1998: 637) has affirmed that theologians have also understood the hypostasis union through *enhypostatos* contrary to *anhypostasis*, which designate ‘without real concrete existence’ (see Lang 1998: 640). Lang (1998: 639) asserted that for John Caesarea the human nature of Christ as joined in hypostatic union “individual existence is communicated to it as the ensouled flesh that becomes proper to the Son of God.”

Lang (1998: 639) notes that John Caesarea supported the *enhypostatos* position. He asserts that:

For this reason, he affirms that not only the divinity but also the humanity is proper to Christ, with the difference that the former belongs to him by nature (*τῆ φύσει*), whereas the latter belongs to him by virtue of the *ἐνυπόστατος ἐνωσις*. The term *ἐνυπόστατος* enables him on the one hand to avoid the consequence that could be drawn from the principle ‘*οὐκ ἐστὶν φύσις ἀπρόσωπος/ἀνυπόστατος*’ that each nature is *ἰδιοῦπόστατος*, i.e. has a hypostasis of its own.

It possible to argue that *enhypostatos* presents us with the depth of the interplay of human nature and the divine. Thus, the human is at home in divinity *visa vie*. Hughes (1989: 213) argued that the Son of God, beyond being a “providential sustainer of the cosmos as a historical continuum” is redeemer. The second person of the Trinity is a reintegration with humans to rescue all of creation as Christ is the Image in which humanity was created. Furthermore, the Son of God is linked to our humanity without compromise of the ontological transcendence of the Creator. Thus, the uniqueness of humans has a link also in the ontological sphere of the Son of God (Hughes 1989: 213). Hengel (1976: 4-7) argues that some assert that the mythic Christ is un-Jewish and is a product of Hellenisation because Christ used the title Son of God as a Jew, Lord is thought to be Paul’s Hellenisation though there is a Christology with ontic terms earlier in the church before Paul. We can argue then that the *enhypostatos* plays an important role in dealing with various ambiguities of Christology. De Jonge (1998: 106-107) asserts that the Son of God in Paul and John implies pre-existence contrary to Mark. Paul and John present the royal Son of God who will reign forever, and Jesus as Son of God is God’s act of inauguration of a new kingdom, and the transfiguration of Jesus implies the close relationship with God that he revealed to three of his disciples.

Hengel (1976: 8-10) notes that the Son of God for Paul is soteriological than metaphysical speculation (Galatians 4: 4). He (1976: 10) further argues that the Son belongs with the Father terminology; thus, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is used in Pauline writings in soteriological terms between creation and history. The role of creation and history are specific to black Christology (Mofokeng 1987: 7 & Witvliet 1987: 32). Paul draws from an older tradition in the church that is characterised by (a) the sending of the preexistent one into the world (for soteriological significance) (b) the giving up the Son to death as in the case of Isaac (Hengel 1976: 10-11). In the context of this study, a soteriological emphasis on Christology affirms God's existential dimensions that entail the importance of history. In the black lived experience and the acceptance of soteriology through a concrete Christology, we are not saved purely from sin, which in some respect has ontological aspects, but our humanity is saved as well by one who is like us in concrete terms.

De Jonge (1988: 146) argued that Jesus use of the Son of Man and Son of God indicates divine authority and divine origin but what is more important is the fact of the "sending of the Son by the Father". Therefore, John does not speak of the mode of existence of the Son but attributes to it the mission of the Son. This message entails the fundamental tenets of soteriology as understood by the early church. First, that Jesus died for the whole world and not a nation, a pre-Pauline belief, and second, Jesus Parousia (De Jonge 1988: 146-148). If indeed Jesus died for the whole world, then oppression based on the NT is a scandal against not humans alone but the divine drama of salvation. To the extent, De Jonge point through black theology must affirm that the Parousia implies recognition of Jesus by those who bore physical and historical witness to his ministry, miracles, death and resurrection—inclusive of ascension. This point is indicative of the real person of Jesus, who the world has come to know and believe in, but our belief is not in abstraction but in the real concrete existence of the person of Jesus as our God and saviour, an acceptance of both natures incorporated in one person.

Hughes (1989: 213-214) Christology seems in some sense to share aspects of enhypostatos in that humanity is God's creature and in all of creation humanity is the Image of God "the eternal Son is the Image in accordance with which man was formed." God only becomes what he is not through the connection between Image to Image, and in becoming flesh, the Son remains God without ceasing. Therefore, Christ is a theanthropic person with two natures having always been there because humans were created

through the divine image, thus, Christ is agent and sustainer. This point is critical for accepting that Christ not only assumed human flesh without its ontological aspect but he assumed all which makes us human. In short, both flesh and Spirit or any interpretation of ontological life belongs to God because God created it. For black theology the relation of image to image is syllogistic, while to a certain degree accepts the reality of pre-existence and transcendence which are attributes and nature of the reality of God in Christ. Hengel (1976: 15) asserts that for Paul, Christ is also “*eikon*”, the image of God—*the revealed being, love made visible*. He (1976:43-45) further asserts that the Son of God is found in Rabbinic and Palestine Judaism. This tradition also entails Wisdom seen as God’s beloved child born before creation, Wisdom as mediation in creation and Wisdom as the daughter of God, while the Torah is the firstborn of the universe (see Hengel 1976: 48-50). This personalisation of wisdom is also based on the view that wisdom is a cohabitant and companion of God on the throne and this wisdom permeates all of the universe. Therefore, the Son of God carries preexistence, mediational creation and sending into the world (Hengel 1976: 51 & 57). Hengel (1976: 58) asserts: “Earliest Christology has a quite original stamp, and is ultimately rooted in the contingent event of the activity of Jesus, his death and resurrection appearances.” Pannenberg (1991: 363) accentuates Hengel point by asserting: “The Easter event became the starting point of apostolic proclamation and the church’s christology.” De Jonge (1998: 99-100) notes that Christ prior to Paul is connected to death, resurrection and the Gospel. Furthermore, the designation of Messiah in Christianity is based on Jesus crucifixion. Jesus is Christ before the trial and after the resurrection (De Jonge 1998: 104).

Hughes (1989: 214) substantiates his position of an interplay between the image (human) and divine image in the theanthropic Christ by arguing that the Son as a real and historical person is contrary to modalism and doceticism. The virgin birth is not a negation against the divine taking up human fallenness rather through Mary, God brought forth His Son with power, without compromising his deity; it is Mary who provides the humanity of Jesus while the Holy Spirit is the reality of deity. In the study, it is critical to note that if Mary provides the physical humanity of Jesus who is a man, perspectives on gender are raised tandem with race. Hengel (1976: 14) argued that the Son is actually a unique soteriological event because for Paul the Father is the primal ground of creation with the Son as mediator, therefore, Son of God and Kyrios refer to the risen and exalted savior. For Hughes (1989: 214-217) the virgin birth is the

confirmation of God's power and transforming hopelessness because through the virgin birth the activity of the Father is seen by sending Jesus who in his accord comes to perform the father's will. The virgin birth is a decisive intervention and links Christ with the first Adam contrary to the display of purity/sinlessness. For Hughes (1989: 218) Christ appearance showed the Trinitarian operation. Hughes (1989: 218) asserts:

At Bethlehem he who is the eternal Image of God took to himself our human nature which is created in the image of God—that is to say, created in him—and in doing so he conformed our human nature to that image in which it was created—that is to say, conformed it to himself, thus fulfilling the wonderful potential of that nature in its true integrity and making actual the purpose for which it was created.

Hughes (1989: 218) locates the humanity of Jesus and his historicity at least within the Old Testament with Abraham and David, while Bethlehem directs to him to Calvary. He (1989: 219) asserts:

The cradle was the start of the road that led to the cross; and the purpose of Christ's coming was achieved not in the cradle but on the cross. The purpose of the incarnation, in other words, was not ontological but soteriological. Thus, Jesus declared of himself that "the Son of Man came...to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45), and St. Paul proclaimed that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinner" (1 Tim. 1: 15). As Athanasius observed, it was not the Son's wish merely to become incarnate or to make himself visible, but rather by taking our nature to himself to offer himself up bodily to death in the place of all.

The fact when considering Hughes and black christology of the incarnation as soteriological combines with the ontological place of love—an origin of love beyond physical existence (which cannot be denied to any human) but critical in and for physical existence. This is the explicit operation of the Triune God, which ends with the brutal bodily and ontological death of Christ on the cross. This cross and brutal bloodied body is significant for black theology, race and possibilities of resurrection in the *eschaton* and existentially. In this sense, Christ being fully human accepts the vulnerability, temporality, gullibility, and fragility of being human. For blacks and humanity as a whole the refocus on the realness of the body of Jesus that is born in poverty, humiliated, spat on, crucified and resurrected is an important aspect of the meaning of being human and

God's eternal power that does not negate any human body and fragility. While the resurrection implies vindication and soteriological purpose perhaps through the incarnation through the womb and the resurrection, we glimpse how the body remains the image of God, an image that God Himself refused to be obliterated by death or even abstract theology.

Berkhof (1939: 305-315) attests to the constant acceptance of the unity of full divinity and humanity in Christ by stressing that the doctrine of atonement necessitates accepting the two natures in one person. Black theology considering the dehumanisation of blacks can accept De Jonge (1988: 149-151) view that christology in 1 and 2 John focus on the fact that Jesus became flesh for in John, Christ was a real human being who died a human death for all to live. Furthermore, Jesus baptism and death are essential in his humanity, John writings emphasise what the Son has done in the flesh. Hengel (1976: 72) asserts: "The tradition behind the prologue to the Fourth Gospel is 'earlier' than the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke in their present form." Therefore, the Trinitarian revelation of God overcame myth, Hengel (1976: 72) further argues: "the exalted Jesus is not only pre-existent, but also shares in the *opus proprium Dei*, creation. Indeed, he accomplishes the work of creation at the behest and with the authority of God, just as he also determines events at the end of time." Hengel (1976: 76) argued that the incarnation and death are expression of divine love. Though it is significant to note that love was from God, human hate, e.g. the Romans and the priestly class similarly crucified Jesus. It is racism as hate that resulted in the destruction and dehumanisation of blacks.

Hughes (1989: 219 & 232-233) asserted that Jesus was not only visible but taken our nature and the incarnation was a raising of humans from lower level to higher ontology. The incarnation is God stepping down to life to lift us and creation from our pit. To Hughes, Christ becoming human is not ontological but speaks of assuming this humanity through self-emptying and being poor, his divine nature remains even when living in poverty in Palestine, dying on the cross; it is God in action (Hughes 1989: 233). In the context of this study and black theology the socio-economic, political and historical aspect to the incarnation and the hypostatic union is one of the lenses of refocusing on the realness of the Trinitarian God revealed in Christ. While it might seem the socio-economic factor to God's revelation may be interpreted in line with kenosis and humility it might also imply a deep solidarity of God with the physical wretchedness of humans on earth.

Moreover, in today's context with most of the world's human population living in poverty the incarnation and its socio-economic dimensions are ever pressing to the question of being a creature of God, salvation and creation. The incarnation is also a critique firstly, to the Christians who take part in oppression and secondly, to the church's mission in the world for saving souls and bodies. The person of Christ is thus pervasive and permeates all of Christianity, Christian mission and Christian theology; it seems we cannot escape the ramifications of the incarnation!

In New Testament studies the christological aspect to Jesus entails the use of titles. De Jonge (1998: 95-98) argued that the Bultmann school of thought posits that Jesus refused an assumption of a messianic title or any explicit or implicit self-exalting title. For Judaism, the Messiah is rare and appears in the text in Qumran though with a designation of a high priest and that messiah is associated with an inauguration of a new era. Mofokeng (1987: 5) has noted that the messianic secret was intended for people to encounter Jesus praxis. Therefore, in a black christology incarnation implies praxis.

Pannenberg (1991: 334-343) affirms Mofokeng (1987: 5) in that Jesus must be understood as the inbreaking rule and love of God. Furthermore, the cross is an internal event linking the ambivalence of his person, arrest and rejection, which are all consequences of the divine sending of Jesus and ultimately from God Himself. Pannenberg (1991: 363-364) further argues that Jews and other human judges thought of Jesus sonship as human arrogance and equating himself with God, in fact he is the Son of God because he has subordinated himself to the Father. This logic is reversed in the context of the black experience and Christianity in Africa. Blacks are oppressed and dehumanised by those who make themselves God and attempted to banish others from God's love.

De Jonge (1998: 113) asserts that Jesus was understood in terms of finality (the last prophet), thus giving rise to a theocentric christology presented by Jesus himself. De Jonge (1998: 113) argues: "Theocentricity implies centering on God the Father. It was Jesus who, from his own intimate relationship with the Father, invited his disciples to enter into a child-father relationship with God." It is possible then that the exact closeness of Jesus with God and humanity proves his divinity and identity. There is a synergy between the prior point of preexistence, creation, *Imago Dei*, soteriology and the *eschaton*, which a black christology seeks to affirm. Hengel (1976: 60) asserted that Jesus divinity is pre-Pauline and is located

in the hymns of confession and in him being the descendent of David and through the resurrection.

In fact, Hengel (1976: 62-66) note that God raising a condemned man is a primal Christian confession, the crucified Jesus is the Son of David and risen Son of God and this is the eschatological truth. For a black christology God's act of raising the condemned does not end with Jesus but is constant for the downtrodden till the eschatological fulfillment. According to Hengel (1976: 67-71 & 77) the pre-existent Son is thought of as the hovering Spirit of God (Gl 1:2) sent after all the sending of prophets and angels now the Logos replaces Wisdom, thus implying that christology is necessity and not a myth and affirms the change of Tetragrammaton into Kyrios (Lord) in reference to Jesus. Black christology sees the person of Christ in the hypostatic union, specifically the enhypostatic union as instrumental in grasping the depths of a transcendent God succumbing to vulnerability and death because of love and the human condition. The soteriological process places God and humanity as its nucleus in this story of love. Humans are loved because God created humans in His image and likeness and God through the salvific history becomes this human because of love. It is significant to note that the image to image relation is downward spiral and encapsulates God's humility at all times contrary to human arrogance climbing up to be God and even decide on the fate of other human beings and creation.

3. Black Christology

When assessing the Arius and Nicene Christological controversy the brokenness of hypostatic union encounters us. As Arius thought of as a left wing Origenist who sees God the Father as immovable and unchangeable, decries the homousia of the Son, subordinates Jesus to God and his belief in three hypostases (Schwarz 1998:142-143). The Nicene creed replace some of the words in the Apostles creed to counter attack Arius heresy. However, the Apostle creed while not being lofty in theological language carries the depths and the mystery of the Trinitarian God as revealed in Christ. Furthermore, it historicises this event by accepting the birth of Jesus through Mary, his accusation and crucifixion before Pontus Pilate and the unique resurrection of Jesus, Jesus on the Father's righthand, the working of the Spirit and the resurrection of the dead. I do not wish to do a comparison here between creeds rather the intention to note the Apostle's creed as a creed that bears simple witness to the mystery. While not explicitly Trinitarian it does seem to signal a change, at least to the Jewish Christians, about monotheism, God's working in history and the future

especially this human encounter of the divine in the person of Jesus. The history and circumstance around the death of Jesus are important as they reflect the reality that befell any Jew in Roman occupied Judea. Carter (2004:530) argued that Cone's black Christology entails Jesus humanity as significant because Cone Christology contains Jesus Jewishness, which then is significant for Black Power and Black existence. In the study's attempt for a black Christology this Jewishness of Jesus is pushed to the realm of ordinary Jewish existence in occupied Judea but more explicitly in the ordinary reality of being a human being living and existing in those troubling times that are connected today despite the 2000 years difference. Carter (2004: 530) asserted that Cone just like Barth reacted to the abstraction in theology. Jesus Jewishness is an eternal sign of the mystery of God's embrace of all creation. This Jewishness of Jesus is inherent in the Trinitarian reality and this Jewishness is not closed by racial orientation but open by God who established Jewish identity (Carter 2004: 531). He (2004: 531) argues:

Thus, the meaning of Jewishness, insofar as it is caught up into the divine life in Christ, witnesses to the universal meaning of creation, in general, and human existence, in particular, regardless of the various identity-markers from which creatures might be considered.

The foundation of a black Christology is not a rejection of traditional Christology that has established postulations of the hypostatic union of the two natures Christ. Instead, black christology operates as a thrust to refocus the meaning of the Gospel for black people and oppressed people who have suffered the injustice imposed by the colour divide and a relegated nonbeing existence. Erskine (1981: 38) correctly argues that: "One of the great tragedies of this world that confronted black people was that of the white person wanting to be revered as God: the creature wanting to be revered as the creator." Black Christology is the resurrection after resurrection, this means the church rediscovering the value of the body. Firstly, the body of a Jewish Jesus, who is the main image of the human image and secondly, seeing value in our image as creatures before God, especially bodies that have been relegated to a position of nonbeing because of race, oppression, exploitation, poverty and injustice. Black Christology is then a reaction against the abstraction specifically an abstraction that objectifies other human bodies, pigmented bodies into nothing, suffering, poverty and injustice. Carter (2004: 532) argued that

Christ divine-humanity transforms all of humanity, both Jews and Gentile enter the Jewishness in the Triune God through the Son. He (2004: 532) asserts:

The Jewish humanity of the trinitarian Son, Jesus Christ, is analogically central in this reciprocal movement of giving and receiving. Thus, far from being inconsequential, Jesus' Jewish humanity is, in fact, a crucial element in what it means to exist concretely.

Cone's and liberation theology's insights and lenses redirect us to refocusing on Scripture and an existential aspect into the text, specifically the Gospel. In the Gospel we encounter God who dies on the cross for soteriological reasons within the mold of historical processes that entail socio-economic, religious, political and racial/ethnic realities. Cone (1993: 13) asserts:

But when the poor of the North American and Third World read the passion story of the cross, they do not view it as a theological idea but as God's suffering solidarity with the victims of the world. Jesus' cross is God's solidarity with the poor, experiencing their pain and suffering.

Cone (1993: 12) further argues:

But it has been the actual suffering of the oppressed in black and other Third World communities that has been in our reflections on the cross of Jesus Christ. As Gustavo Gutierrez has said: "We cannot speak of the death of Jesus until we speak of the real death of people."

Carter (2004: 533) notes that for Cone, God encounters the creature in Christ as a "Thou" instead of the "It". Thus, the logic of race sees a relation of "I" (whites) and "It" (blacks and Third World). As such, black Christology draws further relevance in the link between the cross and lynching tree, the person of Christ in hypostatic union and the real humanity of others are connected and reconfigure theology. Torre (2015: xvii) has pointed out that liberation theology has conceived of a deity who is in the side of the oppressed. Therefore, the Scripture in particular the Gospel are read in existential terms, which do not negate traditional significance of the unique Christological and soteriological work of Christ. But rather affirm it and are instrumental lessons to the meaning of the Gospel. Cone (2011: 3) asserts:

The lynching tree is the most potent symbol of the trouble nobody knows that blacks have seen but do not talk about because the pain of remembering—visions of black bodies dangling from southern trees, surrounded by jeering white mobs—is almost too excruciating to recall. In that era, the lynching tree joined the cross as the most emotionally charged symbols in the African American community—symbols that represented both death and the promise of redemption, judgment and the offer of mercy, suffering and the power of hope. Both the cross and the lynching tree represented the worst in human beings and at the same time “an unquenchable ontological thirst” for life that refuses to let the worst determine our final meaning.

While the cross and lynching tree are separated by centuries and geography between Golgotha and the United States, Africa and the Third World (and in most instances, the lynching tree as structures of white power), they remain relevant in the subject of the black experience. This point is important for Cone (2011) throughout the cross and lynching tree. In fact, the cross has primacy because of the person on it and, therefore, through shared humanity and God’s solidarity, gives meaning to the lynching trees of the South and those of today. Carter (2004: 533) argued that abstraction is part of white/American existence and it is this abstraction that has lost the Jewishness of Jesus, which is critical for enhypostasis in real-time. Carter notes that for Cone, modern racism is a Christological problem and relates to the relegated realms of existence between the “I” and “Thou” orientation. Carter (2004: 533-534) argued that Cone looked at Jesus identity existentially especially in light of the human condition.

Furthermore, the practice of the Eucharist in the ecclesiastical and liturgical practice seem to affirm the absence of Jesus further existentially. Christology is understood with its connection to death and the resurrection which forms part of Jesus vindication. But death and resurrection while they remain in the hands of God require real human being who Jesus is in solidarity with God and humanity. Cone (1993: 5) argued: “In Jesus’s death poor blacks saw themselves, and they unleashed their imagination, describing what they felt and saw.” Therefore, black christology is affirmation of the humanity of blacks and their suffering linked with the humanity and suffering of Christ. The coherence of their humanity establishes a deep relationship/identity rooted in solidarity.

At a fundamental level the cross and lynching tree are drawn together by the real destruction of physical bodies, the resurrection of Christ from the

dead and the continual hope and perseverance of blacks and oppressed. It is critical also to affirm critical dimensions of relevance or motifs markers against serious doctrinal and theological distinction. At the heart of a black Christology is both the ontological and existential aspects of the human being subjected to humiliation, slavery, oppression etc. Being a creature of God created in the image and likeness of God and with ontological aspects given by the creator and the physical body that is typical to all living creatures affirm Cone's critique of racism being a christological crisis. Through the incarnation, God is found in human form in all its fullness, i.e. vulnerability, hunger, pain, suffering and even the event of death itself. Thus, all humanity is represented by Christ being fully human and being a susceptible human. In a sense, Christ is not just a human representation but, in the context of the salvific process, is the human condition itself, which is being reconciled to God. While being fully God, Christ remains in His unmistakable nature. For blacks and oppressed people, this unmistakable nature of God is seen even in the fragility of a hanging body crucified by the Roman and is a position of resemblance for experience and for accepting even redemption as understood in black and liberation theologies. Cone (2011: 30 31) has argued that the absence of the lynching tree in theological reflection is revealing when considering that the cross of Christ was the first-century lynching where both blacks and Christ stripped, wiped, mocked, scorned, spat on and dying humiliating deaths. Cone in the *Cross and Lynching Tree* (2011) has argued that the cross gives meaning to the lynching tree, therefore, subjecting the lynching tree to the deeper and ontological aspects of the cross, which entail a serious cost of reconciliation between God and humans usually underpinned in Christology and Christ preexistence. In black liberation theology, the question of the nature of Christ is accepted in its hypostatic union. However, reinterpreting Scripture in light of tangible human experience that validates the meaning and identify of Christ. Niebuhr saw the cross as the hidden love of a transcendent God and an "illumination of the character of man and God" (see Cone 2011: 35).

4. Black Christology Today: Concluding Thoughts

The task for black Christology is the affirmation of the divinity of the body as the image of God, which is further accentuated by the incarnation and the hypostatic union intention. However, at the heart of it must be the role of the Holy Spirit as seen in the ministry of Christ, the establishment of the church, and in the context of the black church, the Spirit has played a pivotal role (see Witvliet 1987: 22). According to Witvliet (1987: 22)

this Spirit lifted up the humiliated, stressed God immanence and engulfed black people into the Triune God during their oppression. Watters (2019: 100-101) asserts:

Though black theology places a great deal of emphasis on suffering, the Resurrection is just as significant. The Resurrection is an event for Jesus, in that something radical has happened to Him. It is also an event for the disciples in that Jesus' post-resurrection appearances awaken for them a bold witness of the gifts the Spirit will bring. The Resurrection characterises a destiny for Jesus, yet it was not His destiny alone but the beginning of the absolute transformation for humankind. Just as the cross of Jesus reflects the condition of black people today, the resurrection of Jesus reflects the hope that liberation from oppression is immanent.

The basis of a black Christology in light of the re-visitation of the hypostatic union seeks to make it clear that God's immanence has elucidated the existential reality of the incarnation and the value of people's lives. Mofokeng (1987: 5-7) located black Christology as an anthropo-soteriological and Christo-pneumatological necessity and that through the resurrection, Jesus is alive among the downtrodden. Mofokeng posits that the question of "who Jesus is" is an existential question that the black community as interlocutor wrestles with and formulate black Christology. Mofokeng (1987: 8) and Witvliet (1987: 32) locate black Christology and other liberation Christologies in light of black history and general history, therefore, the significance of Christ is a continual historical factor. At the same time blackness must be understood within the philosophy of black consciousness as articulated by Biko (1978: 52). Dwane (1988: 59) argues that the significance of Homoousios, despite whatever weaknesses the doctrine might have, is the fact through the Son as the New Adam we cry Abba because "He is ours as us and Immanuel, God with us: The cross represents God Himself suffering with us for us." Carter (2004: 535-538) has presented us with the significance of baptism that comes with black Christology. This baptism is a new form of embodiment as baptism represents death and resurrection through the role of the Holy Spirit. This baptism is the call to the church, white Christians and blacks to be renewed and counterhegemonic in order to allow new possibilities. It is clear that the body cannot be dismissed for the revelation of God, soteriology and the existential context (Black Live Matter, Marikana, George Floyd and all of the Third World) through the person of Christ. Carter (2004: 539) asserts that Trinitarian life entails body politics in Christ and implies a

new way of being in the world. Carter (2004: 539) argues: “The empirical church, being founded in the Holy Spirit, is the real anticipation of the mystical body. Baptism—entry into precisely as entry into his body—is induction into a powerful existence.” Therefore, those who destroy other bodies through structures of poverty, slavery, colonialism, sexism, capitalism etc. are in confrontation and rebellion with God and the whole of creation. Thus, the unity in Christ through the hypostatic union is critical in Christian theology and for the life/witness of the church.

5. Notes

1. See Christine Hayes provides insights concerning the priestly cult of the Jews in Yale Lectures in the Old Testament, Lecture 9 “The Priestly Legacy: Cult and Sacrifice, Purity and Holiness in Leviticus and Numbers” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URMs-17otFE&list=PLh9mgdi4rNeyuvTEbD-Ei0JdMUujXfyWi&index=9>. Accessed 10/05/2021.

2. See Margaret Barker discussion with Tom O’Loughlin in “Theologians in Conversation; The Temple and the First Christians, where she highlights the close proximity of Temple imagery with the early church’s understanding of the person of Christ as rooted in the Scriptures and Hebrew tradition. The points she highlights concerning temple imagery carry deep meaning in understanding Christology from a strictly biblical lens. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1nXy_Dyflc. Accessed 10/05/2021.

3. See Special Event: N.T. Wright Interview - Part 2 - Temple Theology & New Creation themes explored, where NT Wright explores deeper meaning of the Gospels in relation to the creation story in Genesis. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXdtohAsm_0. Accessed 10/05/2021

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Author’s Declaration

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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