

**JESUS THE GREATEST ANCESTOR: A TYPOLOGY-BASED THEOLOGICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF HEBREWS' CHRISTOLOGY IN AFRICA**

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# **Jesus the Greatest Ancestor: A Typology-Based Theological Interpretation of Hebrews'**

## **Christology in Africa**

*African theology* was spawned in response to yearnings for theological independence, and desires to theologize in dialogue with African cosmologies; these practical elements still remain today the *raison d'être*, and are definitive of, African theology. This background disguises a cardinal goal of African theology: to build and sustain authentic African Christian communities in faith, ethos and worship. Because the *Bible* is a witness to Christianity's primal events and traditions which are considered to be definitive of the identity and self-understanding of Christianity (ever since) and, consequently, integral to its faith, ethos and worship, its usage in African theology is imperative if it wishes to fulfil this goal.

To show one of the ways the aforesaid could be done, this thesis uses the Bible to formulate an African theology on ancestors by interpreting a section of it theologically. Such a theology could help define the relationship between African Christianity and ancestors. More specifically, the Christology of the book of Hebrews is interpreted theologically and *related to typology*, with the result that Jesus is understood not only as superior to Jewish mediatorial figures of angels, Moses and the Aaronic high priests, but, also, as the definitive mediator to whom the Jewish mediatorial figures point. Subsequently, this Christology of Hebrews is 'transferred' to Hebrews' contemporary context in Africa by means of a theological re-interpretation *based on typology* (due to the similarities between the Jewish mediatorial figures and African ones), resulting in the view that Jesus, as the definitive mediator in Africa, is the greatest ancestor.

The thesis goes on to argue that when this Christology of Hebrews in Africa ('Jesus the greatest ancestor') is applied to African Christianity, ancestors can, firstly, be absorbed into an African Christian consciousness as a work of God pointing to Christ, i.e., as types of Christ. Secondly, ancestors can be perceived to be displaced by Jesus the definitive mediator to whom, foreshadowing as types, they must give way now. Finally, and in consequence, ancestors have to be abandoned now, specifically as objects of religious cultic practice, i.e., as mediators. The resultant effect of this African theology based on Hebrews' Christology on African Christians is that ancestors are absorbed into their Christian consciousness while allowing for an authentic belief in Jesus' unique and ultimate significance as the definitive mediator between humans and God.

I, Peter Nyende, declare that this work was researched and written by me alone and that it has not been submitted for any other degree

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 14/06/05

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## PREFACE

The motivations of this thesis can be traced to my own experiences as an African Christian in Africa and to my fascination with Hebrews' relationship to the same. Most of what I have read, and thought through in a scholarly way, in the course of preparing this thesis I would have grappled with at one time or the other concretely in Africa. It is, therefore, a particular pleasure for me to offer this thesis, to those who may have the same experiences, or who may identify somewhat with the experiences of Christians in Africa and the struggles of Christian theology there.

I am grateful to all who contributed to making this thesis possible. To my two supervisors: Prof. Larry Hurtado, my primary supervisor, who was very supportive throughout having argued for the place of theology in Biblical Studies himself in a section of his inaugural lecture at the University of Edinburgh, and Dr. Andrew Ross, my secondary supervisor, whose experience and knowledge, having lived and worked in Africa for a considerable length of time, was a great help. Special thanks too to Julie Cartwright-Finch for willingly editing the initial draft of my thesis and to Deborah Tomkins for proof-reading the penultimate draft. Their labour has made this thesis more clear at many points than it would otherwise be. Lastly, I am indebted to the joint scholarship of Langham International and Church Mission Society which enabled me to carry out my thesis studies.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>En.</i>	<i>Enoch</i>
<i>EvR</i>	<i>Evangelical Review</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of The American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
LXX	Septuagint
<i>MS</i>	<i>Mission Studies</i>
<i>NBf</i>	<i>New Blackfriars</i>

<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTDNT</i>	<i>New Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
OR	OXFORD READERS
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>QJS</i>	<i>Quarterly Journal of Speech</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Religion in Malawi</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SLBR</i>	<i>Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
<i>Syr. Bar.</i>	<i>(Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>T. Dan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

What would be the meaning/significance of the Christology of Hebrews for southern and mid-African Christian communities ('Africa' from here on)?<sup>1</sup> This is a question that is hugely significant, and whose answer, as shall be seen in the outcome of this thesis, has far-reaching consequences for African theology. The question draws our attention first to the field of biblical studies, then secondly, and, specifically, to Christology (i.e., New Testament Christology), and even more pointedly, to New Testament Christology within, thirdly, an African Christian context. These three spheres converge in the aims and intentions (even motivations) of this thesis, in that I wish to carry out an interpretation of Christology from a specific biblical text within an African context for the purpose of contributing to African theology and, potentially, pointing the way to how more of such contributions could be made. But why should biblical scholarship concern itself with African theology *via* biblical interpretations that are focused on extrapolating their Christologies in an African setting, and how might that be carried out?

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<sup>1</sup> Mid-Africa is a term used here to refer to East and Central Africa. Although our thesis seeks to relate to largely southern and mid-Africa Christian communities, it is not, in its entirety, related exclusively to Christianity in these parts of Africa.

## 1.1 AFRICAN THEOLOGY

It is widely recognized that non-Western theologies have been struggling to enunciate their particular approach to theology away from a Western dominated Christian theological tradition in view of, and precipitated by, the demographics of Christianity. Whereas Western Christianity has in the past, vis-à-vis the 'Third World', dominated both numerically and in the forms of the expression that Christianity has taken, today, Christianity in these parts of the world has numerically outgrown that of the West. The result of this has been, again in relation to Third-World Christianity, a move away from a culturally more or less unified, thus culturally monocentric, European and North American Christianity, to one that is rooted in many cultures, and in this sense culturally polycentric.<sup>2</sup> The formation of what is now known as the 'Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians' in 1976 not only epitomizes this very fact, but also, the association is intended as a vehicle for systematic aid to this movement towards regional theologies. As pointed out in Davis' (1987)<sup>3</sup> study, this umbrella organization of Third World theologians emerged with the following five goals:

- (a) to provide opportunities of sharing and dialogue among theologians;
- (b) to evaluate the theologies of each area and their relationship to Western theology;
- (c) to help the Christian communities to an indigenous understanding of revelation, and to enable them to renew their service to the Lord according to the cultural, economic, and political situation of each community;
- (d) to make possible a continuing dialogue between Christians from these areas; and
- (e) to study new relationships between missionaries and indigenous churches (86).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Coptic and Ethiopian Christianity are the exception here, Christianity having been received there long before its spread by Western missionaries, from the middle of the last millennium, to other parts of Africa and the 'Third World'.

<sup>3</sup> The reference and bibliographical style of this thesis has followed *The SBL Handbook of Style*, (Alexander *et al* [2002]). It should be noted here that in bibliographical entry, the handbook recommends that book articles, unlike journal articles, should not be put in quotation marks (65).

<sup>4</sup> For more on this see Fabbella and Torres (1978 and 1983), and Hood (1990).

Accordingly, African theology was spawned in response to yearnings for 'theological' independence, and desires to theologize in tandem with African cosmologies; these practical elements still remain today the *raison d'être*, and are definitive of, African theology.<sup>5</sup> These African cosmologies (be they political, social, cultural, historical, economic, or religious), it would be worth pointing out, become for all practical purposes the context for African theological discourse, its site of interpretation with its necessarily correlative orientations, agendas, interests, questions, and experiences. Intimated here is a theology derived from the interplay of Christian tradition, or any aspect of it, on the one hand, and African cosmology, or any aspect of it, on the other.

With regard to the Christian tradition, I would contend that the Bible, however conceived, holds a central position, for it is incumbent on those who wish to articulate an African theology to use the Bible in dialogue with African cosmologies and culture for it to be a *Christian theology*. This is so because, as Mugambi (1989, 9-13) points out, when talking of African theology, it is not African theology *en bloc* that we are talking about but an African Christian theology. It could further be argued that the proper appellation should be 'African Christian Theologies' since Africa is not a homogenous whole. Still, with minor exceptions and objections, 'African theology' is used as a generic appellation for theologies written or expressed by African Christians for an African cosmology, or within the context of an African cosmos. For this reason, the Bible takes on importance in attempts to articulate African theologies (and, *ipso facto*, to realize the building and sustenance of

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<sup>5</sup> All studies and discussion on African theology point this out clearly. See Nyamiti (1978) and Pobee (1979) for short introductions, and Ukpong (1984) and Parratt (1995) for comprehensive discussions

authentic African Christian communities in faith, ethos and *cultus*).<sup>6</sup> The gravity of this point requires we elaborate on it briefly.

From the earliest of times Christianity has concerned itself with authenticity, what is Christian and what is not. This is clearly seen in the churches' Scripture and canonical heritage (whether of the Western [Roman Catholic, Protestant and kindred], or Eastern or even Ethiopian church) as the locus of what is authentic Christianity. As Koester (1975) notes, 'the canon was created as a critical weapon in a religious and cultural revolution ... it wanted to assure historical continuity and it wanted to prevent departures into spurious cultural and religious objectives which were seen as alien to the origins of the Christian faith' (8).<sup>7</sup> Because Christianity's primal events<sup>8</sup> and traditions are considered to be definitive of the identity and self-understanding of the Church (ever since) and consequently integral to its faith, ethos

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on this.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to mention that the building and sustenance of African Christian communities is a chief motivation and goal in the desire by Africans to theologize within their African cosmologies. It is understood that in so doing, Christianity takes root in the African psyche, a perception, which, again, highlights the linking of African theology to the faith, ethos and worship of African churches. The 'Inculturation Debate in Africa' (Bowie 1999), could be understood to be an attempt to pre-empt the demise of Christianity in tropical Africa akin to the occurrences in North Africa (Botha 1986) in the 700s, Nubia (Shenk 1993) in the 1300s, and in West and East Africa (Groves 1948) in the early 1800s. The analyses of the demise of Christianity in the mentioned places put the blame on the lack of inculturation (the grounding of Christianity in the local cultures). Moreover, these goals of African theology is all the more important given the current state of the church in Africa as summarised by Hastings (1976): 'The problems of the Christian churches in Africa today are many and deep; but they are seldom problems of decline. They arise instead from the sheer rapidity of growth, from an almost discordant vitality, from the need, and often too, the determination to reshape the pattern of church life and thought learnt from European missionaries, directly and indirectly, to accord with the complex religious and secular needs of African societies, while remaining faithful to the essentials of Christian tradition' (16). Consequently, the use of the Bible in African theology is critical to achieving the ends of inculturation: authentic, sustainable African Christian communities. See the deliberations of African Catholic Bishops at the 'African Synod' of 1994 where this concern is strongly emphasized (Brown, 1996, 75ff).

<sup>7</sup> For more discussions on this see Metzger (1987, 1-8) and what Farley (1982, 108-117) calls the 'Scripture principle' behind the collection of writings (some of which later formed the canon) by early Christian communities.

<sup>8</sup> However conceived, it is apparent that the primal event that constitutes the beginnings of the Christian community to which the Christian Bible attests is the unique incarnation of God in Jesus

and worship, the Bible is requisite for a distinctive (and authentic) Christian theology. As such, the Bible is viewed as normative, or as a criterion, for what is authentically Christian, forcing theologies, not least African theology, that would wish to be considered Christian inevitably to come under its scrutiny for validation as Christian theology.<sup>9</sup>

### *1.1.1. African Theology and the Bible*

It may well be said that the Bible is already central in African theology by virtue of the vital role it is said to play in African Christianity.<sup>10</sup> But the same cannot be said of the Bible with regard to African theological scholarship. Not at least before the middle of the 1970s when it was strongly felt that although African theology affirmed the primary status of Scripture for its theology, it was not adequately grounded in it (Fasholé-Luke 1975). But ten years later, Mbiti's (1986) research on the 'Use of the Bible in African theology' strongly suggested that it was playing a significant role in African theology; a suggestion now supported by Ukpong's (1999) commentary on biblical interpretation in modern Africa. But a closer examination

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Christ (the Christ-event, his life, death and resurrection) and what that very understanding means for humanity.

<sup>9</sup> The authority of Scripture in determining what is Christian may also be approached from different perspectives from the one just given. If we may use Fiorenza's (1990) study, there seem to be two broad approaches to the Bible as a requisite for any Christian theology in recent times. One is the functional approach where the understanding of the necessity of the Bible in theology is primarily understood through its functions in the church (and society at large); because the Bible is used by the Christian community to understand its faith and order its life, theology must reckon with it. The second, which he calls the 'canonical approach', is similar to the one we have given above. The first places authority in the Bible by virtue of its function in the church, the second by virtue of its (irreplaceable) nature. One could also think of other ways in which authority is invested in the Bible so as to render it central to Christian theology; for example, with Kelsey (1968) in its ability to transform, with Farley (1982) in its role as a classic, with Maurice Wiles (1975) in its role as any other religious book, and with Lindbeck (1984) 'as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action' (18). For our purposes, we have sought to establish the centrality of the Bible in African theology by giving primacy to the 'canonical approach'. An argument justifying this primacy here, even though relevant, is, for want of space, not pursued.

<sup>10</sup> As early as 1978 Mbiti (1978) had (on the basis of a thorough research on articles and books, as well as oral sources) established that the Bible was at the forefront of African Christianity.

suggests otherwise. Only a few of the articles examined and cited by both Mbiti (1986) and Ukpong (1999) indicate a sustained engagement with the Bible.<sup>11</sup> It seems that the use of the Bible in African theology has not been satisfactory. This is a critical judgement that Fasholé-Luke (1981) drew attention to in the early 1980s when he wrote: 'The Bible has played a significant role in the development of African Christianity ... what is now necessary is the interpretation of the Bible by Africans primarily for Africans' (409). To understand more of this judgement, it is imperative to look at the possible ways that the Bible can be used in theology.

We could conceive the use of the Bible in theology as taking place in three ways:

1. when the Bible is used as the subject matter for theology; 2. when it is used as part of theological formulations or discourses; and 3. when it is used as a model for theology.

The principle task of Christian theology, as Jeanrond (1984) puts it, is 'to study again and again the basic texts of the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures and to interpret them for successive generations of Christians' (55). The first use of the Bible does exactly this. Using the Bible in a rather direct way as the primary source of study, it can be regarded as biblical interpretation or biblical exegesis mixed with its, or ending in, appropriation. For this reason the quest for the meaning of the Bible (now and not just when it was written) is the fundamental rule in this usage. There

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<sup>11</sup> Mbiti's (1986) reference has three, out of a possible 50 articles and books, titled 'Studies in Second Corinthians', 'The Epistle to the Ephesians', 'Job – A meditation on the problem of suffering'. Ukpong's reference has also three, but out of a possible 60, titled 'Galatians 3.28 – A Study on Paul's Attitude towards Ethnicity: its Relevance for Contemporary Nigeria', 'Biblical Perspectives on Women: Eve, the Mother of all Living (Gen 3.20)', and 'The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18.21-35)'.

seems to be much latitude on how this can be done. For example, a portion of Scripture can be examined and the implications of the reading pondered; or the Bible may be approached thematically where a theme taken from it or from elsewhere leads the way in the reading of the Bible and the implications thereof pondered; or yet again, the Bible can be called upon to give solutions to problems occasioned by the circumstances and the experiences of a people. The content of the Bible here predominates and is the subject matter of the theology that uses it this way.

However, there are theological discourses that are not based on the study of Scripture in the sense outlined above but still in an *ad hoc* manner use the Bible. Kelsey (1975, 122-134),<sup>12</sup> following Toulmin's (1963) analysis of the standard pattern of arguments, points out four ways that they do so. The Bible may be used to provide *data* when appealed to in making a theological proposal. It may be used as a *warrant* when invoked to move a theological proposal from its data to its conclusion or claim. It could be used as a *backing* when it serves 'to show that the warrant is true' (144). And lastly it may be used to approve of or *rebut* the applicability of the warrant. In a good number of theological formulations, as Kelsey shows, the usage of the Bible may be limited to only one or two of these uses, leaving the other constituents of the theological discourse to be filled by other sources such as philosophy, or some other spheres in human culture of thinking, validation, or theory. This means that it is possible here to offer an other-than-biblically-structured theological reflection (a philosophically-structured one for example) but still use the Bible accordingly. Thus the degree to which the content of the Bible is the subject

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<sup>12</sup> See also his earlier 'Appeals to Scripture' (1988).

matter of the theology that uses it this way depends on the part it plays in the theological argument. However, unlike the first use of the Bible we have explained in the preceding paragraph, the Bible when used in this sense may not have material sovereignty of its parts as distinct from everything else in the content of this theology, nor is it the subject of interpretation, as the primary datum, in this theology. This is the second way we could conceive the Bible to be used in theology.

The third use of the Bible is not so much interested in its content for theology as it is in using patterns detected therein to do theology. This way, the Bible is seen as a model or a paradigm for doing theology. Green (2001) states it this way:

...we must give appropriate weight to the status of Scripture for how its books, separately and together, while drawing on these paradigmatic presuppositions (for example "the new-age inaugurating advent of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth" [322]), *model the instantiation* of the good news in particular locales and with respect to historical particularities ... in the New Testament already, one finds 'theology' both in its critical task of reflection on the practices and affirmations of the people of God to determine their credibility and faithfulness and in its constructive task of reiteration, restatement, and interpretation of the good news vis-à-vis ever developing horizons and challenges (Ibid., *my italics*).

Some leading questions in studying the Bible for such purposes would be these:<sup>13</sup>

What strategies for articulating the good news are contained in this text? What strategies for bringing about faithfulness are to be found? How does the text proceed in its theological reflection? On what sources (authorities) does the text draw? How does this text participate in theological reflection? All of these questions are intended to tease out of the Bible ways of doing theology in ever changing situations.

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<sup>13</sup> I have adopted them from Green (2001) who employs this particular way of using the Bible in 'inquiring into how IPeter itself engages in the theological task' (322).



The uses of the Bible so conceived make it possible to perceive that the unsatisfactory use of the Bible being pointed out in African theology is with respect to the first usage which seem to deal primarily with interpreting biblical texts. That is, there is a relative lack of study and interpretation of the texts of the Bible by Africans for Africans (to paraphrase the critical judgement Fasholé-Luke made in the early 1980s). Parratt (1995) states this shortcoming more precisely in observing that 'in general the contributions of African scholars in the field of biblical exegesis have fallen short of their corresponding contributions to the study of African religions' (56). Parratt must have in mind the substantive work on African religion by African Christian scholars<sup>14</sup> that puts to shame their literature on the Bible as illustrated in the work we cited of Mbiti and Ukpong. So, African theology is in need of directly engaging with the biblical texts if it is to help build an African Christian theology, and all the more because it could be argued that, of the three uses of the Bible in theology, this particular use is primary.<sup>15</sup> In this thesis, therefore, I intended to contribute to meeting this need both in its interpretation of Hebrews and, thereby, pointing out a possible way that more such interpretations could be made.

### ***1.1.2. African Theology and New Testament Christology***

But the need of the Bible in African theology does not stop with its use in African theology in the sense just outlined. A further task which, if attended to as a priority in biblical interpretation would significantly help in building African theology, must be pointed out. Christology is basic to any Christian theology and not least an

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this, see Chitonda (2000) and Shaw (1990).

<sup>15</sup> This is so because the other two uses of the Bible in theology seem to draw their use of the Bible from biblical studies carried out by biblical scholars, whether directly through using their interpretations, or, indirectly through a critical dialogue with the same.

African theology. As Macquarrie (1990) sums it up, 'Christianity, as the name implies, has Jesus Christ at its very centre, so that if Christology is concentrated on the study of Jesus Christ, it is not so much a branch of Christian theology as its central theme' (3). This being the case, the view of the Bible as normative, or a criterion, for what is authentically Christian accentuates the need for African theology to invest in the interpretations of the New Testament that are centred on the person of Christ. But there is a more fundamental reason for such investments by African theology. The subject of Christology being tied up with the origins of Christianity means that it is tied up consequently with matters of Christian authenticity. As already stated, the Bible is normative for what is authentically Christian because it is the medium, as it were, that the Church has for the primal events and traditions which are definitive of, and an essential reference for, its identity and self-understanding, and consequently for its faith, ethos and worship. Chief of these events and traditions is the person of Jesus Christ. As Koester (1971) remarks and goes on to argue, 'Christianity started with a particular historical person, his works and words, his life and death: Jesus of Nazareth' (205ff). Indeed, whenever the theme of the origins of Christianity is taken up, the figure of Jesus has always featured centrally. In the words of Anderson (1964), himself concerned with the theme of the origins of Christianity, 'he [Jesus] is the great converging point, to which we all have to strike straight across the great expanses. Learned scholars of the Church, dogmatician, theologian, and Biblical critic, have done just that with a kind of unwavering instinct' (16). Consequently, in biblical interpretations, Christological interpretations of the New Testament texts ought to play an integral, if not a fundamental, role in contributing to the building of an African theology. This,

therefore, makes the interpretation of Christological texts of the New Testament necessary in any attempt to contribute to an African theology through a direct engagement with the Bible. In other words, when seeking to use the Bible in building an African theology, New Testament African Christologies are imperatively needed. But, perhaps, such a task may not be useful given that African Christologies may be said to abound.<sup>16</sup> African Christologies may abound indeed, but the crucial question is: are these African Christologies the results of a direct engagement with New Testament Christologies? Close scrutiny of them shows that indeed they use the Bible but, again, not in the primary sense that we have argued above needs to be the case. A look at African ancestor-Christologies will make this clear.<sup>17</sup>

African theologians have in varying degrees sought to articulate, specifically, Jesus as an ancestor. Pobee (1979, 46-48), our first example, points out that ancestors are members of the community who have died; that they are now 'elder brothers of the living at the house of God' (46); that to qualify as an ancestor one must have lived a long life, been exemplary in that life and done much for the prestige of one's people; and that they are believed to influence life for the good or ill of the community they leave behind. He then concludes that amongst the *Akan* people of West Africa, Jesus should be understood as an 'ancestor' because their ontology, abode, qualifications, and functions mirror his albeit, with one significant difference: he is the *Nana*, 'the great and greatest ancestor' (94) for he is closer to God than all other ancestors, making him more effectual at the enumerated ancestor

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<sup>16</sup> Studies on this can be found in Appiah-Kubi (1977), Schreiter (1991), Mnemba (1988), Onaiyekan (1997), and Stinton (2001).

<sup>17</sup> I choose ancestor-Christologies because, as will become apparent, they are significant for this thesis.

duties. Turning to Nyamiti (1984) as our second example, Jesus should be considered as a 'brother-ancestor' since, of all the different types of ancestors (he calls them ancestor relationships [16]) in African society, 'brother-ancestor' comes closest to capturing the relationship of Jesus with Christians. Nyamiti considers a 'brother-ancestor' to be 'a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is mediator to God, archetype of behaviour and with whom – thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death – he is entitled to have regular sacred communications' (23).

Bujo (1992) brings out, especially, the utter dependence of the living community on ancestors through communion with them (23-32): 'The living cannot hope to survive unless they render due honour to their dead and continue faithfully along the tracks laid down by them' (24), he writes. With the understanding that Africans have a sense of community which transcends the living members of a community to include ancestors, he argues that ancestors are needed for the generation of what he calls 'life-force' (23). Further, he perceives that because of the ancestors' superior status to the living members in the community, they are more important in the community and exercise a definite influence on the living by warding off evil and bringing prosperity (29). Also he argues that ancestors are 'models for living' (30), resulting in strength for the community and a better future. On the basis of this ancestor phenomenon, Bujo proposes that Christ should be understood theologically as 'ancestor par excellence', or simply 'proto-ancestor' (79), because he not only 'lived the African ancestor ideal to the highest degree' but 'brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfilment' (79). As for Kabasale (1991), our last example, ancestors

are 'a source of life and an obligatory route to the supreme being' (116). They are also elder brothers of the living and thus closer to 'the sources and foundations' (121), presumably of life, knowledge, and power. Thus, for him, Christ should be seen as an ancestor because he fulfils the roles of ancestors in Africa.

Common to these ancestor-Christologies is their identification of characteristics of ancestors that they consider parallel to some characteristics of the Christology they have in mind. These characteristics are mostly to do with roles and functions, with the end result that their ancestor-Christologies perceive Jesus to be qualitatively a superior ancestor because he better executes the roles and functions of ancestors in Africa. The use of such a methodology in articulating ancestor-Christologies is commendable and so far seems the only feasible one.<sup>18</sup> We will not discuss here their studies of 'ancestor' which is an integral part of the said method till later, but concern ourselves only with their Christologies. Presumably because the audience they write to is assumed to know which Christology they are seeking to re-conceive along the lines of an ancestor in Africa, they make no effort to identify and to explain it. (Though it is easy to infer that the Christologies which they seek to re-conceive are confessional Christologies, that is as explicated in the particular church tradition they belong to.) It is largely on account of this that, inevitably, their ancestor-Christologies fall short of African New Testament Christologies proper. This is not to say that they do not appeal to Scripture, for they do. Pobee (1979, 83-87), for example, seems to have the starting point of his Christology in various texts of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ukpong's (1994), though concerned with the relationship of Christology to inculturation, calls this the 'functional analogy approach' (42), which he argues is parallel to 'to the type of New Testament christology that studies the christological titles' (Ibid.).

New Testament that depict Christ as human and as divine from which he seeks to communicate to the Akan society using the category of ancestor. However, there is no comprehensive engagement with any Christology of a New Testament text in his study, but the piecemeal usages of some New Testament texts in explicating Christ as human and divine which Pobee subsequently tries to communicate to the Akan peoples. In other words, his usage of the New Testament in articulating an ancestor-Christology is more of a *backing* and a *warrant* for his theological proposal of Christ as ancestor, and not so much as the primary datum, the subject of interpretation from which he interprets Christ as an ancestor. His use of the Bible (to go back to our discussion on the three uses of the Bible in theology) lies in the second usage, which falls short of the kind of biblical interpretation that we are advocating as essential for establishing an African theology. Bujo and Kabasale's ancestor-Christologies in this regard are not any different.

This, then, brings us to Bediako's (1994, 96-104, 116-19) ancestor-Christology. Unlike the others we have reviewed, he clearly has Hebrews' Christology as the New Testament Christology with which he is engaging. He writes: 'the value for us in the presentation of Jesus in Hebrews stems from its relevance to a society like ours with its deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestor function' (114), and he goes on to articulate Jesus as the 'true ancestor'. He does so by declaring the ancestors to have no reality and that it is in fact Jesus Christ who is the only 'true ancestor' fulfilling the need that led African society to create the myth of the ancestors in the first place. This is because Bediako perceives the cult<sup>19</sup> of ancestor

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<sup>19</sup> My usage of this term is not in the strict technical term of sacrifice so that it could be taken to signify here the sacrifices offered to ancestors. I use it in this thesis rather loosely to denote reverence

as the 'product of myth-making imagination of the community' (116): theirs, he argues, is a functional value, namely that of fostering social harmony within the community and across generations (past, present, and future). This myth-making, he continues to argue, is what makes ancestors sacred. He asserts that the power of ancestors stems from, and is sustained by, the corporate belief of the community and not from their intrinsic, real, demonstrable power to act. He contends that this is not the case with Jesus who, coming into the world from the transcendent realm as the Son of God, he argues, took on human nature, underwent death and conquered it by his resurrection, showing and demonstrating his intrinsic powers. He concludes, therefore, that Jesus is the true 'ancestor'. In other words, for Bediako, the beliefs African peoples have about their ancestors are only true in the case of Jesus alone. Bediako's attempt is a step in the kind of interpretation of African New Testament Christologies that could contribute to an African theology. But, still, his explication of Hebrew's Christology is sketchy and presumes too much in the sense that no specific methodology seems to operate in his interpretation.

So we have to conclude that African theology is in need of engaging with New Testament Christologies more adequately in constructing authentic African Christologies and thereby African theologies. In this thesis, I intend, therefore, to meet this need both in my interpretation of Hebrews' Christology and, through it, trying to show how more of such interpretations could be conducted with other New Testament Christologies.

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of one or another kind. The reason for this will be forthcoming when I look at ancestors in Africa in the fifth chapter.

## 1.2 THE BIBLE AND ITS INTERPRETATION

Yet the identification of the crucial need of the Bible, and specifically the Christology therein, in African theology, gives rise to a second problem, the problem of procedure or method in conducting such biblical interpretations. In biblical studies today, there exists an acute appreciation of difficulties in trying to arrive at the meaning of biblical texts and in trying to determine the goals for which those meanings are sought; biblical scholars are not all doing the same thing with the text, nor do they have the same scholarly goals. The emergence of historical critical studies for systematic interpretations of the Bible in the 1700s fostered a sense of unity in biblical interpretations where the goal of interpretation was perceived as arriving, through grammatico-historical methods, at some objectively determinable meaning of the text. Biblical scholars and others alike who intended to use biblical interpretations for theology, we may say, would have had such a determined meaning of whichever text as their starting point. J. P. Gabler [1753-1856] (Eldredge and Sandys-Wunsch [1980]), was perhaps the first one to delineate this clearly in an attempt to free biblical research from dogmatic theology and in effect to herald the sub-discipline of biblical theology in biblical studies.<sup>20</sup> Green (2002) puts it thus: 'Gabler sketched a three-stage process by which one might move from historical analysis of the biblical text to a biblical theology: 1. careful linguistic and historical analysis; 2. identification of ideas common among the biblical writers; and 3. articulation of the transcendent (timeless and universal) principles of the Bible' (7). Thus, with few exceptions, it seemed to the minds of scholars (and still does to

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<sup>20</sup> For more on Gabler's programme see Eldredge and Sandys-Wunsch (1980), Morgan (1987) and Stuckenbruck (1999). It seems that the influence of Gabler's programme still endures in, for example, Stendahl (1962), in whose articulations Stuckenbruck (1999, 154-57) sees Gabler's sentiments in modern garb.



others) that the way interpretations of the Bible useful for contemporary theology (whether biblical or systematic or even practical) would be conducted, differences in details notwithstanding, was through 'what the text meant' (which was perceived as objective and fixed) and 'what it means'. However, at least starting from the 1960s, this method's legitimacy has relentlessly either been challenged or rejected,<sup>21</sup> and new methods proposed and practised to replace, compete, or co-exist with it.<sup>22</sup> This has turned the field of biblical interpretation into a methodologically problematic and contested ground.<sup>23</sup> In the first instance, any method proposed or practised in the place of historical criticism brings with it new and perhaps weightier philosophical and theological problems, enough to have it challenged or rejected as well. For example, a structural approach could be charged with watering down the historical elements in the biblical texts that are absolutely vital to its meaning (a philosophical objection) and to the integrity of the Christian faith (a theological objection); whilst a reader-orientated approach may also be charged with watering down the historical contingencies of the biblical text vital to its meaning (a theological objection), and with solipsism, which is nothing more than a projection of the whims and desire of the reader onto the text, the stuff of textual manipulation (a philosophical objection).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The basis of these challenges have been philosophical (e.g. Lyotard [1978] and Kuhn [1971]) in rejecting claims to objectivity, the very aspirations of historical criticism) as well as theological (e.g. Childs [1970] and Winks [1973]) and sociological in the sense of substituting the academy for the church as the primary conversation partner of biblical studies (Johnson and William [2002, 28, 38ff]).

<sup>22</sup> See Porter (1997) for a comprehensive bibliography on works dealing with methods current in biblical studies.

<sup>23</sup> Various attempts at ways forward through the different proposals offered are good indicators of this; see for example Clines (1993), Hengel (1996), Bockmuehl (1998), Bartholomew *et al* (2001), and Johnson and William (2002).

<sup>24</sup> A more concrete philosophical objection to literary approaches would be, for example, Derrida (1981) and post-structural biblical scholars' objections to literary approaches to reading the Bible, like structuralism, arguing that in the absence of an outside reference or the transcendently signified in language, what we have is an endless differential network of signs referring infinitely to signs-and-more-signs and not meaning at all (280). A concrete theological objection would be, for example,

Secondly, any attempt at an integration of these methods presses upon us the question of what happens when the different approaches have competing and irreconcilable philosophical presuppositions. Indeed some attempts have been made towards an integration. Tate and Jonker, for example, have thought it possible to integrate different approaches to biblical interpretation. In his *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, Tate (1997) proposes a hermeneutical approach that conjoins author-centred (the world behind the text), text-centred (the world within the text) and reader-centred approaches (the world in front of the text), which as he shows relate to historical criticism, literary criticism and reader-response criticism respectively (191-230). Founding his proposal on a 'basic communication model' (xxiv) which indicates that meaning resides in an interplay of speaker/author, language/text, and audience/reader, he argues that no approach has a monopoly in determining meaning for all have limitations. Therefore 'interpretation is impaired when any world is given pre-eminence at the expense of neglecting the other two' (xxv), making the best hermeneutic an eclectic one (230). The problem though with such a proposal and its kindred is that the philosophical presuppositions of the individual approaches that do not agree seem not to be reckoned with. In noting that: 'Every method is...anchored to a set of underlying presuppositions that determine the set of questions to be put to a text; and the answers are those expected in advance' (195), Tate seems to touch on this problem but falls short of discussing its implications for his proposal and, with it, in offering an answer on how an integration of critical methodologies can be possible in the face of inimical and

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Childs (1992) objecting to some forms of literary approaches because he feels they are divorcing the Bible from its theological reality (723), or Noble (1996) objecting to reader-response approaches for the same reasons. A concrete sociological objection would include calls, *contra* Räisänen (2000), that the church is the primary conversation partner of biblical studies in the academy (Fowl 1998).

competing presuppositions. Yet this is the single most important obstacle to any kind of integration. A brief elaboration in general terms based on sketches of the preceding sections should make this clear.

How would one bring together, for instance, a historico-critical and a rhetorico-critical approach in reading a biblical text when they are not aligned philosophically? For example, historical criticism largely presupposes that the biblical text is a historical document, while rhetorical criticism, though recognizing its historicity, sees it as rhetoric. Thus, when seeking for the meaning of a biblical text, historical critics look for what was meant by the writer and this with reference to his/her first audience, the *sensus literalis sive historicus*, whilst rhetorical critics look for what is meant for those who receive the rhetoric of the Bible, and they do so with reference to the dynamics of rhetoric, the *sensus rhetoricus*. Or, as a second example, historical criticism has flourished on the presupposition of an absolute/objective world that anchors true and objective knowledge. This presupposition colours its interpretative methodology, so that when looking for the historical meaning of a text, the historical critic will look to critically (we could say empirically) ascertained historical events or contexts to determine and validate it. In addition, the said presupposition brings to the centre the question of truth (understood to be relative to a pre-existing objective reality). For this reason, the historical critic perceives that a biblical text has a definitive meaning that should be sought for. But this is not the case with rhetorical criticism: on the contrary it flourishes on the presupposition, that an objective world is invariably relative to language and thus subjective or perspectival. Meaning therefore is determined or validated through language, understood in this instance as rhetoric, and thus contextual, communal, rational,

affective and practical. The question of truth may not be at the centre, since it too will be relative to a world mediated subjectively or created by language and thus contingent. As such, a biblical text has a variety of meanings.

Unlike Tate, Jonker (1996) recognizes, in *Exclusivity and Variety: Perspectives on Multidimensional Exegesis*, the severity of the problem posed by such competing presupposition, and responds by proposing a 'multidimensional exegesis' as a way of combining the different hermeneutical approaches regardless of their philosophical disharmony. This integration of hermeneutical approaches:

refers to the interrelation among exegetical methodologies in a systematic and ordered way. Every methodology is allowed to operate according to its own approach, and by means of its own method(s). However, instead of operating exclusively and on its own, the exegetical process and results are being coordinated and related to those of other approaches and methods (71).

His proposal though lacks clarity, leaving a number of unanswered questions. For example, who does the co-ordinating? Is it the historic or rhetorical critic? And would not that presuppose a compromise of presuppositions of the methodologies in question? To what end is the co-ordination? Is it, for example, for the purpose of enhancing meaning? What kind of relationship does he have in mind, and to what purpose? However, his illustrations (and that is what makes up the majority of the book's content) suggest that what he means is the co-opting by one critical methodology the findings of the other where applicable in its investigations of a text. So that, for instance, 'A historical-critical methodology will integrate literary insights only if they serve the investigation of the history of the text' (290) and, 'a narrative methodology will integrate historical-critical insights only if they serve the investigation of the literary character of the text' (Ibid.). On closer scrutiny, his

proposal is, in fact, not an integration of approaches but an employment by a particular approach (the one that has primacy in the alleged co-ordination and relationship) of the insights of the other into its investigations where suitable. In most cases this employment happens when that approach cannot within its own presuppositions and methodology offer answers needful to its interpretation of a given text, or when we have the literary in, and which at the same time eludes interpretation by, the historic and vice versa (Barton 1994, 7-8), or still, when little or no evidence is forthcoming to construct any conclusive historical background to a text. His three such models (298-333) are indeed a good example of this. So, even though Jonker's multidimensional exegesis comes closest to an integration of hermeneutical approaches, it cannot be considered strictly as such.

It seems, then, that with integration problematic, if not impossible, what is left is exclusivism, a 'balkanization' of hermeneutical approaches in biblical studies. For example, Templeton (1999, 293-329), who clearly understands the philosophical presuppositions at stake, chooses literary criticism at the exclusion of historical criticism in reading the Bible. For him, the Bible is literature rather than history on the basis that 'many realities of which the New Testament speaks are simply not accessible to the historian. What we have in the New Testament is the language of the human heart, the language of emotion ...' (306). The Bible then should be approached literarily; a position whose implications he alludes to in his pronouncement: 'To lose the Bible as history is not to lose truth, but to lose one kind of it and find another. But we have not lost it and do not lose it. We change the question merely' (327). But the disadvantage of capitulating to exclusivism in hermeneutical approaches is to fail to do justice to the complexity of the *genre* of

biblical literature for it is not, as Templeton suggests, just either literature or history; it is both and maybe even more. As Barton (1994) points out, 'the Old (and New) Testament contain(s) some very strange literature; perhaps it will not be surprising if it takes more than one kind of sensibility to understand it' (15, in brackets mine).

In light of the difficulties just outlined that attend integrated approaches and their alternative at the opposite end, exclusivistic approaches, we are left with yet a final methodological problematic, that of choice of method in the variety of approaches available. Which method do we choose for our interpretation of a biblical text and why? Such a decision may not be an easy one to make, because it entails an intimate knowledge of hermeneutics, a capacity to balance a mass of subordinate judgements, one over against another, and a clear awareness of scholarly goals in sight. This may be the reason why, almost a generation ago, Keck (1974) hoped for, somehow, a convergence of approaches leading to a redefined common method in Biblical studies when he wrote:

The contours and direction of scholarship are affected by factors other than the sequence of research problems in which one scholar refines the work of his predecessor. In addition to counter moves (e.g. Ritschl's rejection of his teacher, F. C. Baur), one must also reckon with the emergence of new questions and a resurgence of older ones which, though sighted, were never fully developed. The confluence of such factors initially has the effect of fragmenting the received tradition, but out of it may come a reintegration of the discipline with a different configuration. In biblical study we may now be in the former state, when new questions and methods appear to be fragmenting the received tradition of historical critical inquiry. The rise of the interest in the nature of language and in linguistics, the fascination with (many-sided) structuralism and the desire to reconstruct early Christianity according to 'trajectories' are samples of the various efforts to reconstitute biblical criticism... One may expect that in the future, *once these several approaches have developed, they will converge to produce a basically new shape to biblical study.* (435, emphasis mine).

Thirty years later this methodological redefinition has yet to occur, but rather, to the contrary, biblical scholarship continues to witness unprecedented proliferation of critical strategies.<sup>25</sup> So, attempts to meet the need of African theology to engage with the Bible directly in order to help build an African Christian theology, must, as a corollary, make choices on which method to use, perhaps, even, must search for new methods to follow in interpreting the Bible. Such methodological choices should be based on a justifiable hermeneutical and theological rationale, and be tied to the scholarly goal of the interpretation, which in the case of this thesis is already prescribed: the establishing of an African theology for the building of African Christian communities. Hermeneutical issues are, therefore, invariably an integral part of this study. Indeed in this study, I will propose an appropriate methodology through which Hebrews can be interpreted for the sake of building an African theology. It is precisely such a methodology that may point a way through which others may also choose to engage, in a primary way, with the Bible in building an African theology.

### **1.3 NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY AND ITS INTERPRETATION**

It would be expected that problems of procedure in New Testament interpretation are manifest in instances of the interpretation of New Testament Christologies.

However, this is not quite the case. If anything, it seems that interpretations of New

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<sup>25</sup> Undoubtedly this situation has left its mark on African theology's use of the Bible. Parratt (1995, 203-204) in his comprehensive look at African theology points it out as an enduring problem, but argues that the existence of other approaches does not invalidate the traditional historical critical method which ensures that biblical teaching is not severed from its roots. If we are to follow Ukpogon's (2000, 22ff) rather prescriptive survey of biblical interpretation of the Bible in Africa in the 1990s, most of these other approaches are a variety of reader-response. West (2000, 37-38) who I think offers a more descriptive account of biblical interpretation in Africa, sees the use of a variety of critical methods in biblical interpretation by African biblical scholarship (in which case, it reflects the field of Biblical studies), but with still a predominance of historico-critical approach.

Testament Christologies are encumbered by the opposite problem, that of the inability to break away from historical criticism as the dominant methodology in their interpretation. This can be illustrated by reference to Leander Keck's (1986) essay on 'the renewal of New Testament Christology'. There, he proposes a theological approach to the study of New Testament Christology informed by 'the history of ideas but which will deliberately pursue Christology as a theological theme' (362). This is particularly pertinent for our purposes, since his concern with New Testament Christologies mirror, the one in this thesis: i.e., their usefulness for, or contribution to, theology. In Keck's observation,

The scholarly literature shows that what is called New Testament Christology is, by and large, really a history of Christological materials and motifs in early Christianity, and their ancestry. The massive preoccupation with history has, to be sure, produced impressive results. In fact, today it is difficult to imagine a study of NT Christology which is not influenced by this historical analysis of early Christian conceptions of Christ and their antecedents (362).

This is well corroborated by surveys of New Testament Christologies in the 20th Century. As an example, Hurtado (1979) points out that William Bousset's *Kyrios Christos* 'determined the agenda for the scholarly study of NT Christology since the publication of the book in 1913' (307). This determination of agenda, he further points out, was not in terms of the material interpretation of the New Testament Christology but in terms of methodology which was that of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* generally. So, in the case of his (Bousset's) book, we see 'an emphasis upon knowledge of Jewish and pagan background as indispensable for scientific study of earliest Christology, attention to the process of development of Christology and the factors in early Christianity that provoked this development' (307). Despite questions levelled at some of Bousset's views (as Hurtado himself



does), this methodology, he concludes, has made critical study of New Testament Christology what it is today.<sup>26</sup>

Keck (1986) goes on to observe that nowhere else is this methodology more evident than in the 'fascination with the palaeontology of Christological titles' (368) in New Testament Christology.<sup>27</sup> But Christological titles are not the only manifestation of the dominance of the historico-critical methodology in New Testament Christology. To the study of Christological titles we may add 1. the studies on the origins and developments of Christology in early Christianity<sup>28</sup> and 2. studies seeking an understanding of the historical Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Historical Jesus studies, however, have a life of their own, their origins much earlier than Bousset, for him to be credited as influential to their methodology. However, the latest phase of historical Jesus studies is clearly at one with what is credited as the influence of Bousset so far as its efforts to understand Jesus relative to 'a concrete time and place' (Meier 1991, 86) are concerned (albeit in this case, the concrete time and space is, significantly, early Judaism).<sup>30</sup> For our purposes, what we should note running through all these different concerns of current New Testament Christologies is the same methodology, i.e., historical criticism.

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<sup>26</sup> See also Boers (1970) and Perrin (1974, 41-56); some other relevant discussions on New Testament Christology that point to the influence of Bousset are Hurtado (1984) Fossum (1991) and Zeller (2001).

<sup>27</sup> Cullmann (1959), Hahn (1969) and Lindars (1983) may be considered representative of this.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Moule (1977), Charlesworth (1992), and Gieschen (1998).

<sup>29</sup> For significant studies see Sanders (1985), Crossan (1991) and Meier (1991-2001).

<sup>30</sup> A survey and evaluation of historical Jesus studies could be found in Evans (1995), Scott (1994), and Charlesworth (1991).

In Keck's judgement, though focused on titular Christologies, this state of affairs had a significant shortcoming. He points it out this way: 'To reconstruct the history of titles as if this were the study of Christology is like trying to understand the windows of Chartres Cathedral by studying the history of coloured glass. In fact, concentration of titles finally makes the Christologies of the NT unintelligible as Christologies, and insignificant theologically' (368).<sup>31</sup> As we have observed, historical approaches to New Testament Christology are not limited to titles of Jesus, but searches for the origins of New Testament Christologies, and even their development, do not help bring about theological understandings of Christ. Also, searches for the historical personality, identity, wisdom, etc. of Jesus will not help in the apprehension of Jesus theologically, at least not directly. Keck, therefore, sought to have this redressed arguing that the study of New Testament Christology would be renewed 'if it recovers its proper subject-matter - Christology - and its proper scope, the New Testament' (362). To do this Keck proposed an alternative approach to the study of New Testament Christology, one that would be informed by 'the history of ideas but which will deliberately pursue Christology as a theological theme' (362).

Fundamental to what Keck considers as teasing out a theological explication of New Testament Christology is the question of the identity and, particularly, the *significance* of Jesus. For the purposes of renewing New Testament Christology, Keck wants the interpretation of New Testament Christology to move, as it were, beyond verification to signification. On the principle that significance cannot be

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<sup>31</sup> Keck's judgement is in need surely of qualification, for not all studies of the titles of Christ in the New Testament are arid theologically both in their motivations and utility (or in their ramifications), for their meaning to be dismissed as theologically unintelligible. But the point of his judgement still

arrived at by speaking of Jesus in isolation, but 'is intelligible only in relation to something or someone' (363), he argues that the subject-matter of Christology is in its network of relationships. In this case, the relationship (or correlation) in view is that of Christ to God, to humanity and to the *cosmos*. Thus he posits, '... from statements about God or world, or humanity, one can infer the appropriate christological correlates, and vice versa' (363). Keck calls this web of relationships the grammar or syntax of the signification of Jesus. So for Keck, we may say, the key to the theological significance of Jesus is to recover the subject matter of Christology *via* (using grammar as an analogy) the syntax of the mentioned relationships. Thus: 'the religious and theological signification of Jesus emerges only when one reflects on this event [Jesus] in relation to God, world and the human condition and its resolution' (372). An example of what this would mean, he suggests, is to view every statement about Christ 'to implicate God' (363), which is a relationship that in Keck's judgement of contemporary Christologies of the New Testament is the most neglected. Another example of what this would mean, but with respect to the anthropological relations, is:

... if the human condition is viewed as bondage, Christ is the liberator and soteriology will be expressed in the idiom of liberation. Christology will then show what there is about Christ that makes it possible for liberation to occur through him. Or, if Christ is hailed as the great teacher, the human condition will be construed as ignorance or illusion, so that salvation will be a matter of learning the truth (364).

Against the background of this understanding, he, accordingly, points out three ways to the study of New Testament Christology that in the end aid in understanding the significance of Jesus.

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stands: historical studies of the titles of Jesus are not theological studies of the same, and, therefore, in themselves do not render Christology theologically fully intelligible.

Firstly, he proposes an approach to New Testament Christology that contends with this grammar. In such an approach, what is aimed at is 'a systemic grasp of the way the correlates of Christ and God, world, and the human condition are expressed or implied' (370). Seeking to justify this further he states:

Attending to the correlates of christology is, moreover, particularly appropriate to the New Testament because this literature consistently expresses the identity and significance of Jesus in relation to something else - doxology, paraenesis, cult narrative, etc. There are no sections of the NT [New Testament] devoted to Christology as a discrete topic in its own right. Attending to the syntax of the signification of Jesus is therefore not attempting to impose an alien structure on the texts but a way of ordering the relational character of Christology as it appears in the NT (371).

Secondly, he proposes that the study of New Testament Christology should be limited to the New Testament. This would mean a Christology that is focused on New Testament texts rather than individual authors or communities, on the one hand, and, on the other, a Christology that is focused on the texts or corpus of texts as they exist and 'with what they were designed to do' (371). Concerning the latter, some leading questions in the study of New Testament Christology would be these: 'What is the overall construal of Jesus' identity and significance in the text? What is the structure of this Christology and to what extent are the logical correlates expressed? What degree of coherence and completeness does this Christology have?' (372).

The third proposal has to do with the plurality of Christologies in the New Testament. Rather than following the historical mode in dealing with diversities in New Testament Christology that result in, for example, trajectories, or genetic relationships, Keck proposes a Christological approach to diversity. By this he means the asking of Christological questions of each Christology. Questions such as:

'what sort of anthropology does each entail? What is the range and depth of the human condition which each allows to become visible? ... '(373). Also, he means pursuing 'the consequences of the canon's juxtaposing precisely these Christologies' (374), which he believes is deliberate rather than accidental.

Going by the current literature on New Testament Christology, it seems that mainstream New Testament Christology are historical in nature. This means that the move from verification (i.e., titular Christologies) to signification (i.e., theological Christologies) envisaged in Keck's call for the renewal of New Testament Christology has not taken place. It is my contention that this move from verification to signification has not taken place because Keck has not linked such a move with the new interpretative approaches in biblical studies, yet one would think that they are potentially useful in enabling the kinds of New Testament Christological interpretations he desires. If I may point out Keck's short coming more precisely, he fails in his article to bring into dialogue his proposal for theological Christologies with methodologies that may be consonant with such a goal. To my mind, this is a grave omission since one of the critical issues in New Testament Christologies (as in New Testament studies generally) can be identified to be, perhaps first and foremost, methodological. The abundance of mainstream New Testament Christologies informed by the history of ideas, as has been shown, are enabled by (and thus in direct relation with) the hermeneutics of historical criticism. This should mean, at least, that a call for a change of focus in interpretations of New Testament

Christologies is invariably a call, to whatever the extent, for a change in approach to their interpretation as well.<sup>32</sup>

A new method would supply different sets of questions to be posed to the Christologies of the New Testament; questions whose answers would result in an evaluation of the person and work of Jesus theologically. Keck, of course, has suggested an important framework for the study of New Testament Christologies, and from it questions that need to be posed to New Testament Christologies, which may indeed lead to a theological Christology. The main problem is that he has not related this framework and questions to any interpretative approach to New Testament Christology, even if he has not ignored the question of approaches altogether. But still, Keck has inadvertently illustrated that the interpretation of New Testament Christologies needs to move procedurally beyond historico-critical approaches if it is to be useful for theology, and in our case, for African theology. However, such interpretations can be possible only where a methodology or approach consonant with the aforementioned goals of interpreting New Testament Christologies that way is used. This presses on us the necessity for choosing an appropriate methodology or even searching for a new one in biblical studies, a choice that must be carried out on the basis of a justifiable hermeneutical rationale and tied to the goals of the desired interpretation.<sup>33</sup> But, further still we may argue, that the choice made on which way to proceed in interpreting the Bible with the ultimate aim

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<sup>32</sup> Keifert's (1984) discussion, though concerned with integrating linguistic and historical interpretative paradigms for New Testament Christology, may serve to make this clear.

<sup>33</sup> There are signs that interpretation of New Testament Christology is opening up to the variety of approaches available in biblical interpretation. However, this seems largely limited to narrative criticism, which is in turn limited to the Gospel narratives and especially applied in interpreting Markan Christology (see, *inter alia*, Broadhead [1993], Davidson [1993], and Cook [1997, 67-108]).

of contributing to the building up of an African theology should be consistent with the one used in, specifically, interpreting New Testament Christologies. Put differently, the interpretation of the Bible generally should not be divorced from the interpretation of specific aspects of its content as is apparent when New Testament interpretation generally is opened up to different approaches while New Testament Christological interpretation is conducted almost exclusively *via* historical criticism. In this study, therefore, I will aim to propose a form of biblical interpretation that is useful for the interpretation of the Bible generally, and its Christology particularly.

#### **1.4 METHODOLOGY AND OUTLINE OF STUDY**

In summary, then, the Bible, and especially its Christology, needs to bear on African theology in a primary way if its articulators wish it to be a Christian theology and so help to build and sustain authentic African Christian communities. However, in order to conduct an interpretation of Christology from a specific biblical text within an African context for the purpose of contributing to African theology and, potentially, to point the way to how more of such contributions can be made requires that one adopt an appropriate methodology, or propose a new one, through which to achieve such a goal. Consequently, in Chapter 3 of this thesis, I will, on the basis of a hermeneutical and theological rationale which I shall broach, propose a typology-based theological interpretation, as the most appropriate form of biblical interpretation for Hebrews, and one that is also in tandem with the goal of contributing to an African theology. On the way to this proposal, we shall consider closely, in Chapter 2, why the aim and nature of theological interpretations of the

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One, of course, could also come across the occasional social approach to New Testament Christology as can be found in Robbins (1984) and Slater (1999).

Bible make them the most appropriate genus of biblical interpretation suited for the goal of interpreting the Bible for the faith, ethos and worship of the Church generally, and of interpreting Hebrews, particularly, in order to build African theology. This consideration will be followed, still in Chapter 2, by an examination of different models of theological interpretations proposed, implicitly or explicitly, by their leading proponents in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, we shall critically discuss and evaluate their models of theological interpretation and state the reasons for not adopting any of them in the theological interpretation of Hebrews, but, rather, proposing a new one (which will not be divorced entirely from theirs because it will draw on some elements from them).

A typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology will highlight two cardinal things: 1. the indispensability of the biblical text's historical contingency for biblical interpretations that seek to build theologies and with them the faith, ethos and worship of Christian communities, and 2. the significance of the context in which such biblical interpretations occur. This will necessitate, firstly (as will be seen in Chapter 4), a historico-rhetorical study of Hebrews as a vital initial procedure in the process of its theological interpretation. What this means, specifically, is that I will carry out a rhetorico-critical study of Hebrews but in the service, ultimately, of historical criticism of the same. This is because, as we shall explain fully in the relevant section of this study, there is a sense in which historical critical methodology can make use of the insights of rhetorical criticism to confirm if not rebut the conjectures of historical criticism (which are plenty given the nature of scholarship on Hebrews historical background). In other words, there is a sense in



which certain kinds of rhetorical criticism can offer an alternative route to studying a biblical text historically, especially where there is a dearth of precise historical information available of the text's *Sitz im Leben*. Since Hebrews' historical background, for lack of information, has never been conclusively demonstrated, it qualifies to be studied this way *en route* to its theological interpretation. Consequently, it is our rhetorico-critical study of Hebrews that will lead us into the subsequent investigation of its Christology within the background of its wider religio-historical context.

Secondly, my proposed theological interpretation will necessitate, in Chapter 5, a comprehensive study of ancestors in Africa, as the context in which I envision Hebrews' interpretation taking place in Africa. This study will largely draw from the field and the insights of social anthropological studies, which marks a significant step beyond all other works of African theologians seeking to articulate ancestor-Christologies. This is on account of the fact that African theologians seeking to engage ancestral traditions of Africa with some form of Christian tradition seem not to take cognizance of the labours of social anthropologists who have taken time to observe in some detail such phenomena. An illustration, again from theologians seeking to articulate ancestor-Christologies, will suffice. In seeking to compare given conceptions of Christ with ancestors in Africa, African theologians (Bediako [1994], Bujo [1992], Kabasale [1991], Nyamiti [1984]) discuss the understandings of ancestors in Africa, and it is here that this shortcoming is clearly evident. In their proposals, they have numerous unsubstantiated statements and assertions (which they subsequently interpret) about ancestors which have no basis in concrete data, such as

are available from the studies of African societies and religions, especially by social anthropologists amongst others.<sup>34</sup> Nyamiti (1984) is a good example of this observation. Throughout his *Christ as our Ancestor*, he details the African beliefs in ancestors (15-17), without any recourse to concrete ethnographical data (even though at the very beginning he refers his readers to several books whose usage in his study is not clear).<sup>35</sup> He is right, as I will show later in the course of this study, in calling attention to the fact that there are different types of ancestors in Africa; but the existence in Africa of the 'brother-ancestor' type he discusses is, apparently, dubious. This is so because in all the data that I am aware of on African societies, there is no ancestor relationship between members of the same generation, it is always inter-generational. The neglect by African theologians of engaging available data on African societies by social anthropologists is a serious omission, because it weakens the case for the intended articulation of an African theology in dialogue with Africa's vast ancestral traditions. So, by drawing on the work and insights of social anthropologists on the ancestral phenomena in Africa, I will be trying to avoid this problem.

The outcome of Chapter 5 will be an interpretation, in an African context, of Jesus in Hebrews as the greatest ancestor. It will have been argued in Chapter 4 that Hebrews' Christology is predominantly mediatorial and, therefore, can legitimately be reconceived of in Africa along the lines of ancestors who play a mediatorial role in Africa's religio-cultural cosmology. This interpretation I will pursue further in

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<sup>34</sup> For example: Fortes (1987) on the Tellensi of West Africa, Kyewalyanga (1976) on the Ganda of Uganda East Africa, and Daneel (1970) on the Shona of Southern Africa.

<sup>35</sup> At least he provides some references; the others in question do not, despite going ahead to discuss ancestors in Africa.

Chapter 6; qualifying it, and considering its significance for various relevant aspects of the faith, ethos and worship of African Christians. Here we shall be able to see how an African theology generated on the basis of a sustained and appropriate interpretation of a biblical text could play a significant part in the life of Christian communities in Africa, the very aim of African theology.

In Chapter 7, the final chapter (and the conclusion), we shall revisit this highly defined form of theological interpretation for the reading of Hebrews theologically and its relationship with general forms of theological interpretations (such as the ones discussed in Chapter 2). We shall also consider what contribution African theology arrived at in this way could make to other Christian theologies.

## CHAPTER 2

### TOWARDS A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF HEBREWS' CHRISTOLOGY IN AFRICA

Broadly conceived, 'theological' interpretations of the Bible should be understood as those that seek to make it accessible or actualize it in, and for, the Church, in a given contemporary setting. A look at any comprehensive book on the subject of the history of biblical interpretation will show that such interpretations were the norm until the 1700s.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally the Bible was viewed as the locus of divine discourse, the Word of God to *homo sapiens*. The canon of the New Testament was a result of its identification as the repository of the authentic words of Jesus and the apostles (Metzger 1987, 1-8), expressing the original divinely-given truth, hence its use by the Church as a provider of right teaching, confession and living. For all practical purposes, the Bible was interpreted for the life and faith of Christian communities. Consequently (with time) theological thinking was carried out largely by way of citation and exposition of the Bible (Farley 1982, 108-117). The sense, or meaning, of any portion of the Bible would in various ways be derived directly (literally) or indirectly (spiritually) or through a combination of both to have it speak to the life and faith of Christian communities. However, the onset of critical inquiry into the Bible in the 1700s and the context that spawned and enabled it, i.e.,

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<sup>1</sup> See Grant and Tracy (1984) for example.

'modernity', made this traditional way of interpreting the Bible problematic.<sup>2</sup> It is this situation that has led to calls for a recovery of interpretations of the Bible that are fashioned for the identity, life and faith of Christian communities in their contemporary setting, which are at the same time carried out in the light of critical scholarship (both in its methods and fruits), i.e., calls for theological interpretations of the Bible in the academy.<sup>3</sup>

Various ways have been proposed on how this might be conducted, and with them different details on precisely what passes muster as a theological interpretation. This prompts the question: Which of the proposed theological interpretations is the most appropriate in reading the Bible? Further to this, since the Bible is not a homogeneous whole, a second, equally important, question that we have to face at the same time is whether a single model of theological interpretation can cater, and thus be appropriate, for the reading of all the different genres of the Bible. It would appear, for reasons that will be made clear, that what seems needful is the working out, in an *ad hoc* manner, of models for theological interpretation that are appropriate for the reading of certain biblical writings and that are in relation, and specific, to different socio-political and religio-cultural realities the Church might find itself in as it reads the Bible. So, for example, if I am reading *Hebrews* for the *Church* in a certain part of *Africa*, how do I proceed to interpret it theologically? I will begin to offer an answer to this question in this chapter, which I complete in the next chapter where I will propose a model of theological interpretation best suited for reading

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<sup>2</sup> A point well noted by Robinson's (1964) remarks in his comprehensive discussion of the history of biblical hermeneutics.

<sup>3</sup> Meyer (1994, 145-147) credits Peter Stuhlmacher's essay (see Stuhlmacher [1979]) as the harbinger of the recovery of theological interpretations of the Bible in recent New Testament scholarship.

Hebrews in Africa. To be more specific, I will seek in the chapter to map out, first, the factors (alluded to above) that have led to the need for deliberately developed theological interpretations in contemporary biblical scholarship. This will provide clarity to the problem, against which I will, secondly, discuss some representative writings on theological interpretation with the end purpose of evaluating their adequacy for reading the New Testament, Hebrews in particular, theologically. Then finally, in Chapter 3, I will proceed to argue, but in conversation with the preceding discussion in Chapter 2, for a certain form of theological interpretation that I think is most adequate for my intended reading of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. That model, typology-based theological interpretation, will be the one I will use to interpret Hebrews' Christology in Africa.

## **2.1 HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM**

### **2.1.1. *Vis-à-vis Historical Criticism***

The philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (such as Galileo, Descartes especially, and Locke) ushered in a new way of looking at the world.<sup>4</sup> 'They committed the modern world to thinking about nature in a new and "scientific" way, and to using "rational" methods to deal with the problems of human life and society' (Toulmin 1990, 9).

The modern world's basic and fundamental assumption was that there was an absolute world that could be known through scientific rationalism - the process of observation, experimentation, deduction and value-free conclusion - which was understood to be devoid of prejudice, the temporal, ignorance, superstition and mythology. Since it was considered that knowledge acquired in this way was an

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<sup>4</sup> Thus the argument that the start of modernity should be pegged to these philosophers (Toulmin 1990, 10). For more on the formations of modernity see Hamilton (1992).

accurate reflection of objective reality (thus 'the touchstone of truth'),<sup>5</sup> universality and certainty of knowledge was thus secured.<sup>6</sup> Valid knowledge was consequently restricted to the kind of objective (i.e., factual, value-free, and neutral) knowledge which could be expressed *via* rationally validated methods by, 'on the one hand, framing one's basic theories around ideas whose merits were clear, distinct and certain' and 'on the other, using only demonstrable arguments, having the necessity of geometrical proofs' (81).<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note this change in understanding the world because it affected all fields of inquiry, not least historical inquiry, in validation of both historical fact and meaning. What passed as acceptable historical testimony as well as historical truth would have to be objective, which meant in concert with observed facts (or known laws of nature) 'on the principle that the future will resemble the past and the unknown the known' (Rubinoff 1996, 142).<sup>8</sup> In turn, the way texts from antiquity were read was affected, removed as they were by a broad span of time and language from the coalescing assumptions of the modern world, and so was the reading of the

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<sup>5</sup> Phrase from Rorty (1980, 269) in his comment on what seemed to give science an edge over religion and politics: the presumed contact with the real.

<sup>6</sup>It should be understood, as Toulmin (1990) stresses, that Descartes (and company) were not philosophizing *in vacuo* but in response to bloody conflicts occasioned by 'uncertainty, ambiguity and the acceptance of pluralism' (55, also, 69-80); the quest for certainty was therefore critical in bringing stability to society. This quest for securing the certainty of knowledge is sometimes known as 'Cartesian Anxiety' (see Bernstein 1983, 16-19).

<sup>7</sup> One should not assume here that modernity's original formulations and metaphysics remained static until the onset of postmodernity: the details and views on objectivity and scientific rationalism evolved in the course of time. Post-17<sup>th</sup> Century philosophers, such as David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), for example, modified the initial thrusts of the claims of empiricism and their bases (see Watson 1966). What is important to note is that such changes did not alter modernity's basic premise, the premise of objectivity and scientific rationalism in shaping thinking, inquiry and knowledge; they remain the legacy of modernity. Megill's (1994, 1-20) 'four senses of objectivity' today is useful in making this clear.

<sup>8</sup> Bleicher (1980, 14-26) offers a very brief introduction. For a useful discussion with reference to the Bible, see Harvey (1967, 68-101).

Bible,<sup>9</sup> now stripped of its numinous intimations that were ruled out as fiction by scientific rationalism (Krentz 1975, 10-30). While, formerly, readings of the Bible had both grammatico-historical and aesthetico-rhetorical interpretations (more on this later),<sup>10</sup> the definitive interpretation was now limited to the sense the text had for its writer and first audience (*sensus literalis sive historicus*).<sup>11</sup> This was understood to objectify interpretations since meaning of an historical text was arrived at by reference to critically ascertained (in the sense of reason for their occurrence accounted for) historical events (or contexts).<sup>12</sup> The flip side of this was that non-literal meanings of texts were cast aside, as subjective. Kümmel (1973) points out that, 'This "historical method" of interpretation, based solely on the establishment of actual facts and, so far as method was concerned, paying no attention to the canon of Holy Scripture, not only found numerous practitioners in the field of hermeneutics, but in particular was deliberately adopted in numerous commentaries' (110). We should note that in the background of such presuppositions was the tacit assumption that language refers, and gets its meaning by reference, to external realities, and/or reflects and represents facts about those realities: in other words language mediates knowledge of the world.<sup>13</sup> When such a view was extended to the Bible, it was seen

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<sup>9</sup> See Sheppard (1998, 260-68).

<sup>10</sup> Ocker (1998, 75-84), Muller (1998 123-152), and Grant and Tracy (1984, 83-99) offer helpful introductory accounts of the kinds of interpretations employed then.

<sup>11</sup> See Kümmel (1970) for a comprehensive look at the factors leading to, and ultimately privileging, historical criticism as definitive in New Testament studies. See also Frei (1974).

<sup>12</sup> This should be considered the classic presupposition of historical criticism and is the canon of historico-critical readings, amid the dispersion of perspectives (including 'new historicism') and variety of new and old critical systems (such as 'textual', 'source', 'form', 'author', 'audience', 'social' etc) that would be found within the approach.

<sup>13</sup> I suppose that this assumption (which Putman [1995, 70] calls the 'traditional view' of language) could be traced back to Locke (1690, 'II Of the Signification of Words'); before then, it seems that at least three views of language including the 'traditional view' prevailed (Stiver [1996, 14-35]). More of 'representational' or 'reference' view of language can be found in Devitt and Sterelney (1999, 17-38).



chiefly in terms of its capacity to represent past history and derive its meaning from the same.<sup>14</sup>

From the broad-brush perspective of theological interpretations of the Bible alluded to, the cardinal problem that the situation just outlined precipitates is that, in and of itself, historical criticism cannot provide interpretations of the Bible for today generally, nor in particular interpretations that nourish the faith and life of the Church in its contemporary setting.<sup>15</sup> It is a hermeneutical problem that historical criticism engenders and at the same time is ill equipped to meet. It may identify the horizon of the New Testament but it cannot appropriate it. This is a state of affairs that individuals and communities that hold the Bible as Scripture find highly undesirable for reasons which include the following: 1. the Bible is perceived as containing the gospel (centred on Jesus of Nazareth) which lies at the origin of the Church, and consequently, 2. it has an absolute and universal character, and is of permanent value that has to be identified in every culture and historical situation; 3. the Bible is looked upon by Christian communities as absolutely essential for the provision of an authentic Christian identity and faith, and for the ordering of their lives; and for these reasons, 4. the writings of the Bible are seen as always having something to say to the church today in its current context and experience.

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<sup>14</sup> This is why at times historical criticism is frequently viewed as using texts as windows to events behind them (see Peterson [1978, 19]). On more on text as 'window' or 'mirror' see Krieger (1964, 3-4).

<sup>15</sup> This statement should not be taken to mean that historical criticism has no theological value in theological interpretation. As noted by Murphy (1998, 113), 'Historical criticism may not in itself capture precise nuances, but it can approximate the historical meaning at some level, and this cannot be considered as theologically without value'. We cannot rule out here that historical criticism has a foothold in biblical studies because of the historical nature of the Bible and the fact that the Christian faith heavily invests itself in the location of God's epiphany at a point in human history. For a helpful discussion on historical-critical theology, i.e., of historico-critical readings of the Bible that are not purely empirical but grapple with the significance, meaning, intentions *etc* of the text, and ask the

The shortcoming of historical readings so conceived was noted quite early as historical criticism began to predominate in biblical studies. Again Kümmel (113) points out, for example, that C. F. Staudlin in 1807 protested against the exclusive use of historical criticism in interpreting the Bible because,

the teaching of Jesus has to do with the unchangeable, divine truths that cannot have merely temporal historical significance, and because the declarations of the apostles convey deep religious perceptions, only he can understand the New Testament who has this sort of impression of Jesus and a similar religious perception. "Moral, religious, philosophical" interpretation, therefore, belongs inseparably to the relevant interpretation of these writings...(113).

Indeed the reading of the Bible for the purposes of using it for the faith, life and conduct of the Church or even individual has been a perennial struggle ever since historical criticism emerged on the scene, precisely because historical readings could not offer theological interpretations of the same.

### ***2.1.2. Vis-à-vis Literary and Poststructural Approaches***

Two shifts that moved historical criticism from the centre of authority in hermeneutics, or at least disturbed its hegemony, occurred in succession in the last century. 'Close reading' (similar to 'formalism' and 'New Criticism') emerged in the 1920s<sup>16</sup> and shifted the reading of texts from their social and historical context, and from the writer's mind and life, to the text itself. In interpreting a text, what mattered was the text itself, its structure, architecture, intrinsic form and the internal relationships of its parts. A literary reading of texts was called for (this is the so

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texts questions in tandem with their religious content, i.e., theology of the Bible in its historical setting (see Liebing [1967]).

<sup>16</sup> The impact of this approach though was to be felt in biblical studies only from the 1960s. See Detweiler and Robbins (1991) for more. Some of the hermeneutical approaches that they have spawned include: Narrative criticism, Reader-Response criticism, Structural criticism, Rhetorical criticism, and Literary criticism. See Malbon and McKnight (1994) and Porter (1997) for a broad look

called 'textual paradigm')<sup>17</sup>. Then in the 1960s, the textual paradigm of reading was itself challenged by the emergence of poststructural criticism, which shifted the controlling principle in reading texts from the text itself to the reader. The reader mattered most since s/he was the one understood to confer meaning to a text ('the reader paradigm').

What should not escape our attention is that these approaches were themselves enabled by changes in the understanding of the world. Firstly, with regard to language, the text is now seen as a system of signs, and in itself it can function to engage the reader and generate meaning quite apart from historical background.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, Postmodernism (broadly conceived)<sup>19</sup> assaults the outlined Cartesian metaphysics of modernity. The assumption of an objective/absolute reality, known through scientific rationalism and which consequently makes true objective knowledge, fixed meaning and universal validity possible, is refuted.<sup>20</sup> All knowledge therefore is necessarily particular, historical, cultural and tainted with the local/personal. The result of this is a philosophy that either rejects the notion of an objective reality (and knowledge) altogether (as is the case with poststructuralism) or

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at these new hermeneutical approaches in biblical studies, and Minor (1996) and Powell (1992) for comprehensive bibliographies.

<sup>17</sup> See Seldon (1989).

<sup>18</sup> I should think that the proper starting point of this understanding of language is in the linguistics of Saussure (1974) in which he divorces language from reference in favour of an autonomous, relational and closed view of language. Language is viewed as a system of signs ('semiotics') without external referent: the *signifier* is a sign as well as the *signified* (the sign signified, here a semantic object) so that meaning is determined by a sign's differences from other signs and not by an external referent. (I have relied on Devitt and Sterelny [1999, 259-272] for this short analysis).

<sup>19</sup> Theories of postmodernism are not univocal; what is agreed on is the significant shift in the Western ways of seeing, knowing and representing that is affecting all fields of inquiry.

<sup>20</sup> For more see Kuhn (1996) and Lyotard (1994).

one that sees this absolute reality (and knowledge thereof) as subjectively mediated and interpreted (what we may call, following Hikins and Zagacki [1988, 219], 'perspective realism').<sup>21</sup> Nowhere do we see the two alternatives more clearly than in the respective views on the nature and significance of language that they subscribe to. The first alternative *contra* the traditional view of language as representational of, and referring to, objective realities, denies that language points to anything outside itself, and in some cases even within itself by its internal linguistic relations.<sup>22</sup> The other alternative is less radical because it does not preclude a view of language in positive terms, though it apprehends language as prior to reality because (but by no means do we have an agreement how) language and life, or being in the world, are intimately related.<sup>23</sup> It views language as inextricably related to its use by speakers and listeners in a specified context within a given linguistic tradition. In effect, no aspect of a language's perceived relation to the world is privileged in determining what a sentence means, a premise that opens up the number of possible avenues that one may have recourse to in determining the meaning of an utterance. Common to both of these views would be the notion that language is significant in determining the world we know, meaning that reality is relative to language (only that in the first alternative it is an illusory one, while in the second it is more or less a subjective/perspectival one).

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<sup>21</sup> See Polanyi (1958).

<sup>22</sup> *Contra* the understanding argued for by Saussure and company (see above), hence the Derridean 'there is nothing outside the text'. Thus, in the absence of an outside reference or the transcendently signified in language, what we have is an endless differential network of signs referring infinitely to signs-and-more-signs (Derrida 1981, 280).

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger (1962) in *Being and Time* and 'the later' Wittgenstein (1953) in *Philosophical Investigations* are usually discussed as significant contributors to this philosophy of language.

Whereas literary (and arguably poststructural) approaches may be said to recover the contemporaneity of the Bible, and also something of its universal character and value and voice, and are, in consequence, capable of availing it for use by the Church, they have not so much solved the problems caused by exclusive historical readings of the Bible as replaced them with a different kind of problem. The historical dimension of the Bible together with its theological consequences is absolutely important to Christianity, and in the first instance underpins its universal and permanent value for the Church. Questions of 'what did happen?', of the theophany of God in Jesus, what he (Jesus) taught, why he was executed, his resurrection, the Easter experiences, and others, are of too huge a theological significance to Christian communities to be cast aside. The following should suffice to make this clear.

In writing that 'Christianity started with a particular historical person, his works and words, his life and death: Jesus of Nazareth. Creed and faith, symbol and dogma are merely the expressions of response to this Jesus of history', Koester (1971, 205ff) brings our attention to the place that Jesus has in the canon of the New Testament by drawing out the point that, however conceived, and whatever the diversity, it seems axiomatic that the New Testament writings are witnesses to, and deepening reflections and interpretations of, Jesus, by communities that formed, in the first place (directly and indirectly), on account of faith in him. Precisely because of their *historical referent* (we may call it the 'Christ event'), which is understood as a once-for-all phenomenal event, these writings assume fundamental theological importance in, and have been privileged by, Christian communities as the primary, if not the only

available, authentic witness and interpretations of the same. We are inevitably dependent on those writings for any witness and interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, any comprehension of the nature of Christianity – its faith, life and order – today, and of Jesus in particular, must have the canon as its point of departure to have any legitimacy of being Christian. Consequently, approaches that ignore this historical character of the Bible in attempting to hear its voice and to recover its theological significance for the Church today undermine its voice in the end. In short, interpretations of the Bible that look for its meaning *via* the contemporary reader, and/or the text, cut off from all historical reference of the text are, from the perspective of theological interpretations of the Bible, problematic. Textual readings and reader-response readings in and of themselves (ahistoric, synchronic, textually immanent) are ill-equipped to provide theological interpretations of the Bible.<sup>24</sup> They may provide aesthetic and edifying readings of the Bible that make it alive for today (Brown 1988), but, in ignoring the historical references of the Bible, they undercut the very theological significance that makes it important for today. So, they too precipitate the need for theological interpretation.

Some scholars have sought to address these problems by arguing for certain forms of theological interpretations or by reading the Bible in certain ways. On account of the limitations of time and space, we shall limit our discussion to five such scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who seem to be leading, and representative, figures (or have led and been representative), at least in the North-Atlantic region. We will begin by

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<sup>24</sup> Childs (1992) puts it thus: "The threat lies in divorcing the Bible when seen as literature from its theological reality to which scripture bears witness. When the focus of the analysis lies in the "imaginative construal" of the reader, the text is robbed of all determinative meaning within various

looking at the most recent forms of theological interpretations proposed in biblical scholarship.

## **2.2 ELEMENTS DEFINITIVE OF THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS AND HEBREWS**

### **2.2.1. Stephen Fowl: Goal and Context**

Stephen Fowl (1998b) in *Engaging Scripture* has proposed a model of theological interpretation where interpretations of the Bible are considered to be theological when their religious goals serve the Christian communities in their pursuit to live faithfully before God in the light of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> Discussing at some length the relationship of Christians with the Scripture (2-13), he argues that Christian communities look to the Bible as 'the standard for their faith, practice and worship' (2), which necessitates biblical interpretation and the embodying of the same, a practice that he understands as multi-faceted, diverse, and ongoing. Consequently, he proposes a model of theological interpretation that involves 'a complex interaction in which Christian convictions, practices and concerns are brought to bear on the scriptural interpretation in ways that both shape that interpretation and are shaped by

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theories of reader response. The effect is to render the biblical text mute for theology and to deconstruct its tradition in a way equally destructive as the nineteenth-century historicists' (723).

<sup>25</sup> What Fowl argues for in this book is consistent with his previous works, which, for the purposes of his argument, he seems to bring together here. For more see, 'The Ethics of Interpretation; or What's Left Over After the Elimination of Meaning' (Fowl 1990); *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Fowl and Jones 1991); 'Making Stealing Possible: Criminal Reflections on Building an Ecclesial Common Life' (Fowl 1993); 'Who Can Read Abraham's Story' (Fowl 1994); 'Texts Do Not Have Ideologies' (Fowl 1995a); 'How To Read the Spirit and How the Spirit Reads' (Fowl 1995b); and 'Christology and Ethics in Phil 2:5-11' (Fowl 1998a). It should be noted that most of his work cited above is, from different perspectives, composed of his arguments on the place that Christian communities have in determining biblical interpretations, i.e., they are composed mainly of writings about the way that Christian communities' convictions, concerns, and practices inform and are informed by biblical interpretation. What is new in this, the 1998 book, is his theoretical underpinning of such theological interpretations (see 'underdetermined interpretations' below) that does not constrain the diverse and particular interpretative interests of Christians in interpreting the Bible.

it' (8). But what does this entail and what does Fowl exactly mean? A significant element of his proposal is the prominence it gives to Christian communities as the locus of biblical interpretation, both in terms of the context in which the interpretation occurs, and in terms of the determination of the meaning and significance of the Bible. This is seen clearly in his discussion of three accounts of Biblical interpretation: 'determinate', 'anti-determinate', and 'underdetermined', of which the 'underdetermined' is crucial in the theoretical underpinning of his model. To him, determinate interpretations of the Bible (33-40) are those that view the biblical text to have one meaning intrinsic to it, and therefore 'through the application of some set of interpretative procedures' (34) that meaning can be uncovered. (Implicitly, he has in mind here historical criticism and certain forms of literary criticism which, respectively, understand meaning to be with the author of the text or immanent in the text.) This meaning is then used as a basis for Christian doctrine and practice so that stable determinate meanings amount to stable Christian doctrine and practice. The main problem that he identifies in this is the assumption that 'matters of doctrine and practice are straightforwardly determined by biblical interpretation and never the other way round' (34). Fowl disputes this and argues that ecclesial practices and concerns play a significant role in biblical interpretation. Another problem he points out is that views of the biblical text having a single, stable determinate meaning engender difficulties with regard to the Old Testament (36-37), on account of numerous sections in the Old Testament that, unless interpreted in another sense other than what is directly in the text, will not be of any use to the Christian community.



Anti-determinate interpretations are the opposite of determinate ones. For Fowl's purposes, he understands them to be those readings of the biblical text that challenge the dominant readings of the same: 'a particular account of determinate interpretation provides the foil against which to offer the view that interpretation is not determinate' (41). Of course poststructuralist approaches to biblical interpretations are at issue here (accordingly, he focuses on aspects of Derrida's writings in this section [41-54] to illustrate anti-determinate interpretations). Fowl thinks they are more appropriate than determinate interpretations because of the plurality of meanings they spawn, making them consonant with 'the diverse and particular aims Christians bring to biblical interpretation' (56). But, he is wary of the fact that they can 'result in paralysis and instability in practice' (56).

In contradistinction to determinate and antideterminate interpretations, Fowl then proposes his preferred approach to biblical interpretation, 'underdetermined' biblical interpretation. Central to this approach of interpretation is the narrowing and indeed substitution of what textual 'meaning' entails in order to guide theological interpretations of the Bible that he argues for. Taking his cue from Jeffrey Stout,<sup>26</sup> he argues that 'meaning' in biblical interpretation should be discarded because of competing, if not confused, understandings of the term at a formal level (57). The result is failure in interpretation:

If interpretation is a matter of discovering meaning, and is therefore bound to run amuck when informed by mistaken assumptions about what meaning is, then literary criticism, religious studies, classics, history - in short, all disciplines involving the interpretation of texts - will consist largely in failure to deliver the goods.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In 'What is the Meaning of a Text' (Stout 1982).

<sup>27</sup> Stout (1982, 1).

So what should be sought for in replacement are precise terms that suit the interpretative interests behind interpretations. He says; 'Explicating textual meaning in terms of varied and diverse interpretive aims, interests and practices will provide us with a more manageable way of addressing interpretive disputes' (58). This narrowing down, or replacement, of textual meaning by interpretative aims, interests and practices is what he calls an underdetermined account of interpretation. The advantage of this, he notes, is that it allows Christians to engage the Bible in diverse and particular ways 'without having to fit it all under a single determinate theory of interpretation' (59) or, implicitly, recourse to any theory of interpretation. Thus his advocacy for an underdetermined account of biblical interpretation, as he states it, allows 'theological convictions, ecclesial practices, and communal and social concerns' to 'shape and be shaped by biblical interpretation' (60). The focus is clearly on the Christian community in its given context as the determinant of biblical interpretation and not a particular approach, historical or literary, to the same.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the remainder of the book is an instance of this as he illustrates how this may take place by focusing on some convictions and practices of Christian communities (vigilance and virtue for example) and how they shape, or ought to shape, interpretation, and are shaped by it.

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<sup>28</sup> These arguments are also found in two of his later writings. See '(Mis)reading the Face of God: the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (Ayres and Fowl 1999) and, especially, 'The Role of Authorial Intention in Theological Interpretation of Scripture' (Fowl 2000), where he contends: '.. the end for which Christians are called to interpret, debate and embody Scripture are found in such manifestations as faithful life, worship and ever deeper communion with the Triune God and with others, and that these ends neither necessitate any specific critical practice nor accord privilege to the intentions of a scriptural text's human author' (73).

Fowl's model is commendable to the extent that it accentuates the place of Christian communities as the context of theological interpretation. Theological interpretations of the Bible should be orientated to Christian communities which in the first instance hold the Bible to be definitive for their faith, life and order. Here, not only are biblical interpretations honed to serve the Church, but also, at the same time, the Church acts as a theological parameter into which the interpretation of the Bible is supposed to take place. The strength of his model lies in its isolating the *why* or the *goal* of theological interpretation and arguing that this goal constitutes and defines theological interpretations quite apart from hermeneutical procedures or the content of the Bible. For this reason, his model of theological interpretation helps us to understand that not every contemporaneous reading of the Bible is theological.<sup>29</sup>

However, two interrelated problems attend his conception of theological interpretation. The first is a theoretical contradiction. According to Fowl's reasoning, underdetermined readings may use, but are not dependent or restricted to, any single determinate theory of interpretation. This frees Christians from the restrictions of the logic of any critical approach to the Bible and allows them to engage the Bible in diverse and particular ways pertinent to their struggles to live faithfully before God. But a closer scrutiny of underdetermined interpretation

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<sup>29</sup> An important point that makes it clear that not every reading of the Bible, whether for aesthetic, political or ethical purposes, or for purposes of raising questions of power, exclusion, emancipation, domination etc in conjunction with the study of the Bible, or even one that relates it to the present in whichever way, is a theological interpretation. It underlines the fact that implicating a reading for today is not in itself definitive of theological interpretation, and may well rule out as non-theological interpretations of the Bible numerous readings of the Bible - like liberation theologies (Siker 1996), black theologies (Cone 1989), feminist theologies (Fiorenza 1988), and psychological readings (Winks 1980) in vogue today and classify them as biblical interpretations of some other kind. This is the reason why we hesitate to consider the interpretations of the Bible from such theologies here as definitive for mapping out the most appropriate theological interpretation of Hebrews in Africa. See also footnote 45.

against the background of theories of general hermeneutics suggests that it is itself embedded in a theory of determinate interpretation, viz., reader-response criticism, which is a critical approach. In arguing that it is the aims, interests, and practices of Christian communities that determine, or ought to determine, biblical interpretations and not the text nor authorial intentions, Fowl has not removed underdetermined interpretations of the Bible from dependence on any theory of interpretation altogether but, rather, has moved biblical interpretations to the sphere of theories of interpretation that privilege the reader or the community of readers (in his case ecclesial communities) as the determinants of what the text is all about. This indeed is the hallmark of reader-response criticisms which are against the 'referential' and 'intentionalist' view that a text inscribes its author's purpose and ought to be understood in its historical context, and against formalist views that meaning lies in the text's structural signification.<sup>30</sup>

By thus placing his model of theological interpretation of the Bible in the sphere of reader orientated approaches, Fowl's proposal gives way to the second problem, which is theological. Precisely because of its reader-orientated basis, Fowl, in his model, fails to deal adequately with the historical component and character of the Bible, and its implications for any theological interpretation of the same. Yet, it seems to me, that the theological interpretation of the Bible cannot ignore or do without reference to the Bible and survive as a valid theological interpretation. For (as we argued above) making the Bible contemporaneous by the rule that it is the aims, concerns and practices of Christian communities which determine its meaning, at the expense of divorcing it (the Bible) from the religious reality it refers to

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<sup>30</sup> For definitive writings on reader-response, see Fish (1980) and Iser (1980).

removes, in the final analysis, the very basis of its importance to (hence interpretation by) the Christian communities. Fowl does not discuss the all-important issue of the nature of Biblical texts<sup>31</sup> as religious writings that were formulated in the historical contingencies of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean world, which is fundamental to any theological interpretation. Using Adam,<sup>32</sup> he cites, and then dismisses in passing, the theological arguments of Käsemann and others that historical criticism is 'needed to repulse docetic interpretive tendencies' (185), on the grounds that the issue in docetic Christological controversy is 'about the nature of Christ's humanity and divinity not historical details about the life of Jesus. Historical Criticism may in some cases provide the latter; it cannot adjudicate the former' (186). However, the verdict that Käsemann, in Fowl's judgement, may have picked the wrong turf to argue for the theological importance of historical criticism does not invalidate its theological importance, viz. that of all interpretative moves, it first and foremost honours (i.e., takes into account) the historical contingencies of the beginnings and core of Christianity and its sacred writings in Palestine around Jesus of Nazareth; and, secondly, attempts to honour the scenarios of the sacred writings' original readers so that what these original readers believed they meant and said might come through. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter this is theologically necessary for any theological interpretation that is to be regarded as Christian. So we may conclude that reader-based biblical interpretations

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<sup>31</sup> Whether this is through the prism of inspiration, canon, credal or confessional identity, and thus authoritative, universal and of permanent value. His discussion on Scripture (2-8) is not helpful for it brackets out this discussion and simply considers the implications for interpretation of the Bible as the scriptures of the Church.

<sup>32</sup> See Adam (1996) for the refutation of Käsemann's his position.

by themselves are not adequate as theological interpretations of the Bible and would not be helpful if used alone in reading Hebrews.

### **2.2.2. Francis Watson: Configuration of Canon, Church and World**

Francis Watson, in *Text, Church and World* (1994), offers a highly sophisticated and diffuse theological interpretation proposal. His summary of the position he develops in the book that: 'Biblical interpretation should concern itself primarily with the theological issues raised by the biblical text within our contemporary ecclesial, cultural and socio-political contexts' (vii), only points to, but is not particularly helpful in enabling us to grasp, his arguments. However, his introduction is slightly more helpful. There, we are led to understand that biblical interpretation within the configuration of text, Church and world, i.e., the text (specifically the canon as the final form of the text), itself not autonomous but located in the Church which in turn lives in the world, defines theological interpretation:

Text, Church and world are thus related to one another as three concentric circles. The text, the innermost circle, is located within the Church, and the Church is located within the world, the outermost circle. There seems to be no reason in principle why biblical interpretation should not be practised within this hermeneutical circle (11).

However, the delineation and the outworking of this theological hermeneutic as presented in his book is rather complex. We will begin to make sense of it first by looking at his argument on 'text' in the aforementioned configuration.

Over and against a particular strain of historical-criticism which betrays a 'diachronic bias' (15), thus perceiving the Bible as a collection of (unrelated) bits and pieces,<sup>33</sup> Watson argues for an engagement with the final form of the Bible as requisite for theological interpretation. This is on account of the genre of the biblical text (which he understands largely to be narrative), the Bible's ecclesial form and usage, and 'the theological judgement that the subject-matter or content of the biblical texts is inseparable from their form' (17). He agrees (19-25) in principle with Hans Frei,<sup>34</sup> that the Bible's literary genre is narrative and as such (i.e., from a literary perspective) is irreducible. He also agrees with Frei<sup>35</sup> that, from a theological perspective, form and content cannot be separated, so that, for example, the identity of Christ cannot be separated from the Gospel narrative (24). However, unlike Frei, he argues that the narrative of the Bible is not self-contained (a realism isolated from reality or one that absorbs reality), but has relations to extratextual, historical, and political reality (25-29). The claim of truth about the story of the Bible, he points out, 'liberates it from self-containment and enables it to shed its light on worldly realities - now, and not just in the parousia' (29).

On the Bible's ecclesial form and usage, he agrees (30-45) with Brevard Childs<sup>36</sup> that: 'In the final, canonical form of the text, the redactors prepared it for an authoritative role within a communal context. Phenomenological description of the

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<sup>33</sup> I am careful to point out here that it is a particular strain he is against, not historical criticism *en bloc*. This is because contrary to the charges of some (e.g. Rowland 1995), Watson is not against historical approaches to the Bible in their entirety (see Watson 1995 for his own clarification). In this particular book, he does not reject historico-critical approaches but simply attenuates and relativizes their importance for theological interpretation.

<sup>34</sup> In *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (Frei 1974).

<sup>35</sup> In *The Doctrine of Christ* (Frei 1975).

<sup>36</sup> Especially in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Canon* (Childs 1979).

sacred scriptures of the two religious communities [Jewish, Christian] can make this fact visible, and it can also encompass the fact that these texts continue to fulfil that communal role today' (43). For this reason, theological interpretation must engage with the final text and not the pieces isolated by historical critical investigations. However, he points out that the final form of the Bible as a basis for theological interpretation so justified by communal contexts, i.e., canon, 'is not a sufficient mediation between the "original texts" and the present' (43). The meaning of the canon 'must be given and discovered in the midst and in the depths of the conflict-ridden situations in which it is inevitably entangled' (45). We now turn to this aspect of his perception of theological interpretation.

'Postmodernism' and 'feminist critique', which comprise a large section of Watson's book, can be understood respectively to represent the world and the Church in Watson's theological hermeneutic of text-in-Church-in-world. In consequence they should be viewed as illustrations of his theological hermeneutic, or instances of biblical interpretation 'concerned with theological issues raised by the biblical text within our contemporary ecclesial, cultural and socio-political contexts' (vii).<sup>37</sup> How then does he relate them to the text to draw a contemporary meaning from it? Two meanings are derived from the text through the use, in different ways, of two aspects of postmodernism.

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<sup>37</sup> This assessment of course is debatable because Watson, in a way characteristic of his writing in this book, does not say so. The signposts and summaries offered to help the reader follow the logic of his writing are themselves ambiguous, if not confusing. For example, the purpose given for 'part I' (at the end of p. 17) and the summary of that part which includes the purpose (on p.77) are apparently different. One often must determine for oneself the flow and coherence of his arguments!



The first is through Derrida's<sup>38</sup> writings, whose theory of indeterminacy of language he uses to read I Cor. 14 'deconstructively' (89-106). But then he counters such a reading through what he calls a theological-exegetical point of the creation story in Genesis which shows that language, relations and persons are integral to humanity (107-108) as opposed to the subjective individualism which Derrida critiques. Watson finds such a theological point brought out in the writing of Jürgen Habermas<sup>39</sup> (108-114), which he uses to read I Cor. 14. He concludes by offering a rationale of this way of theological interpretation of the Bible thus: 'Since the problem deconstruction addresses is ultimately a theological one, theological and exegetical resources were deployed to construct an alternative solution to this problem which makes better conceptual sense in face of the socio-political realities of the world outside the text' (123).

The second meaning is through a sustained look at the writings of Lyotard<sup>40</sup> on the inevitability of narrative to structuring life. This he contends has been 'a suitable conceptual tool for theology' (131) and in consequence called into use by, for example, Hauerwas<sup>41</sup> and Lindbeck.<sup>42</sup> However, the problem with this has been its rejection of meta-narratives in favour of local ones, and its subscription to the view of the Bible as non-referential to the real world. So, while holding on to the wisdom of narrative (in this case that reality is mediated through an irreducible story in textual form, the biblical text) he reads Gen. 1 in support of extra-textual reality

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<sup>38</sup> Especially *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1976).

<sup>39</sup> In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Habermas 1987).

<sup>40</sup> In *The Postmodern Condition* (1994).

<sup>41</sup> In, amongst others, *A community of Character* (1981).

<sup>42</sup> In *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984).

(140-151). The important thing to note in both these readings is not so much the material argument but the principle behind the interpretations: a contemporary situation/theory judged as theological being used to read the text, and the text in turn being used either independently, or propped up with a contemporary theory, to speak to that/a contemporary situation. In both cases, a theological meaning is apparently derived from the text, in conjunction with a contemporary issue.

Coming to the feminist critique of the Bible, Watson writes that 'through the writings of feminists, there has gradually come to light a new dimension of the oppressive law whose presence within these texts [the Bible] and the interpretative traditions they have generated is such a crucially important hermeneutical factor' (155-6). Unlike strategies of containment (161-172) seeking to contain these oppressive laws *via* contextualization (hence showing the limitation of their application), as well as feminist readings of the Hebrew Bible (173-187) which resist the texts' dominant ideological perspective and seek to rehabilitate marginalized figures, Watson offers a way of understanding the Bible which, in his judgement, effectively deals with the problem, *viz.*, 'law' and 'gospel'. He argues that the Bible internally critiques itself and accordingly he offers some readings of the Bible (e.g. Gen. 2-3) to underscore this (191-201). We need, he writes, to 'distinguish biblical witness to the liberating gospel from its entanglement in oppressive law' (155). What we gather here is a theological hermeneutic, or a theological stance to the text that is shaped by a contemporary situation, in this case women in the Church and Bible.

In the last section of his work (219ff), Watson offers theological theses/stances that go hand-in-hand with the approach to theological interpretation that he has developed in his work. (This is almost an addendum insofar as he does not point out where the theological proposals come from - whether from the text itself, the Church, or even still his own convictions.) To him, this is important because 'theology may itself constitute a hermeneutic' (241) and also, 'Hermeneutics, theology and exegesis flow into and out of each other with no fixed dividing-line; on occasions they may be practised simultaneously' (Ibid.). So for example: 'The actions of Jesus, as narrated in the gospels, must be interpreted not as isolated events but against the background of the soteriological, Christological and eschatological claims of the narratives as a whole' (247), which he understands as a trinitarian hermeneutic; or, 'Insights originating in the secular world outside the Christian community can have a positive role in assisting the community's understanding of holy scripture' (237), because the Spirit works in the society and the world; or even, 'Love of neighbour, as understood by Jesus, is a necessary hermeneutical criterion for a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament' (272).

Watson's most significant contribution to theological interpretation is that the biblical text in its final form is at the centre of interpretation in the Church, itself in the world.<sup>43</sup> This is welcome, given the tendency of some strands of historical criticism to atomize the Bible and incapacitate any engagement with it as a

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<sup>43</sup> The labours of B. Childs (1970), for instance, in pressing the case for the absolute importance of the final text for theological interpretations come to mind here. However, unlike Fowl, the shortcoming of Childs' studies lie in his failure to proceed on and show how the Bible in its final form can then be mediated to (actualized in) today's Church situations; the very charge levelled against him by Fowl (1994, 43). What this means is simply that canonical criticism on its own cannot suffice to act as a theological interpretation of the Bible, nor should be confused with it. But the Bible in its final form

meaningful whole, and as part of the canon of the Church. The other significant contribution by Watson, I think, is his bringing to the fore contemporary theological issues in which the interpretation of the Bible is done in conjunction with, or through which the Bible is read. But, taken on its own terms, there are significant shortcomings with his proposal, three that are particularly pertinent here.

The first problem lies in how to derive meaning from the final text in relation to the Church and the world. His arrangement of text-in-Church-in-world would on the face of it suggest that the text should be the starting point of theological interpretation, but this is far from clear. How exactly are we to relate or arrange this interdependent relationship of text-Church-world to effect theological interpretations? (This question is prompted by the knowledge that different arrangements will yield different results.) Should the Church primarily act as the touchstone for the theological interpretation of the biblical text as Watson seems to suggest, in asserting that it is the Church as the reading community that the Bible derives its being and rationale? Or should the world, through its theories, ethical sentiments and cultural sensibilities, be primarily the touchstone for the reading of the text (as suggested by his biblical readings in large measure determined by postmodernism and the 'feminist critique')? Or should the text be primarily read first on its own terms ('... primarily with theological issues raised by the biblical text' [vii]) by whatever critical approach before it is related to the Church and world (as he seems to do in reading Gen. chapter 37 through literary-critical means)? Or are we to ignore any critical approach to the Bible and let the Church and the world determine

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is, as is the case in Fowl's model, an essential element in, or even basic to, theological interpretations of the Bible.

determine readings of the text through whichever reading strategy that suits them (as demonstrated by his work)? This fact of a loose undefined (or defined but not clearly worked out) interrelationship of text-Church-world in Watson's theological hermeneutic makes his proposal very fluid, indeed too vague, to be usefully applied for the sake of theological interpretations. Because of this, for example, there is no reason why his work should not be understood as a systematic theology, and not theological interpretation of the Bible, both in its engagement with contemporary issues theologically and in its theological proposals for interpreting the Bible, in which the Bible is called upon in an *ad hoc* manner to (using Kelsey's analyses of the use of the Bible in theology)<sup>44</sup> provide *data*, a *warrant*, and *backing* for his theology, or theological position.<sup>45</sup>

The second problem is the place given to the Church in his configuration of text-Church-world for theological interpretation purposes. Despite Watson's affirmation that 'The primary reading community within which the biblical text is located is the Christian Church' (3), and as such, of critical hermeneutical significance 'as the location from which the text derives its being and its rationale' (Ibid.), the

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<sup>44</sup> Kelsey (1975, 122-134).

<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that Fowl (1998, 23) perceives his work more as a systematic theology than a theological interpretation of the Bible. It is worth pointing out this distinction for there are differences between theologies using the Bible for theologizing, and theological interpretations of the Bible. Ogden (1996), for example, points out that theological interpretation of the Bible 'is a special case of interpreting the biblical writings that at the same time is also a special case not only of theology in general, in the sense of critical reflection on Christian witness, as distinct from the critical validation of its aim to validity, but also of historical theology in particular, understood as critical interpretation of the meaning of Christian witness, as distinct from the critical validation of its claims to validity that is the proper business, in their different way, of systematic and practical theology. Specifically, it is the case of such critical interpretation in which the *interpretanda*, the meaning of whose Christian witness is to be understood and explained, are the biblical writings' (184-85). For our purposes, it suffices to note that the use of the Bible in and for theology (except in some strands of biblical theology) does not amount to theological interpretations even in cases where the Bible is interpreted in the cause of the theologies being formulated, as seems to be the case in Watson's proposal. Of course,

outworking of his proposal marginalizes the Church. The only place in the book directly given to the Church in playing a part in theological interpretations is in establishing the final form of the text. He is reticent toward the Church, its convictions of the text, its goals in reading them and the like, and how that might affect theological interpretation of the Bible.<sup>46</sup>

The third and, from the perspective of theological interpretation, most important problem is that, apparently, Watson does not honour the historical horizon (if we may borrow from Hans-Georg Gadamer)<sup>47</sup> of the text as crucial for theological interpretation. At best, he relegates it to the periphery in his theological hermeneutic (see also footnote '33'). Even though he criticizes the narrative approach of Hans Frei as bracketing out extra-textual reality, which is important in correlating text to Church and world, and in addressing 'the Church's proper concern with the fundamental truth of the biblical story of salvation' (29), he is reluctant in letting historical reality contemporaneous with the text be an integral part of the process of identifying the meaning of the text for Church and world today. Indeed at certain points he deliberately distances his work from historical approaches which honour the horizon of the biblical text. For example, in reading I Cor. 14 deconstructively, he writes:

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this does not mean that theological interpretations cannot be of service to biblical theologies or even for that matter, theology (the point of our study!).

<sup>46</sup> Bockmuehl (1998) remarks that 'Watson's conception of the "Church" remains remarkably abstract and detached from the life and worship of any particular ecclesial polity' (290), and more importantly, that his theological interpretations are not related to 'present-day experiences of real Churches' (291).

<sup>47</sup> In *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 1975).

The deconstructive reading of the Pauline text has already secured for us a certain distance from the 1<sup>st</sup> century contingencies that preoccupy the scholarly literature, thus helping to open up the further possibility of a theological reflection on the primary text in which a simultaneous, coinhering engagement with contemporary theological issues excludes a narrow biblicism in both its conservative and its historical-critical forms (103).

Like all other approaches that downplay the historical contingencies of the text, the result of this is to undermine the text's theological import, which is anchored in the historical contingencies without which the text would not have come to being. Theological interpretations of the Bible must, while acknowledging its permanent and universal value, give credit to its distance and historical contingencies precisely on account of which efforts are made to identify its permanent and universal value for every culture and historical situation.<sup>48</sup> So whereas reading Hebrews, as part of the canon, in the Church and for the Church may avail it for use in the life and faith of the Church, to do so in isolation from its historical horizon (as Watson's and Fowl's theological approaches suggest) is to undercut the very theological significance that we are trying to recover in it for the Church today. The same would apply in dealing with theological issues raised by Hebrews (as Watson's proposal points to) or in trying to read meaning from it through contemporary theological issues (as Watson illustrates) without dialogue with its historical horizon. We therefore need to pay attention to theological interpretations that take cognisance of the historical contingencies of the Bible as integral to theological interpretations before pressing our case for the form of theological interpretation most suitable for reading Hebrews.

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<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that Watson (1997, 66) has elsewhere made it clear that he does not consider this as a concern of theological interpretations of the Bible.

### 2.2.3. *Robert Morgan: Theories of Religion*

First we must note that Robert Morgan in *Biblical Interpretation* (Barton and Morgan, 1988) does not set out to propose theological interpretations of the Bible *per se* but chiefly to relate or bridge critical scholarship and religious faith. In his own words: 'The constructive aim of this book is to make explicit a model for bridging the gulf between critical scholarship and religious faith' (25). (Religious faith here having to do with religious communities' beliefs and practices.) Two reasons make his book highly relevant to our discussion at this point. The first is that the critical scholarship he chiefly has in mind is historical criticism. Because of the mentioned significance and implications of historical approaches to the Bible, what Morgan has to say about bridging historical approaches or readings of the Bible and the beliefs and practices of religious communities is important. (His concerns though with the importance of historical criticism as an instance of critical scholarship lie in factors other than the theological ones we have mentioned, but they will not concern us here.) Relating historical approaches to the Bible and faith for today is, writ large, of fundamental importance to theological interpretation. This brings us to the second reason for the relevance of his book: his attempts to hold reason (i.e., historical criticism) and faith (religious beliefs and practices) together. It is significant to note that Morgan himself identifies the linking and holding together of scholarship and faith as the task of theological interpretation (174). With this in mind we may proceed now to examine Morgan's proposed theological interpretation.



The theological interpretation proposed by Morgan is to be found in his model for bridging the gulf between critical scholarship and religious faith, a model he points out that, 'has been present throughout the 150-year triumphal march of historical study in modern biblical interpretation' (25). His proposal, in other words, is more of a recovery of theological interpretation, which he discerns to have been in operation in the work of some key biblical interpreters in the past (here especially D. F. Strauss [1808-1874], F. C. Baur [1792-1860], W. Vatke, and R. Bultmann [1884-1976]) who combined their New Testament research with theological interests. This theological interpretation present in the biblical interpretation of these scholars, as he discerns it, is a philosophy that they used to relate history to faith. His discussion of D. F. Strauss is a good illustration. Morgan points out that Strauss<sup>49</sup> judged the gospels to be unhistorical (due to inconsistencies between them and to their stories of miracles) but used their narrative 'for fermenting and distilling into a philosophical-theological truth acceptable to modern (Hegelian) educated people' (49-50). In other words, Straus re-interpreted the Bible in a way that suited contemporary sensibilities. He did this, as Morgan argues (45-52), through a critical destruction of the gospels' history, which made way for Hegelian philosophy and a theological illumination of the Gospels' stories understood now as 'Myth'. The use of Hegelian philosophy (a vision of God and the world) for theological interpretation of the Bible is also present, albeit in different ways (historical reconstruction especially), in the interpretations of the Bible by Baur and Vatke (62-76).<sup>50</sup> However, their philosophies

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<sup>49</sup> 'Who 'more than anyone else' Morgan (Barton and Morgan [1988]) writes, 'drew explicit attention to the task of theological interpretation' (50).

<sup>50</sup> For example, Baur unlike Strauss did not 'destroy' the historicity of the Gospels so much as use Hegel for an ontological ground for his understanding of that history and in consequence a reconstruction of that history which he interpreted, again, using Hegel, for his contemporaries.

could not hold for long, nor, with them, their syntheses of New Testament understandings and theological meanings derived from them. This situation, in Morgan's judgement, led to the drifting apart of biblical scholarship and theological interpretation. ('Historical scholarship became more and more positivistic, and normative [i.e., believing] talk of God [as opposed to merely historical description of the biblical writers' beliefs] disappeared from biblical as from other historical scholarship' [69].) It was Bultmann (but on the predicate of a different philosophy) and his school who was to take up this trail blazed by the mentioned three, but, like these three, their efforts, Morgan bemoans, are widely ignored today (76).

Therefore Morgan, *contra* the two-stage model of theological interpretation involving a dynamic from historical description (biblical scholarship) to theological judgement (systematic theology), which offers no account of how the movement from the historical to the theological should be done (185), proposes a theory of religion and reality as key to theological interpretation. A theory of religion would act as a crucial theological pre-understanding on the part of the reader to the Bible, making way for, or enabling, a theological interpretation. It would also act as the wider context that 'links reason (rational methods *like historical criticism*) and faith (religious understandings of the Bible)' (187, *italics mine*). Such is the strategy present in all the aforementioned biblical scholars of the past who combined historical scholarship with theological interests: 'Schleiermacher and Hegel proposed different theories of religion and reality, but both theories elicited critical historical study of the Bible and Christianity, and related this to the Christian's sense of God. Strauss destroyed history to make room for his kind of theology; his proposal too,

involved a theory of religion and reality' (188). Morgan argues that the advantage of this strategy is that it uses 'the rational methods on their own terms, but sets them in a wider context that embraces both the witness of the texts and the modern theological interpreter's own understanding of the subject-matter - which alone makes possible a theological understanding of the texts'(187). In summary, a theory of religion brought to the biblical text by an interpreter makes 'a rational theological interpretation' (188) of the Bible possible. As Morgan himself puts it: 'The special feature of theological interpretation is that a theological belief and theory of religion is brought into the act of interpretation' (189). This granted, it would seem that the task of those concerned with theological interpretation would be to choose which theory of religion is best suited for the job (presumably one that is compatible with Christian truth claims).

The strength of his proposal is in deliberately letting theological belief (also theory of religion) have a role in effecting theological interpretations of the Bible. As we have already seen through Watson's model, theological beliefs can themselves act as a hermeneutic for theological interpretations of the Bible. This (as we shall argue) is crucial in the theological interpretation of Hebrews. Two problems, however, attend the articulation of Morgan's proposal. First, Morgan gives no precision or direction to the kinds of theological beliefs that would be determinative for interpretations of the Bible. The fact that he talks of theories of religion and theological beliefs in one breath epitomizes this, for the two may amount to two mutually exclusive notions. Accordingly, he is also reticent on the source of such theological beliefs (or even theories of religion). This vagueness in his proposal makes its application for

theological interpretation difficult, and may in the end counter efforts towards theological interpretations. Together with this, we are not sure whether Morgan is advocating a comprehensive theological belief to be brought to the Bible in every instance to enable theological interpretation of it, or whether he has in mind *ad hoc* theological beliefs such as the ones suggested by Watson.

One of the values of Morgan's proposal is in pointing us to the labours of the past as resourceful in our efforts towards theological interpretations of the Bible. This is a distinct contribution because he points us back to the period of modern critical studies of the Bible, which is perceived to have drowned out theological interpretations of the Bible in favour of historical studies.<sup>51</sup> However, there is more during this period in terms of understanding the problem that necessitates theological interpretations, and consequently, in developing appropriate theological interpretations today, than what he brings to our attention through the key biblical scholars he looks at as having theologically interpreted the Bible. In what follows, we want to pursue this briefly before we propose subsequently the elements of an appropriate theological hermeneutic for the reading of Hebrews in Africa as shall be demonstrated in this thesis. We will argue that Bultmann's theological interpretations reiterate why theological interpretations are needed and in consequence show a way that the abiding significance of the New Testament could be accessed, while Barth's theological interpretations help in making us realize the

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<sup>51</sup> The others who point us to the past for a recovery of theological interpretations point to earlier periods. See for example Wall (2000) who points to the Church Fathers, Yeago (1994) who points to the patristic period and Steinmetz (1980) who points to the medieval period.

fundamental place of the subject matter of the Bible (i.e., theology) in theological interpretations.

#### **2.2.4. *Rudolph Bultmann: Access to the New Testament's Abiding Significance***

Rudolph Bultmann is one of those featured in Morgan's book as employing a theory of religion to link critical studies of the Bible and faith. It seems to me that, of those featured, he is the one who most clearly grasped the problem brought about by historical critical studies of the Bible; a point that is not the focus, as such, of Morgan's study, but which we turn to now. As Poland (1985), (most of what follows depends on his analysis of Bultmann vis-à-vis biblical interpretation) puts it:

The task of Hermeneutical reflection, in Bultmann's view, is to chart a conflict: while the Christian Church professes the New Testament writings, as Scripture, to be of abiding religious significance, modern exegetes necessarily view the New Testament texts as documents originating in, and addressed to, an autonomous world, culturally and temporally alien from our own. The problem of myth and truth, and of the meaning of the New Testament writings, are thus now irrevocably annexed to, and transformed by, the question of the nature of historical understanding. Bultmann's hermeneutical program is an attempt to reckon with this network of issues precisely in their interrelation (11).

Of course, as pointed out earlier, historical criticism was enabled by scientific rationalism. Emerging as part of a modern world view, it could not be reconciled to the mythological picture of the world painted in the biblical writings. Bultmann recognized this when he wrote, 'modern thought as we have inherited it brings with it criticism of the New Testament view of the world' (Bultmann 1955, 256). He, therefore, grasped the Bible as 'originating in, and addressed to, an autonomous world, culturally and temporally alien from our own' (Poland 1985, 11), and understood this as a cardinal problem to be reckoned with in theological

interpretations of the Bible. Understanding this problem was in turn critical to his development of a theological interpretation of the Bible, since, although the Bible was historically and culturally distant, it still had an abiding religious significance to the Christian Church.<sup>52</sup> The central question for Bultmann was how to access the abiding significance of the New Testament (the Kerygma) expressed within the alien and historically contingent (mythology) without compromising that significance: 'Can the Kerygma be interpreted apart from mythology? Can we recover the truth of the Kerygma for men who do not think in mythological terms without forfeiting its character as Kerygma?' (Bultmann 1961, 3). Poland (1985) identifies Bultmann's fourfold response (all interrelated and hinging on the category of *existentiell*).

At the risk of oversimplification,<sup>53</sup> the first and second responses are through a general hermeneutic of understanding a text, which is distant from one's world. Here Bultmann, using Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and Heidegger and Jonas respectively, argues for an access to alien and distant historical texts enabled by an existential understanding of history (39-40, 43-45) and language (41). If history is understood as an arena of possibilities and not a chronology of facts, then cultural and historical distance of historical texts can be circumvented when we are caught up in the texts' inquiries, and claims of human beings, that beguile us as well. Texts here are understood accordingly as expressions of life, possible ways of understanding

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<sup>52</sup> Cahill (1977) summarizes the objectives of the work and life of Bultmann thus: 'the *mediation* of the Christian tradition, the attempt to make a particular religious vision and its theological interpretation fruitful *for the present* and future' (231, *emphasis mine*).

<sup>53</sup> The complexity of Bultmann's writings is well noted (Cahill 1977, 231 and Riches 1993, 70-78), but still some general and succinct analyses with regard to his contribution to theological interpretations of the Bible is possible. Poland (1985) on whom we base our discussion of Bultmann (see 'Bultmann in Retrospect', 11-63), has done a good job by looking at Bultmann's work strictly in relation to biblical interpretation. Other helpful looks at Bultmann with respect to biblical interpretation can be found in Robinson (1964, 29-77) and Riches (1993, 50-88).

existence, and summoning us to decide 'whether or not one will make that possibility one's own' (40), speaking out of, and to matters of, human existence. And if language is understood not as a literal correspondence of word to meaning but as an expression of an author's intention (thus subject to distortion), interpretation of a historically distant text would be to uncover 'the possibility of existence the author intends to express through language's objective formulas and symbols' (41). Here we encounter a polysemic view of language through which 'Bultmann moves beyond the surface or literal level of the writings to expose a deeper, hidden meaning there' (37). This way, as Poland points out, 'biblical texts, as texts among other texts, can have meaning for the present despite their mythological world view' (36).

The third response is through demythologizing or existential interpretations. Mythology is for Bultmann 'the use of imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world, and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side' (Bultmann 1961, 10); crucially, it is the "'objectifying" mode of thought' (Poland 1985, 30). However, when it comes to the New Testament, myths' intentions are not to objectify the transcendent, who cannot be objectified, but to express 'an existence as it is grounded and limited by the transcendent' (36). This which myth intends to express is not limited to the forms in which it is communicated; other forms can be called upon where appropriate. Indeed, Bultmann finds that 'the conceptual categories of existential philosophy provide a means to express the intentions of New Testament myth in a form intelligible to modern readers' (36). Here we see Heidegger's existential philosophy providing the entry point to the New Testament both in terms of understanding it and in providing an

idiom for explicating it for today. In some sense, this is one aspect of Bultmann's demythologizing, concerned with the form of New Testament writings.

The other is 'to remove the false "stumbling block" that mythological statements present for modern thought, so that the true and permanent *skandalon*, the Kerygma can come to view' (47). In Bultmann's view, this is a requirement of faith itself which demands freedom 'from its association with every world view expressed in objective terms, whether it be a mythical or scientific one' (Bultmann 1951-55, 131). Such demythologizing is already at work in the New Testament in the case, for example, of Paul's and John's rebuttals of some gnostic views' (48), and in Luther's 'Christ against Scripture' principle.

It is this aspect of demythologizing that Bultmann calls *Sachkritik*, content criticism (238). Through the Kerygma (which is the very intention of the New Testament, to proclaim Christ understood in the tension between law and faith and best explicated by Paul and John) theological judgements can be made on the faithfulness of chosen portions of New Testament. Although here demythologizing moves beyond concerns with form, to the content of the New Testament.

The fourth response is through a particular understanding of the way in which the religious significance of the New Testament is actualized. In Bultmann's view, as Poland simply puts it, the New Testament 'is actualized in the present as a proclamation that is appropriated by faith through grace' (32). Poland goes on to point out:



Bultmann thus upholds Luther's distinction between the proclaimed Word and the words of Scripture: while the latter may be understood in the present through existential interpretation, Bultmann argues, the New Testament becomes Word of God only in the present event in which it is appropriated by faith (Ibid.).

This distinction means that whereas demythologized, or existentially interpreted, biblical texts can tell us about Christian self-understanding, faith occurs only 'within the event of individual decision, as the "eschatological event" which the Kerygma proclaims is "reactualized" in the concrete experience of the believer' (50). In other words, to understand the text as a possibility of existence that it communicates is one thing, to actualize it is another.

So, we may conclude, what was principally at issue in Bultmann's theological interpretation, what it sought to achieve, was a mode of access to the Bible for modern people which was precipitated by both the Bible's abiding significance to the Church and, at one and the same time, its historical and cultural distance. His use of existential philosophy, as pointed out by Morgan, provided such an access.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the value of Bultmann for theological interpretations of the Bible is not only in his offer of a theory of religion for such an access, but in his underlining of the problem that precipitates the need for such an access: cultural and historical distance of the Bible (which must be respected in the first place to be at all an issue). His respect for the horizon of the Bible may have lacked the theological importance attached to truth concerning the Bible's extra-textual reference (especially Jesus of

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<sup>54</sup> We may here mention Meyer (1994, 151-74), a New Testament scholar, who has offered recently another a mode of access to the horizon of the New Testament for modern people, viz., of 'the phenomenon or fact of evil' (158), by appropriating Bernard Lonergan's philosophy. 'If evil is a problem, and if the problem must have a solution, the question arises; what is the solution? What has God done and what is God doing about human evil?' (159). Edward Schillebeeckx's theological

Nazareth)<sup>55</sup> but nonetheless, Bultmann points out with sufficient clarity what must be grappled with in any theological interpretation.<sup>56</sup> He therefore echoes the problem as identified in our introduction, minus the theological import of the Bible's historical references (especially with respect to Jesus). It is not clear that Strauss and Baur understood the issue at the heart of theological interpretation to be this, nor even if they understood their interpretative work in this way. Perhaps this is the reason why they are not looked at by others as those who engaged in theological interpretations of the Bible but rather as those who transmuted the Bible into secular analogues (Baur) or paid no attention to the Bible in its historical contingencies (Strauss).<sup>57</sup>

#### 2.2.5. *Karl Barth: Subject Matter*

Unlike Bultmann, Karl Barth had very little to offer directly in the way of a concerted reflection on theological interpretations. (We have therefore a number of attempts both by systematic theologians and biblical scholars to sketch his hermeneutics on the basis of his interpretations of different biblical texts.)<sup>58</sup> As

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hermeneutic is also considered as offering a mode access to the New Testament through the category of 'experience'; see Rochford (2002) for a helpful summary.

<sup>55</sup> Bultmann's perception of the theological importance of the veracity of Bible's historical reference is at best ambiguous. For Bultmann, the importance of reckoning with the Bible in its historicity to find its abiding significance for today was not based on the life of Jesus of Nazareth but on the Kerygma which, ironically, must have pre-supposed the life of Jesus (Poland 1985, 33-34).

<sup>56</sup> There could be more contributions from his theological interpretations in attempts at formulating theological interpretations, but his work is largely dated especially, as Morgan (1988, 192) points out, with the debunking of existential philosophy which his mode of access to the New Testament was dependent on.

<sup>57</sup> Kümmel (1973), for example, does not in any way consider the New Testament studies of Baur and Strauss to be an exercise in theological interpretation; this he reserves for Barth and Bultmann (363-406). As for Baird (1992), Baur is understood more as one who used Hegelian philosophy to reconstruct the history of the early Church and not one involved in the task of theological interpretations of the Bible (258-269), whilst Strauss is understood as one who seems to 'destroy' and dispose the Bible to give way to a constructive theology based on Hegelian philosophy (246-258) - hardly a theological interpretation of the Bible.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Sherman (2000) from his interpretation of Job, Colwell (1997) from his reflections on Judas, and Jeanrond (1988) and Ford (1979) from Barth's interpretations of various biblical texts, especially in his *Church Dogmatics*.

Robinson (1964) points out, Barth provides only the beginnings of reflection: 'With a few swift strokes of the brush he sketched its direction in the preface to the first edition of *Romans*' (22).<sup>59</sup> For this reason we shall follow closely McCormack's (1991) analysis of Barth's theological interpretation that is almost exclusively gathered from *Romans*. McCormack points out that the second edition of *Romans* (where Barth had to defend himself against the charge of enmity to historical criticism) is significant for understanding Barth's hermeneutics, for therein emerges his hermeneutical edifice, which he maintains 'did not change after the writing of the second edition of *Der Romerbrief*' (325). The first stage in this theological interpretation is the establishment of the historical sense of the text; what stands in the text? This would properly be seen as an arena for historical criticism which Barth himself understood as a 'prolegomenon to the understanding of the Epistle' (Barth 1933, 7). However, McCormack (1991) points out, because Barth understood the biblical writers to be witnesses, theological interpretation presses on to a second stage which aims at 'penetrating through the text to the mystery which lies concealed within' (327), with the result that they (interpreters of the Bible) too are confronted by the same object/subject which confronted Paul. Thus:

So far as possible, the blocks of merely historical, merely given, merely accidental conceptions should fade into the background; so far as possible, the relation of the words to the Word in the words must be discovered. As the one who seeks to understand, I must be thrust forward to the point where I almost stand only before the mystery of the *subject matter*, where I almost no longer stand before the mystery of the *document* as such, where I almost forget that I am not the author, where I have understood him so well that I allow him to speak in my name and can myself speak in his name (Barth [1984, xii] in McCormack [1991, 328]).

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<sup>59</sup> Declared a 'hermeneutical manifesto' by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975, 463).

It is possible then to understand this second stage as rendering the historical sense redundant since the interpreter has penetrated the subject matter. This leads to the third and last stage where 'theological exegesis becomes truly critical' (McCormack 1991, 328). At this stage one returns to the text to understand it anew in light of the subject matter.

For my money, the historical critics must become more critical. For how "what stands there" is to be grasped is not decided by the occasional *valuation* of the words and word-groups, a valuation which is determined by the exegetical standpoints of the exegete. Rather, it is decided through participation in the inner tension of the concepts which are presented more or less clearly by the text, a participation that is as relaxed and willing as possible. *Krinein vis-à-vis* a historical document means for me the meaning of all the words and word-groups contained in it by the subject-matter of which, if I am not completely deceived, they are clearly speaking; the relating back of all answers given in it to the questions which stand unmistakably over against them and the latter once again to the cardinal question which contains all questions in itself; the interpretation of everything which it says in the light of that which alone *can* be said and therefore also really *must* be said (Barth 1984, xii in McCormack 1991, 328).

The goal of this stage is 'to give expression to the exegete's understanding of the text in the light of its subject matter in his or her own words' (McCormack 1991, 329).

So in *Romans*, we may conclude with Kümmel (1973), Barth demanded that 'we endeavour to see "through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible" and then offered an interpretation that did not inquire about Paul's message to his original readers, but related the biblical text directly to the situation in which modern man finds himself' (363).

Barth's theological interpretation of *Romans*, however, was methodologically problematic, especially in its relationship to critical studies of the Bible.

McCormack (1991) himself concedes that Barth failed to show the relationship

between the first and the last stage, i.e., he did not account for movement from the first stage to the second (330): how does one get from the first to the second and even to the third? This is why 'New Testament scholars of Harnack's generation'<sup>60</sup> dismissed his work as of no interest to scholarship (Kümmel 1973, 363ff). The result was a theological interpretation whose value was to point to engagement with the subject matter of the Bible as necessary in theological interpretation but which unfortunately did not equip interested parties with precisely how to go about it and to do so in light of critical scholarship. Jeanrond (1988) puts it well: 'Barth's greatest achievement was undoubtedly to have drawn our attention to the *theological* message of the biblical texts. But he did not help us see how we can disclose this message today, how we can read the texts ...' (92). Perhaps this is what has led some, such as Wood (2002), to understand the theological interpretation of Barth as a theological hermeneutic in its entirety and not situated in any special or general hermeneutics. In other words, it is a theological interpretation of the Bible that is situated in theology. Indeed, we encounter in the theological hermeneutic of Barth a theological interpretation of the Bible that is driven (or defined) by certain theological convictions about God, the world, human beings (and their interrelationship), and on the nature and identity of the Biblical text. Wood in fact sees Barth's theological interpretation as offering an alternative to the approaches offered today (106). Jeanrond (1988) thinks otherwise, and sees it as constrictive for 'through his (Barth's) own reading of the Scriptures, his own observations, reflections and appropriations, he reached the theological and ontological axioms for his interpretation. While he still recommends these dimensions of interpretation to us, his axioms would already determine too much of the outcome of our own reading' (96, in brackets mine).

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<sup>60</sup> Phrase from Robinson (1964, 28).

Still, Barth's theological interpretations understood in this way help in bringing to the fore the significance of theology in theological interpretations of the Bible.

### **3.1 NEED FOR AD HOC THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

We may now ask where this discussion of representative writings on theological interpretation leads us with regard to a theological interpretation of Hebrews in Africa. For one thing, it seems to me that by themselves, none of the proposed theological hermeneutics is sufficient for the theological interpretation of Hebrews. This is for the following reasons. 1. Fowl's emphasis on Church as definitive of theological interpretation so that any reading of the Bible is a theological interpretation if it promotes faithful lives before God in the light of Christ, lacks consideration of the place and importance of the historical imperative of the Bible in its theological interpretations. 2. Watson's insistence, depending on how we understand him, on concerns with theological issues raised by the final (canonical) text (in-Church-and-in-world) as definitive of theological interpretation has a variety of insights but which altogether make it quite nebulous for use in theological interpretations and, at the same time, his model for theological interpretation sits lightly on the historical imperative of the Bible as in part definitive of theological interpretations. 3. Morgan's proposal that theories of religion (or theological belief) could make theological interpretations conducted in conjunction with critical scholarship, as illustrated by Strauss, Baur and Bultmann, possible, whilst honouring the historical imperative of the Bible, seems too vague to be productively used. 4. Barth's theological interpretation which is defined by certain key theological convictions brings about a certain understanding of the subject matter of the Bible,

but it seems ambivalent to the historical imperative of the Bible, and also seems, for lack of hermeneutical instructions, hard to follow in practice unless one is Barth himself.

However, each has some vital element(s) to contribute to the enterprise of theological interpretations of the Bible.<sup>61</sup> So, one possible way to proceed from here in arriving at a theological interpretation best suited for Hebrews in Africa would be to attempt a synthesis of the definitive elements in the identified theological interpretations. The result would be a theological hermeneutic that is unitary and totalizing. This would be permissible if 1. the writings of the Bible were a homogenous whole, i.e., composed of only one genre, a single subject matter, and originally written under similar historical and cultural circumstances, and 2. if the theological interpretations themselves were to be carried out in the same cultural and historical situations. However, because of the heterogeneity of the biblical writings in genre, subject matter and cultural and historical circumstances and the heterogeneity of their contexts, the case for theological interpretations that are sensitive to the same is obvious.

This brings us to the second possible procedure, that of choosing from the proposed the one most suitable for theologically interpreting Hebrews in Africa. But this is hardly an option for two reasons. Firstly, none of the theological interpretations is particularly concerned to articulate a theological hermeneutic that is

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<sup>61</sup> Such an observation has also been made by Cummins (2004) in his look at representative advocates of theological interpretation (Fowl and Watson are among the three he looks at). He writes, '...advocates of theological interpretation conceive of and pursue this task in particular ways, each emphasizing certain integral elements' (180).

sensitive to different genres or any single genre of the Bible; some in fact see this (in ignoring or rejecting historical criticism) as inconsequential!

Then, secondly, none is sensitive enough to the currently different cultural and historical contexts of the Bible (with the exception of perhaps Fowl who is concerned with a North American context); they all assume a homogenous cultural and historical context.

We are left, then, with a third and, it seems, final possibility of taking a different route to the ones discussed in articulating a theological hermeneutic fit for Hebrews in Africa, while, where possible, drawing from vital elements in the theological interpretations discussed. Such a theological hermeneutic will be specific to the genre of Hebrews and specific to aspects of the religio-cultural cosmos that the Church in certain parts of Africa finds itself in, i.e., it will be local, *ad hoc* theological hermeneutic of Hebrews in Africa. This is the concern of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 3

### TYOLOGY-BASED THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

#### 3.1 TYPOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT<sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter, we pointed out that a definitive element of the theological hermeneutic proposed by Watson (1994) is in the form of theological theses/stances that in themselves constitute a hermeneutic. Also we noted Barth's theological interpretations were situated in theology, i.e., informed by certain theological convictions. The importance of theological convictions girding, informing and directing interpretations of the Bible, thereby enabling theological interpretations, cannot be overstated for reasons already given in the arguments of Watson and in the analyses of Barth's theological interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, our proposed model of the theological interpretation of Hebrews in Africa is informed and constituted by, has its starting point, and is anchored in, a certain theological conviction encapsulated in a particular theology of history, i.e., in a particular understanding of history as numinous and divinely ordered for specific purposes and goals. We turn to this now.

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<sup>1</sup> No offence is intended here to those who feel the term 'Old Testament' is not a fair description to that body of sacred literature that belongs to Jews as well. Since the nature of this discourse concerns itself with theological interpretations of the Bible for, and in, Christian communities, it is appropriate that the term be used throughout this study.

<sup>2</sup> With reference to this discussion we call attention to Webster (1998) and Stell (1993) whose studies though having different purposes show in different ways the importance and place of theological commitments for hermeneutics.

It is axiomatic that most, if not all, of the earliest Christian communities took the Old Testament to be the word of God. Farley (1982) puts it thus: 'As an originally Jewish movement, the Christian sect always had Scripture, a collection of authoritative writings regarded as being of divine origin' (65). But the Old Testament as the word of God was not readily applicable to the faith, life and order of the early Christian communities for much of it would not have made sense literally. As it were, the early Christian communities had to deal with the problem of the historical and cultural distance of the Old Testament. This problem must have been present even in the face of the view - which apparently characterizes the interpretation of Old Testament in the New Testament - that the relevance and meaning of Jewish scriptures is in their pointing to, and therefore, their fulfilment in, Christ. Apostolic preaching (as crystallized in the New Testament) which interpreted the early Church's encounters with Christ as the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament, were not self-evidential, to be simply read off from the surface of the text: they required interpretative, highly selective and creative readings, i.e., theological hermeneutics proper, to be achieved.<sup>3</sup> In consequence, as far as its reading of the Old Testament as the word of God is concerned, the New Testament should be understood to evince a wrestling with the meaning of the Old Testament for the New Testament Church, i.e., with the theological interpretation of the Old Testament. Indeed, studies conducted on the use or interpretation of the Old Testament in the New isolate a variety of theological hermeneutics that are in operation to access the Old Testament for the early Church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed there are studies galore on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. See, for example, Dodd (1952), Efrid (1972), Ellis (1991), Evans and Stegner (1994) and Moyise (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Fitzmyer's (1961) study is a good illustration of this; he points out three ways that can be understood as tackling the problems caused by the historical distance of the Old Testament thus providing

Of these, our interest lies in 'typology' as the theological interpretation employed in the New Testament for reading the Old Testament because, above all, it is based on the presupposition that God is involved with the history of Israel, which leads to his manifestation in Christ. It is in order then to consider, in what follows, how typology works as a way of interpreting the Old Testament.

### **3.1.1. *The Workings of Typology***

Several characteristics of typology provide a good beginning for appreciating its workings as a theological hermeneutic.<sup>5</sup> The first, which would be considered constitutive of typology, is a correspondence between an Old Testament personage, event or institution (the type) and a particular element (the antitype) of the Christian faith, mostly Christ. Since the correspondence is not absolute, so as to form an exact copy, it may issue out as an analogy, or a contrast or even in an 'objectified prophecy', or as a combination of two or all of these. When the correspondence issues out in an analogy, a likeness is emphasized, bringing about a parallelism between the personage, event or institution in question and the element it is likened to in the Christian faith. The result is that the type can be understood to be analogous to the element it corresponds to in the Christian faith. So here we encounter somewhat the prefiguring proper of a New Testament personage, event or institution

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theological interpretation: 1. 'Modernization', 'in which the Old Testament text, which originally had a reference to some event on the contemporary scene at the time it was written, nevertheless was vague enough to be applied to some new event' (Ibid.); 2. 'Accommodation', 'in which the Old Testament text was obviously wrested from its original context, modified or deliberately changed by the new writer in order to adapt it to a new situation or purpose'(Ibid.); and 3. 'Eschatological', 'in which the Old Testament quotation expressed promise or threat about something to be accomplished in the *eschaton* and which the Qumran (or Christian) writer cited as something still to be accomplished in the new *eschaton* of which he wrote' (305-06 in brackets mine). It is no wonder that some, (see Lindars 1976, 66), have come to the conclusion that what takes place in the New Testament is not so much an interpretation of the Old Testament in the New but rather its *use* in the New.

<sup>5</sup> A caveat needs to be given here that these characteristics, though distinct, overlap considerably.

in the Old Testament. Unlike correspondences that issue out as analogies, those that issue out as contrasts highlight differences between the Old Testament antitype and the type in the early Church. Examples of New Testament pericopes exhibiting this characteristic, either in one aspect or through a combination of sorts, include Rom. 5.12-21 where Adam corresponds to Christ primarily through a contrast; and 2 Cor. 3.7ff where Moses and the implications of his ministry correspond to Christ and the implications of his ministry through a similarity, which allows for contrasts. As Eichrodt (1963, 225) puts it,

the comparability of the two is indeed based upon the determinative significance of each for humanity in the period introduced by himself; but this is worked out in detail as a wholly contrasting correspondence, with the sin of Adam and its fruit in guilt and corruption standing opposed to justification through Christ with its fruit in righteousness and life.<sup>6</sup>

In the third kind of correspondence, what Eichrodt calls 'objectified prophecy' (229), the type corresponds to the antitype by pointing beyond itself 'independently of any human medium and purely through its objective factual reality' (Ibid.) to an element that is understood to occur in the New Testament times. In other words, the Old Testament narratives, persons and events, are the content of the literal meaning which the author responsible sought to convey and thus, on the basis of the events they describe and interpret, are complete and meaningful in themselves. However, now, in the New Testament, those narratives are perceived to point to Christ and are subsequently fulfilled in him. In actual fact, this is a case where retrospective interpretation demonstrates the past to be a prophecy of subsequent events, revealing rather than predicting. The interpretation of the past becomes prophecy in reverse, demonstrating the past as a preparation for the future. There is, therefore, a duality

of meanings: the Old Testament meaning (type), and the New Testament one (antitype, which in retrospect happens to be a fulfilment). Hence, for example, the redemption wrought by God in Christ being understood as a new Exodus, or Christ being understood as a second Adam, or even the Lamb of God.

The second characteristic of typology is the intensification, escalation or heightening in the antitype, of an aspect of the type, casting the antitype in greater light in comparison to the type in question. Hebrews seems to exemplify this best with a typology so strong on intensification that it has been judged by Hays (1989) to be, unlike the typology employed by Paul, 'relentlessly supersessionist' (98).<sup>7</sup> Indeed it is possible to conceive of Hebrews' textual structure as a typology characterized by intensification. Since a theological interpretation of Hebrews is central to this study, a brief look at it here to illustrate this point is appropriate.

Certainly, some rhetorico-critical approaches to the structure of Hebrews<sup>8</sup> see the book as being based on the *synkrisis* (comparison) between Jesus on the one hand and, on the other hand, Angels (Heb. 1.1-2.18), Moses (Heb. 3.1-6), Aaron (Heb. 5.1-10) and, therefore, with Melchizedek (Heb. 7.1-25), and the old covenant (8.4-10.18); and between these comparisons would be the relevant paraenetic sections (Heb. 2.1-4, 3.7-4.16 and so forth). The exegetical underpinning of the said comparisons structuring Hebrews is in actual fact, as argued at length by Sowers

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<sup>6</sup> See also John 3.14, 6. 31-33, 49-51; Acts 7. 2-60 which should be singled out as a passage rich in typology, and Acts 3.22; 1 Cor. 10.1-11, 15.45-49; 2 Cor. 15.17; Rom. 3.24 and 8.28-32.

<sup>7</sup> Smith (1972, 60) remarks: 'Although Hebrews has a forerunner in Paul (cf. Romans 4; Galatians 3), the author is certainly the master of typology among New Testament writers'.

<sup>8</sup> Best exemplified by Seid (1999, 326), but see also Evans (1988).

(1965, 89-132), typology, and specifically, a typology characterized by heightening.<sup>9</sup> This seems to be fortified by *synkrisis* as a rhetorical device present in Hebrews, which in the words of Zuntz (1953), 'is a traditional device of encomiastic Greek and Latin rhetoric: the person or object, to be praised is placed beside outstanding specimens of a comparable kind and his, or its, superiority ('ὑπεροχή') urged' (286).

The third and last characteristic we note is what we may call, following Cahill (1982), the 'christocentric dimension' (274) of typologies. Cahill seems to exaggerate what constitutes this characteristic by writing that it means: 'All the figures or types in the OT coalesce into the one antitype, the person of Christ' (Ibid). It would be better, I suggest, to understand this christocentric characteristic of typology as one predominated by Christ: the anti-type of the Old Testament's types and, also, the figure providing the basis for the other anti-types (in the New Testament) of the types in the Old Testament in cases where Christ is not the direct antitype. Of the mentioned characteristics of typology, the christocentric one ought to be distinguished because, in a sense, it is present in all of the other characteristics, i.e., every instance of typology in the New Testament would have a christocentric premise directly or indirectly. The reasons for this are crucial but because they are bound up with the presuppositions of typology we will look at them in the relevant section of this study below.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Buchanan (1972, 249-251).

To reiterate here what we have already touched on above, it is not hard to gather that in these instances, the Old Testament as the word of God is made sense of in the context of the experience of the early Christian communities, and subsequently made to speak to them. (A detached historical-critical reading of the Old Testament by the early Christians would have failed to make such typological interpretations of the same.) This means that whatever else that may have taken place in the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New, typology is used as a theological hermeneutic for the Old Testament. How else, we may ask, was Paul in the light of Christ to engage with the *Pentateuch*, Jeremiah, or Isaiah? To put it differently, if the readings of the Old Testament were to be exclusively historical ones, they, by and large, would have been meaningless to the New Testament Christian communities. But *via* typology, we see historical and cultural distance bridged, resulting in meaning being conferred to the Old Testament in such a way that it is made to speak to a new context, i.e., to Christian, rather than Jewish, communities. Through typology, the Old Testament texts that would perhaps be meaningless or irrelevant to Christian readers are brought to bear on the life, faith and order of the Christian communities by illuminating and, at the same time, by being illuminated by, the faith experiences of the Christian communities.<sup>10</sup> But in what theological presuppositions is typology anchored?

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<sup>10</sup> Here lies a complexity with typology: whilst it clearly is a theological hermeneutic through which the Old Testament texts were accessed by the early Christian communities, it can at the same time be understood to shed light on the faith of the Christian community. Our concern in this study is first with the former.

### 3.1.2. *The Integrality of a Theology of History: 'Heilsgeschichte' of Israel.*

On the presuppositions of typology, Frye (1982) makes the salient observation: 'What typology really is, is a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur that will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously' (80-81). Despite the limitations of his observation to literary perspectives, Frye brings to focus a crucial presupposition of typology: rather than being a haphazard, chaotic arena of actions and events, history has a meaning and a point. Under the scrutiny of theology, what this means is that typology is grounded in the view that God is at work in history, ordering it according to his own goals and purposes, hence the invariable interconnectedness between past and present, type and antitype. Such a view is to be seen in light of the wider canvas of the conviction about the existence of a God who rules the world. It seems to me that all who look at typology isolate this presupposition,<sup>11</sup> with Cahill (1982) doing so perhaps most clearly. While looking at Acts 7.2-60 as an instance of typology, he remarks: 'Animating the entire text is the hermeneutical conviction that God has and does intervene in history, a perspective that begins with the creation narratives in Genesis' (267-68). Cahill (and others)<sup>12</sup> perceives this so strongly to be the case that, in the final analysis, he opines that history is transformed into theophany (and/or, epiphany we may add) whose apex is in the *assumptio carnis* of God in Christ within the historical contingencies of Palestine (268-69). He roundly summarizes it thus:

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<sup>11</sup> For example Braaten (1968, 127), Cullmann (1965, 132-33), Danielou (1960, 32), Von Rad (1960, 226), Lampe (1957, 29) and Markus (1957, 447).

<sup>12</sup> Eliade (1961, 168-72) is a good example.



The imposition of order onto history then transforms the very nature of history, making history into theophany. This vision of horizontal historical process always involves a vertical connection to providence or the God of history, essentially an act of faith and hope, as its legitimation. Typology, therefore, is basically an imaginative vision of history and historical process ultimately grounded on the conviction of the creative power of a God who speaks and acts (275).

It is precisely for this reason that exponents of typology as a theological hermeneutic make objection to its confusion with allegory whose presuppositions are deemed to lie elsewhere. Typology is understood to take history seriously; the past it grapples with is considered as a concrete historical reality, else the legitimacy and logic of relating the past (the type) to the historically present (the antitype) is rendered void (Eichrodt 1963, 226). As for allegory, it is perceived as not necessarily bound to concrete historical realities in its interpretative procedures (Lampe 1957, 31).<sup>13</sup> It is also on account of the mentioned presuppositions of typology that, despite some similarities, it should not be confused with being merely a trope or, more specifically, a metaphor/analogy as Hays (1989, 100-101) seems to suggest,<sup>14</sup> for typology certainly transcends tropes. One of the reasons for this is simply in the logic of metaphors and analogies as communication methods especially in

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<sup>13</sup> It is a matter of debate whether typology can be distinguished from allegory on the basis of how much they invest, or how each of them invests, in history in their respective hermeneutics. Barr (1982, 103-148), for example, marshalled forcefully arguments against any such distinction by insisting that such distinctions were artificial since their uses are mixed up, they could be used in the same 'historical' text for example (115). Barr's argument may help clarify the complexity of Old Testament interpretation in the New but it is not enough to invalidate the hermeneutical presupposition mentioned as distinctive of typology because typology seems to apply only to events, institutions and personages whose past historical reality is taken for granted in the New Testament, while allegory is more encompassing, and primarily concerned with the deeper (spiritual) meaning, historical and otherwise, of texts. Goldingay's (1981, 103-109) discussion on the understanding of typology and allegory in relation to each other is helpful in making this clear.

<sup>14</sup> Hays here is representative of scholars who argue for a literary apprehension of the typology found in the Bible; other examples include Marks (1984) and Young (1994). Young puts it particularly forcefully thus: 'Typology, then, is a "figure of speech" which configures or reads texts to bring out significant correspondences so as to invest them with meaning beyond themselves ... Typology belongs to the literary phenomenon of intertextuality, to the genre of liturgy and sacred story. The sacred text is no mere pretext of something else, as in allegory; rather, story and symbol carry a

communicating something new and whose knowledge cannot be attained directly. That is, metaphors and analogies work on the presupposition that there is some similarity between the 'known' and the 'unknown' so that the unknown is made known through its similarity with the 'known'.<sup>15</sup> But typology is quite different; it does not ride so much on the crest of communicating knowledge of one through the other (nor even creating meaning through intertextual relations [see footnote 76]) as on creating 'meaning that links the present to the past' (Cahill 1982, 274) because, providentially, the past is related to the present in a meaningful way. Further still, the mentioned presuppositions of typology resist interpretations of history as cyclical, for this contravenes the very hermeneutical procedure of typology.<sup>16</sup>

We have just mentioned that typology is grounded on the conviction of the existence of a God who fashions human existence and history. There is, therefore, a design, purpose and direction in the contingencies of history. This explains why it is particularly around the figure of Jesus that a whole multitude of Old Testament types are clustered: he is, for example, the second Adam, the Lamb of God, the suffering servant, and the eternal High Priest. In the New Testament, there seems to be the overriding conviction that history (at least of Israel), is directed by God, to lead it to Christ, and that God is at work in history today directing it towards its final goal, until the fullness of Christ is reached. (Of course this is seen in salvific terms: salvation had taken place in the end-time through Jesus Christ, and the Old

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surplus of significance. Fulfilment is to do with the plenitude of meaning uncovered by relationship with previous text or narrative' (48).

<sup>15</sup> I find Davidson (2001, 245-64) and Martinich (1996) helpful readings on this.

<sup>16</sup> See Eichrodt's (1963, 233-34) criticism of this view as espoused by Bultmann (1950).

Testament was pointing to this since God had directed its history accordingly).<sup>17</sup> Cullmann's (1967) study of the New Testament underscores this view. He argues that salvation-history is basic to the New Testament thinking and is the essence of the New Testament message. Put differently, the biblical view of history, so to speak, is delineated as a history of salvation, progressing from promise to fulfilment in, and focused on, Jesus Christ. It is this convergence of history on the figure of Christ that makes way for the ubiquity of christocentric typologies in the typology of the New Testament, for in various ways and instances, Christ is then understood to be prefigured, and related to the history depicted, in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> This is why 'Christianity in a sense creates the types to which it appeals, by seeing the Scriptures through Christ' (Barton 1976, 261).

### ***3.1.3. Typological Interpretations of the Old Testament***

What has been said so far justifies and accounts for typology as a model for theological interpretation of the Old Testament. Indeed this approach to the Old Testament has its advocates and practitioners in the guild of Old Testament scholarship. In his *Old Testament Theology I* Von Rad (1975) wrote in precise terms:

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<sup>17</sup> Within the context of a study of the 'Testimonia' and modern hermeneutics, Grech (1972) states it quite aptly: 'The primary purpose of the testimonies [the 'Testimonia'] is that of demonstrating the continuity of God's saving deed in Christ with his saving actions in the Old Testament. In Christ salvation reaches its fulfilment, i.e., its culmination. The testimonies, therefore, presuppose salvation history ... (323).

<sup>18</sup> Pannenberg's (1969b, 125-158) muse on 'revelation as history' seems particularly cogent in bringing out this relationship of Christ as the end of history and, therefore, christocentric typology. In this respect, his main line of argument (131-135) has to do with revelation being found at the end of history (which he understands Jesus, not totally but in a sense, to be [135]); an end 'which presupposes the course of history, because it is a perfection of it' (133). If this be the case, then naturally, the past (the Old Testament) would be understood through the end (Jesus Christ). According to Pannenberg, the end will then manifest the secrets of the present (and past), that is of history, the very 'presupposition of primitive Christianity' (133). So, 'In the fate of Jesus Christ, as the anticipation of

... the Old Testament writings confine themselves to representing Jahweh's relationship to Israel and the world in one aspect only, namely as a continuing divine activity in history. This implies that in principle Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history. It regards itself as based upon historical act, and as shaped and re-shaped by factors in which it saw the hand of Jahweh at work. The oracles of the prophets also speak of events, though there is a definite difference, that in general they stand in point of time not after but prior to, the events to which they bear witness. Even where this reference to divine facts in history is not immediately apparent, as for example in some of the Psalms, it is, however, present by implication: and where it is actually absent, as for example in the book of Job and Ecclesiastes, this very lack is closely connected with the grave affliction which is the theme of both these works (106).

This perception of the Old Testament (often referred to as *Heilsgeschichte*)<sup>19</sup> by a leading Old Testament theologian seems perpetually present, if not (depending of course on which period of scholarship one refers to) pervasive in Old Testament scholarship.<sup>20</sup> The implications of such an apprehension of the Old Testament are multifarious, ranging from the meaning and direction of the history of God's involvement in Israel as depicted in the Old Testament, to its purpose and end.<sup>21</sup> For Von Rad, this history, as understood by the Israelites themselves and not by historico-critical means, ought to be the subject for a theology of the Old Testament (105-128). Indeed, as alluded to by Braaten (1968, 127), common terms like

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the end of all history, God is revealed as the one God of all mankind who has been expected since the times of the prophets' (134).

<sup>19</sup> I find Richardson's (1961, 122-41) treatment of this term a helpful introduction to it.

<sup>20</sup> It is abundantly clear that this was the case with pre-critical/enlightenment biblical scholarship (see Danielou 1960 and Hall 1998). But the emergence in the 19th-Century of the scientific writing of the history of ancient Israel did not debunk *Heilsgeschichte*; as pointed out in Goldingay's (1981, 66) study, it can still be traced (in that very Century) in writings of the Old Testament's theologians. Coming to the 20th-Century, *Heilsgeschichte* suffered a set-back due to, but in no way limited to, the influence of Barth and Bultmann (Richardson 1964, 125-53), two most influential theologians whose theology devalued history by failing to give it a central role in their theological articulations. However, this set back has been countered by a return to theologies of history as critical to understanding the Old Testament. For some representative works, see Wright (1952), Wright and Fuller (1957) and Pannenberg (1969a and 1969b), Reventlow (1992) for a thorough bibliography on *Heilsgeschichte*.

<sup>21</sup> Of course, this approach to the Old Testament does not with meet universal countenance. Barr (1963 and 1982) 'the critic of biblical theologians' (Gnuse 2001,4) would provide a good example of

'elective', 'revelatory', 'redemptive', 'sacred', 'holy' etc. seeking to evaluate or even describe the Old Testament, are indicative of attempts to interpret that history and its possible meanings. Inevitably, the result of such perceptions of the Old Testament is the spawning of typological approaches to the Old Testament, as theological interpretations of the same.<sup>22</sup> But can typological interpretations of the Old Testament as instances of theological interpretations of it provide a model for theological interpretation for the New Testament generally and Hebrews in particular?

### **3.2 TYPOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

#### **3.2.1. *Suggestions: Herbert Marks and Richard Hays***

To my knowledge, two significant discussions of Pauline hermeneutics, insofar as typology forms an integral part of it, seem to suggest that typological interpretations can provide models for the theological interpretation of the New Testament. Both Herbert Marks (1984) and Richard Hays (1989) suggest that Pauline typological hermeneutics is a way of reading the scriptures which is not limited to the Old Testament. For Marks, the study of Pauline hermeneutics should not be limited to the apprehension and vindication of his reading but should also be for the emulation

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those opposed to such a view, especially if held at the exclusion of other approaches to the Old Testament. For an overview of the debate see Gnuse (1989).

<sup>22</sup> Von Rad (1961 and 1975 for example) and Eichrodt (1960 and 1963 for example), as conceded in the assessment of scholars such as Hasel (1970) and Brueggemann (1985a and 1985b), who did so in the context of proposing a new approach to Old Testament Theology, stand out in this - especially von Rad. For time and space, I am not in a position to comment on the current state of Old Testament scholarship vis-à-vis typological interpretations although my reading, hitherto, indicates a petering out of the influence of Von Rad's approach; there seems to be a dearth of Old Testament scholarship (theological and otherwise) on typology from the 1990s. However, this is not so important, given that my primary concern here has been simply to draw attention to the fact that typological interpretations,

of his method. He is not clear on exactly what this method for emulation is, but he does give something of Paul's approach to scripture that ought to provide a way of reading the scriptures. *Contra* the synoptic tradition which Marks argues are apologetic and expository interpretations of the Old Testament (73-76), he is of the view that Pauline hermeneutic is revisionary. Revisionary because it usurps the authority of scripture in the sense that it is 'the special understanding of the interpreter [i.e., Paul's] that determines the significance of the text, which only assumes its exemplary or prescriptive role by virtue of that understanding' (77). This he sees to be abundantly the case with Pauline typology. He states it this way: 'In Paul's reading, there is a radical actualization, a drastic evacuation of the past into the present, which "strikes" indirectly at the priority, and hence the authority, of the scriptural text' (79). I Cor 10.1-11 is a good example, where the rock of Massah is identified with Christ. The motivation for such a hermeneutic, Marks argues, is *exousia*: 'Paul's impulse towards spiritual autonomy' (80), whilst its capacity is founded on, and granted by, the dynamics of typology understood solely in literary terms (86ff). Otherwise stated, for Marks, Pauline typology is a hermeneutical approach to scripture that evidences freedom against 'one's own patrimony' (88) - the religion of revelation - 'recognizing that the content of the gospel is never fixed' (Ibid.). It, therefore, calls for new insights (interpretations of the Bible) in this 'dispensation of the Spirit'. He proposes that we should proceed this way in reading the Bible.

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as theological interpretations of the Old Testament, are present in critical scholarship of the Old Testament on account of the presuppositions of typology just discussed.

Two factors render Marks' discussion on Pauline typology unsuitable for the provision of theological interpretations of the New Testament. The first is that his discussion of Pauline typology is oblivious of theological underpinnings of typology; the kind that allow for the hermeneutical moves that Paul makes in reading the Old Testament. This permits Marks to explain the typological interpretative readings of Paul literarily, and within a framework of *exousia*, the desire for autonomy. In consequence, he sees Paul's understanding to be key in giving meaning and even authority to scripture, and not a theology of history with which Paul engages the Old Testament. Secondly, typology, in the final analysis, does not provide a theological hermeneutic that we can use to read the New Testament but is rather an occasion to dissect Paul's hermeneutical motivations which he recommends we should in turn embrace and use accordingly in our interpretation of the Bible. The results of such an understanding of Pauline typology as an approach to reading the New Testament are twofold: firstly, we have an open New Testament to be read according to the dictates of the interpreter's understandings and yearnings for *exousia*, and, secondly, we have, in consequence, a subversion of the very texts we wish to interpret theologically. This is hardly the provision for a typology-based theological interpretation of the New Testament.

Hays (1989) has a lot in common with Marks: like him, Paul's 'interpretative methods are paradigmatic for Christian hermeneutics' (183) and, like him, he understands Paul's hermeneutic as providing freedom to read scripture in new ways (189). The difference in his discussion of Paul's exemplary hermeneutic for reading the scriptures is, firstly, that he views it under the lenses of 'a certain imaginative

vision of the relationship between scripture and God's eschatological activity in the present time' (183). For his (Paul's) hermeneutics, therefore, to make sense and accordingly be used by us, we need to share in his eschatological vision, and see ourselves as people of the end-time, locating 'our present time in relation to the story of God's dealing with human kind' (185). Secondly, and more importantly, he casts typological interpretations as part of Paul's hermeneutic strategy in the light of metaphors, precipitating an appreciation of 'the metaphorical relation between the text and our own reading of it' (186). This would allow space, in our reading of scripture, for 'the play of echo and allusion, for figurative intertextual conjunctions, and even - if our communities are sufficiently rooted in Scripture's symbolic soil - for *metalepsis*. The troping of the text would be the natural consequence of locating lives within its story' (Ibid.).

Hays' analysis of Pauline typology as an exemplary hermeneutic (his neglect of the theological underpinnings of typology notwithstanding) could provide a typology-based interpretation of the New Testament except for two shortcomings. Whereas his analyses of Paul's typological interpretations may be readily applicable to Old Testament readings which we could perceive as *metalepsis* and thus alluding to, echoing, and prefiguring our times, they are not clear when it comes to the reading of the New Testament itself. Paul's readings may be used in creating new typological interpretations of the Old Testament (187), but what of reading typologically his own readings? How are we to interpret the New Testament texts (not the Old Testament ones) on the basis of *metalepsis*?



We may take it that Hays' musing on Paul's eschatological vision may grant an orientation and a way to interpret the New Testament, but this is not pursued as such by Hays, leaving it to the reader to figure out how this can be done.<sup>23</sup> The other crucial shortcoming with Hays' argument is his neglect of the place of a theology of history in enabling the interpretative moves he envisages we could make through imitating Paul's hermeneutics. The literary understandings of typology as metaphorical or *metalepsis*, which he argues needs to be used in interpretations of the Bible as an emulation of Paul's own typological interpretations, and the conviction, therefore, that the symbolic soil of scripture if well inhabited can enable the identification of echoes, allusions and figurations in the Bible (186) will not suffice.

For reasons already discussed, a theology of history, indeed a form of *Heilsgeschichte*, is imperative to any attempt to follow Paul's typological hermeneutics. Ironically, Hays' discussion of God's eschatological activity, and of communities living within the story of the Bible is *ipso facto* a concession, which he seems to ignore, to the importance of such a theology in Pauline hermeneutics. This is because any perception of the eschatological activity of God presupposes his earlier workings in history, which the story of the Bible can be understood to portray. So, for appropriate typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament, we first need a carefully defined theology of history as our basis, and then, subsequently, we need to show how such a theology can provide readings of the New Testament that are themselves typological readings of the Old Testament in the New. We now address ourselves to this.

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, his three proposals for the use of Paul's hermeneutics in reading the Bible (Hays 1989, 83-92) have more to do with what needs to be done than how it can be done.

### 3.2.2. *The Requisite Theology of History: 'Heilsgeschichte' Expanded*

Reflecting on the relation of God to history, Gilkey (1963) remarked, 'almost everything produced since 1918 has been on this subject' (174). (Indeed theological perspectives on history abound.)<sup>24</sup> At the time of his writing, Gilkey was dissatisfied that the literature on God's relation to history had ignored discussions on Providence. But Providence is not the only subject to be ignored: a cursory glance at most of this literature shows that discussions on the relationship of *Heilsgeschichte* to other histories has also been ignored, which, it can be argued, is the result of, and a corollary to, the ignoring of Providence. This means that much of the literature on theologies of history *per se* will not concern us much here, for our primary interest in looking at history as theology is, quite narrowly, the relationship of *Heilsgeschichte* to wider history. If anything, most of the literature we shall engage with for relevant theologies of history will be from the discipline of theology of religion, which amongst theologians of Christianity, normally crosses over into theologies of history in evaluating claims that God is at work in other religious traditions.<sup>25</sup> It is only after we have argued that, on the basis of *Heilsgeschichte*, it is possible, indeed called for, to perceive other histories as related to, or included in, *Heilsgeschichte* and thus highly significant, that we shall be in a position to advance our proposal on how this could become a theological hermeneutic for a certain genre of New Testament texts.

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<sup>24</sup> The anthology compiled by McIntire (1977) confirms this. He provides a good survey of the literature together with the reasons for the upsurge of theologies of history starting from the first world war. We need to note however that the interval between the late 1970s and 2003 is a long time, and systematic theological scholarship, if the result of my search of relevant literature is anything to go by, seems to have moved on to other concerns.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed it is mostly within the context of 'theology of religion' that theologies of history reside, with varying degrees of modification. More specifically, and in addition, theologies of religion are usually conjoined with discourses on revelation and redemption, which in turn have a direct relationship to theologies of history that either see *Heilsgeschichte* as exclusive to Israel's history or see it related to other histories. So, all of the theologians whose work is discussed below have it articulated mostly in the sub-discipline of 'theology of religion' (see Veitch [1971] for more on this) or, if not, then they

We may begin our discussion by posing the question: is *Heilsgeschichte* exclusive to Israel so that only its history as depicted in the Old Testament is the one with which God is involved; ordering and directing it to its goal and finality in Christ as understood by New Testament interpreters? Langford (1981), the subject of whose work is 'Providence', suggests a variety of responses to this question in remarking:

One view denies that there is any radical gulf between biblical and non-biblical history, because God is equally Lord of all historical events. At the opposite extreme we find a complete separation of biblical and non-biblical history, based on the claim that biblical history is providentially ordained, whereas the rest of history is a directionless and chaotic movement reflecting material and personal forces that have no ultimate meaning (130).<sup>26</sup>

However, the possibility of a spectrum of responses along a 'yes' and 'no' continuum is, it seems to me, untenable. God is either involved with the histories of peoples other than Israel or not: if he is, then, of necessity, these histories must have a certain correlation with *Heilsgeschichte* (precisely on account of its claims); and if he is not, then there is no relationship whatsoever. With this in mind, we may attend to the possibility of a 'no' response. Few theologians, if any,<sup>27</sup> who embrace *Heilsgeschichte* as depicted in the Old Testament would hold the view that the rest of history is a haphazard movement devoid of God's involvement. Barth, the eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian, has often been cited as holding this view, albeit in the

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have it articulated under the subject matter of 'revelation' or 'redemption' as is the case respectively in the case of Pannenberg (1969a and 1969b) and Cullmann (1965).

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps we may say, as a qualification, not really 'directionless and chaotic', since they can be interpreted on basis other than providence, i.e., minus the numinous, in the sense that God is not understood to be involved with them (thereby making them of 'no ultimate value').

<sup>27</sup> I have not come across, any example except the suggestion, by Connolly (1965, 113-14), of Löwith. However, any consideration of Löwith, as one refining Barth's theology of History, which sees other histories as devoid of God's involvement (see below), is a misrepresentation of his position. Löwith (1949) clearly held that other histories (he calls them profane) had significance insofar as they were a reflection of *Heilsgeschichte* (185-87), otherwise they are a realm of pain and suffering, and of sin; 'a realm of sin and death and therefore in need of redemption' (193).

context of theology of religion.<sup>28</sup> Barth indeed discussed religion as an antithesis to revelation in his famous paragraph 17 of *Church Dogmatics 2/1* (1956). But we must acknowledge the limitations of his discourse as representative of scholars who give a negative response with regard to God's involvement with histories outside *Heilsgeschichte*. This is because, even though it is possible to extract from his discourse a theology of history,<sup>29</sup> he carries out this discourse on religion narrowly - as an antithesis to revelation. In such a frame of reference, the articulation and evaluation of the nature of religion is conducted on no other basis than on the touchstone of his understanding of revelation. His concerns are not with the involvement of God, whether in the sphere of religion or elsewhere, in the history of Israel as such, nor in wider history. We, therefore, can proceed to isolate Barth's theology of history as extrapolated from his theology of religion only if we make the crucial assumption that, for Barth, 'revelation' is the indicator of, or synonymous with, God's involvement with history, of which we could understand religion to be a component. Such an assumption helps us to assess Barth's position and comment on it because it simply means that the presence, or the possibility, of God's revelation in religions points to his involvement with wider history and vice-versa.<sup>30</sup> It is very clear from paragraph 17 of *Church Dogmatics* that for Barth, all 'religion'

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<sup>28</sup> See Knitter (2002, 23-32), Race (1983, 11), Davis (1970, 45), and Bleeker (1965, 91-98) to cite a few examples.

<sup>29</sup> This is amply demonstrated by Connolly (1965, 110-13).

<sup>30</sup> One may wonder here why we should look to Barth's narrow discussion of religion this way to arrive at his theology of history. Why should we not instead look at his views on history in order to do so? The reason is that our interest in Barth as a representative of theologians who respond negatively to the view that God is involved with the histories outside the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel is on account of Theology of Religion scholars who cite him as such normally on conclusions drawn from paragraph 17 of *Church Dogmatics* (Barth 1956) and not on the basis of their assessment of his entire works (also see following footnote). Indeed if this was the case, perhaps they would have to grapple with his view on history which is not a straight-forward one. As remarked by Veitch (1971); 'The way in which Barth interprets history is as sophisticated as it is subtle' (11), and I would hasten to add, open to varied interpretations (see for examples the different ways Ogletree [1965, 117-154] and

represented the futility of human effort to reach God and human attempts at self-justification, and was therefore under God's judgement.<sup>31</sup> From the stand-point of 'revelation', 'religion' was unbelief, the attempts of people to know God by their own means (301ff). 'Religion' was therefore the opposite of 'revelation', for in it, Barth would argue, 'man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking in advance the very thing which has to be given by God' (303). In seeing religions as substitutes of revelation, and thus characterized by idolatry and self-righteousness, Barth could be said to have perceived the histories of peoples (religions residing within them), as histories without God's involvement whatsoever but rather against God's involvement - quite a negative theology of history.

So, Barth's theology of history so gleaned from his theology of religion in paragraph 17 of *Church Dogmatics* 2/1, which would insist that God has worked in history, directing and ordering it, but only with regard to Israel as attested to in the Old Testament and related to the eschatological event of Christ, leaves us faced with a telling irony. The irony, as will become apparent, is that any notion of a *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel and especially when viewed from its eschatological impulse, i.e., its *telos* in Christ, absolutely necessitates the view that God's working

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Bakker [2000, 222-268] interpret it). This then makes us limit our look at Barth, for the purposes of our discussion, to 'paragraph 17' in isolating Barth's theology of history.

<sup>31</sup> I am aware that there are those who question whether this indeed is the position of Barth on religions. If we take 'paragraph 17' as definitive of Barth's position, then it is. But if we are to consider other writings of Barth, then it is debatable. As demonstrated, for example, in the studies of Veitch (1971) and Harrison (1986), it is possible for one to read other sections of Barth's work and conclude the opposite. Indeed, both of these scholars try to account for this apparent ambiguity of Barth's theology of religion by invoking his theological method of paradoxical counter statements, correctiveness etc (Veitch 1971, 213ff and Harrison 1986, 20ff). Others, of course, would view this ambiguity as a change that befell Barth's position later on (Brunner 1951). As mentioned already, I have not attempted to isolate Barth's position against the canvas of the totality of his works here because my interest in his work is limited to only an aspect of it: 'paragraph 17' of *Church Dogmatics*, on whose basis theology of religion scholars cite Barth as denying God's involvement in other religions and, depending on how we understand him, even the Christian religion.

transcends the salvation history of Israel as reflected in the Bible. Salvation history has a claim on other histories, so to speak. We turn to this in the following.

As alluded to above, scholars who embrace *Heilsgeschichte* understand, one way or the other and for a variety of reasons, that God is involved in other histories as well, and subsequently seek to relate the two. It is here then that we have a spectrum of responses along an indirect-direct continuum of God's involvement with other histories other than that of Israel. We will examine here, in a general and abbreviated way, three theologians representative of views residing, as it were, on the left, centre and finally to the right of the mentioned indirect-direct continuum.

Daniélou is representative of theologians who perceive an indirect involvement of God in other histories. In Dupuis' (2001) summary, he

draws a sharp distinction between nature and the supernatural, or equivalently between religion and revelation. "Non-Christian religions belong to the order of natural reason, the Judeo-Christian revelation to the order of supernatural faith. Both constitute different orders. To this distinction of the two corresponds that between two God-given covenants: the cosmic and the historical. The cosmic covenant is equivalent to God's manifestation through nature ... It manifests God's abiding presence in creation and is symbolized, in Noah's episode in Genesis, by the rainbow ... (134).

From the perspective of theologies of history, what this means is that history outside the one depicted in the Old Testament is devoid of God's direct involvement with it; it enjoys an indirect involvement through its encounters with creation/nature. At best, it is a pre-history, a preparation of sorts, to God's personal revelation (and with his direct involvement with history) starting with Abraham and culminating in Christ.

However, in a move to the right of the mentioned continuum, *contra* Daniélou, von Balthasar (1968, 155-177), on the basis of a theology of history of the Old Testament, points to a visible 'working of God through the whole of history, which in the sense of the Bible certainly cannot be described as a "natural providence" (if those words have any meaning). God works and guides events in relation to ultimate salvation, which has its centre in Israel, but concerns the whole world' (160). This Old Testament theology of history, he argues, is evident at its beginning (he calls it protology), where God is involved not with Israel but with the human race resulting in his choice and covenant with Noah. In Noah, von Balthasar argues (156-58), 'a divine covenant is made with the whole of mankind and the whole of creation, a covenant which stands in relation to the covenant with Abraham as the all-embracing universal to the particular. This particular, on the basis of the covenant with Noah, must have a dynamic openness to the universal' (156).

This Old Testament theology of history, Balthasar continues to argue, is also encountered at its end (eschatology), *via* the prophets and the apocalyptic visions. According to Von Balthasar, it is for this reason that Daniel, as an apocalyptic literature, has spawned attempts to draw up theologies of world history where, 'the whole time is stirred up in relation to the final time' (160). It certainly shows 'the consciousness of the relevance of secular history for salvation history' (Ibid.). Cullmann (1965) seems to have a similar outlook to von Balthasar.

For him (160-66) *Heilsgeschichte* touches all humanity and its history but, specifically, with regard to its salvation. That is, the divine plan, from creation through to the election of Israel (the remnant) to the one man (Jesus) has all humanity in view as displayed in the return to multiplicity through 'apostles, first community, Church made up of Jews and Gentiles, world' (160). He writes, 'Israel is elected for the salvation of humanity. Because mankind is envisaged from the outset through the concept of the election of Israel, humanity remains in the salvation-historical perspective throughout its entire extent' (160). In addition to this, wider history is, according to Cullmann, not an arena of sustained divine revelation as the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel is, so as to be conceived of as leading directly to salvation history. Thus his remark: 'Apart from these indirect points of contact, the New Testament does not, of course, draw any direct lines leading from the history of the peoples of antiquity to salvation history' (163). However, he concedes that there is a sense in which they converge on the one man (Jesus) for their salvation, on account of which there is 'a merging of secular history to salvation history' (166). In his own words:

The material relationship between salvation history and history, theologically speaking, is that salvation history in essence rests upon election, on reduction to a narrow line, and that this line continues on for the salvation of all mankind, leading ultimately to a funnelling of all history into this line, in other words, a merging of secular history with salvation history (166).

Then to the far right of this continuum we have Pannenberg, one of the most elaborate theologians of history.<sup>32</sup> More than any other theologian in recent history, it may be said, Pannenberg (1969a) understands the whole of history as the arena of

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<sup>32</sup> Which is no surprise given that his career has addressed 'the cluster of issues concerning Christian faith, theology, and history' (Colombo 1990, 1).



God's activity, through which, therefore, he reveals himself; an understanding that has huge ramifications for the relationship of the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel to other histories.<sup>33</sup> His main thesis is that 'the totality of his (God's) speech and activity, the history brought about by God, shows who he is in an indirect way' (13). This means that no single activity in history, but rather the totality of history, is an absolute indirect self-revelation of God, itself a chain or series of related events (14ff). This is the reason why, Pannenberg (1969b) argues: 'Whenever the historical self-demonstration of YHWH in his acts was viewed as being definitive, and lasting, this demonstration still retained a provisional character. It was always surpassed with new events, new historical activity in which YHWH presents himself in new ways' (140).

Given that it is in the totality of history that God absolutely reveals himself indirectly, then the end of all history assumes pivotal significance as definitive in knowing God, and, crucially for our purposes, understanding his revelation in his past activities in history. This end in Pannenberg's thought is in Jesus, and more so in his resurrection. In his own words:

Now the history of the whole is only visible when one stands at its end. Until then, the future always remains as something beyond calculation. And only in the sense that the perfection of history has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ is God finally and fully revealed in the fate of Jesus. With the resurrection of Jesus, the end of history has already occurred ... (142).

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<sup>33</sup> Strictly speaking, Pannenberg's work is concerned with revelation, and how revelation is accomplished through history. But to do so, he of necessity espouses an elaborate theology of history, through which the relationship of the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel to other histories is evidently clear as we show below.

From the vantage point of the view of the end of history, 'the history that demonstrates the deity of God is broadened to include the totality of all events' (133), and not just limited to the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel. Again in his own words:

The history that demonstrates the deity of God is broadened to include the totality of all events. This corresponds completely to the universality of Israel's God, who is not only the God of Israel, but will be the God of all men. This broadening of *Heilsgeschichte* to a universal history is in essence already accomplished in the major prophets of Israel in that they treat the kingdoms of the world as responsible to God's commands ... Correspondingly, the apocalyptic viewpoint conceived of Jahweh's Law as the ground of the totality of world events. It is at the end of this chain of world events that God can for the first time be revealed with finality as the one true God (133).

The implications of such a theology of history for the relationship of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte* to other histories is obvious, some of which Pannenberg himself begins to touch on in the above quote. *Heilsgeschichte* is now expanded to include all other histories, or simply collapsed into all (universal?) history. In consequence, God is perceived to be at work in other histories directing them to their finality in Christ just as he was in the history of Israel. In other words, the life-event of Jesus has revealed, and thus transformed, all history into *Heilsgeschichte*. As it were, God has been active in all histories directing them to, hence their convergence in, the person of Jesus Christ, the end of history.

This demands the question of what then would be the purpose or even uniqueness of Israel's history, for in a sense, even though biblical history provides a pre-history to Christ the definitive end of history, on account of that very end, it is superseded (or transcended) by eschatological history. I think the only logical answer is that the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel is paradigmatic rather than exclusive. Paradigmatic in showing that we could view ethnic histories as arenas of *Heilsgeschichte* in similar

ways to Israel's history. In other words, what we perceive to have transpired in the history of Israel as reflected in the Old Testament, i.e., the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel (which is fulfilled in Christ as reflected in the New Testament), we could perceive precisely on account of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte*, to have occurred (or to be occurring), in varying degrees, in histories of other peoples as well.

So, in different ways these theologians perceive God to be involved with other histories in addition to the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel. Whereas all of them at different points on the spectrum of those who see God involved in history outside Israel's espouse an important facet of the reasons for perceiving God to be at work in other histories, it is Pannenberg's espousal that is most consistent and comprehensive. Therefore, this study will assume and proceed from his position.

If we may conclude this section then by recapitulating the contours of our argument, it is hard to envisage a *Heilsgeschichte* that is cut off from other histories on two highly significant counts elaborated by Pannenberg. The first is with the universality inherent in the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel that God is Lord of all and not just a localized deity of Israel, a conviction which necessitates a view of his involvement with other histories. The second is with *Heilsgeschichte's* eschatological claims of God's absolute revelation to all in Jesus Christ, and, we may add, his redemption of all peoples (and not just of Israel). What is more, this eschatological claim stretches back to the beginning with the creation. Such a claim precipitates a re-reading of other histories as products and manifestations of God's active involvement with them, and also the very re-reading of Israel's history as not

the exclusive arena of God's active involvement in histories of human societies and cultures. In the end, eschatological history as the pinnacle of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte* transcends it, thrusting it into a paradigmatic role. It would seem possible to understand that such a theology of history was operative in the logos-theologies of Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement. They understood with consistency, but in various ways,<sup>34</sup> that God had been at work through his Word revealing himself right from the creation, and had definitively revealed himself in the incarnation of the very Word. Thus the incarnation was not viewed as discontinuous with everything that had gone before, but part of divine activity in history. This enabled them to approach Greek philosophy positively but at the same time critically; the truth found in, and the best of, Greek philosophy was indeed revealed by that Word. In consequence, Greek philosophy was taken as containing partial revelations whose fullness was found or realized in Christ, and was a *praeparatio* for the reception of Christ; it had now to give way to Christ.<sup>35</sup> However, theirs was not so much a theological interpretation of what would become the New Testament<sup>36</sup> but rather a relating of their perception of Christ and the working of God to Greek heritage. Indeed our theology of history so far has not provided a typological theological interpretation of the New Testament, but only its basis. We now turn to the typology-based theological interpretation that it provides for the New Testament.

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<sup>34</sup> To borrow from Dupuis (2001, 70), '*logos-spermatikos* in Justin, *Logos-emphutos* in Irenaeus and *Logos-propetrikos* in Clement'. For more on these theologies in relation to the workings of God in history, see Dupuis (2001, 53-77), Daniélou (1973, 39-74, 345-74) and especially Chadwick (1966, 1-65) and Holte (1958).

<sup>35</sup> I have drawn our attention to these theologies from early Christian theologians due to their proximity to the apostolic Church, to show that from the outset, i.e., right from the inception of Christianity, *Heilsgeschichte* was widened to include other histories on the convictions enumerated.

<sup>36</sup> 'Not so much' is an important phrase because, as pointed out by Chadwick (1965), Justin's *Second Apology*, for instance, 'may be taken as a commentary on Romans i-ii and Acts xvii' (295).

### 3.2.3. *Typology-based Interpretations of the New Testament*

Within the framework of the theology of history argued for above, the key to typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament, as we argue below, is in correspondences between the original context in which a New Testament text was written or heard (we will refer to this as simply the 'initial context' from here on), and a contemporary context in which it is being read or heard ('contemporary context' from here on). The emergence of Contextualism has brought to the fore the point that a text's context plays a significant role in determining the meaning ascribed to it. This is of cardinal importance to typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament. Certainly, the context of a biblical text is itself subject to a variety of differentiation, ranging, for example, from concerns, questions, interests and reading habits of the context to the experiences, perspectives, conceptions, knowledge, history, culture, and religious consciousness of the same. Furthermore any aspect highlighted in characterizing or even defining a context can be variously differentiated, multiplied and nuanced. Further still is the fact that just how much the context of a text determines its meaning is up for grabs.<sup>37</sup> Our interest here is not to argue for any shade of contextualism, but, simply, to point out that the context of a text plays an integral part in determining its meaning, and not least in typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament, thereby making it a necessary object of critical investigation and interpretation. What follows should make more clear exactly what part contexts play in achieving typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament.

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<sup>37</sup> See Goldstein and Machor (2001) for a recent survey of the discussions.

As it happens, if the initial context of a New Testament text - whose genre is typology (i.e., the New Testament text is a typological interpretation of a portion of the Old Testament [see below for more])<sup>38</sup> - has similarities with a given contemporary context, then, *mutatis mutandis*, its meaning can be transferred directly from its initial context into its contemporary one. This is because the similarities in the initial and contemporary contexts of a New Testament's text eliminate considerably its message's cultural and historical distance, with the result that what can be determined to have been heard by the text's initial audience is, with few necessary qualifications, the same message being heard (hence transferred) by the text's contemporary audience.

We could illustrate this, again, by the use of Hebrews. Supposing that the initial context of Hebrews was one replete with mediators in its religious cosmology (in this case, angels, Moses, and high priests), we could say that the meaning of Hebrews' Christology to this context is that Jesus is the definitive mediator, who, therefore, surpasses Moses, Angels and High Priests. In a contemporary context of Hebrews, say, Africa, which is replete with ancestors as key mediators in its religious cosmology, we could transfer this Christology of Hebrews from its initial context directly onto it, so that Jesus too is understood in Africa as the definitive mediator but, now, surpassing ancestors. As can be seen, it is precisely because of the similarities in the two contexts of Hebrews, i.e., the presence of mediators in both, that its meaning to its 1<sup>st</sup> century audience is readily comprehensible to its contemporary audience in Africa.

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<sup>38</sup> Since the texts in view here are typological in nature, their initial context should be taken, in part, to be provided for by an audience which either shared in Israel's history or was familiar with it.

The case for direct transference of meanings from initial to contemporary contexts of New Testament typological texts does not lie solely in similarity of contexts but, crucially, is also grounded and reinforced in the conviction that God works in all history (which is, incidentally, illustrated in the similarity of contexts). And herein lies my thesis: 1. if God has been involved with the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel in a way that is recognized and, subsequently, interpreted in the New Testament to prefigure Christ, and, 2. if this involvement is perceived to have similarities with a particular aspect of the religious heritage of another group of people who are part of a contemporary context of the given New Testament text, then 3. this aspect of the religious heritage of this group of people can be interpreted to prefigure Christ in the same manner as the identified part in Israel's history is interpreted to prefigure him by the New Testament text.

The basis for this thesis lies in the convictions of the theology of history delineated above, i.e., if God is involved with histories other than Israel's, then they too should be understood and interpreted in the same ways as the history of Israel is by the New Testament. It is this conviction that leads to the conclusion that, where similarities exist between Israel's religious heritage and that of another group of people, it is the same God who has been at work in the two histories, and, for the same purposes. So going back to Hebrews, if angels, Moses and high priests are interpreted therein to prefigure Christ, ancestors too are then interpreted to prefigure him as well on account of their similarity as mediatorial figures to angels, Moses and high priests, and on account of the conviction that it is the same God at work in the two traditions. Consequently, New Testament texts that are typological interpretations of the Old

Testament are used to interpret typologically similar aspects of other histories in the same manner that they interpret Israel's *Heilsgeschichte*. The result of such an interpretation is that we have aspects of the religious heritage of people which, when interpreted by New Testament typological texts, are interpreted as types of Christ.

Coming to the concerns of theological interpretations, what this means is that similarity of initial and contemporary contexts, or at least similarity of aspects in both contexts, viewed through the aforementioned theology of history, eliminates considerably the problem of historical distance and enables a direct transfer of the historical meaning to be made from the initial audience to the contemporary one. It is this biblical interpretation, characterized by the direct transfer of a New Testament typological text's historical meaning, from its initial context into a contemporary Christian context, on the basis that the similarities in these contexts are there because God is at work in all history, that we are calling typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament.

As alluded to previously, we then have a theological interpretation that is genre and context specific. That is, we have a model of theological interpretation that can be used to read, not all, but only certain New Testament texts depending on their genre and in which context those texts are heard or read. Going by Wellek and Warren's (1962, in De Bruyn 1993, 81) criteria of 'outer form' (having to do with meter or structure) and 'inner form' (attitude, tone, purpose and the like) for determining genre, the New Testament genres that would offer the possibility to be



theologically interpreted thus would be those whose inner form<sup>39</sup> includes a typological interpretation of the Old Testament. This would be the case for it is only such texts that would have an interpretation of a 'type' in Israel's *Heilsgeschichte* thereby offering the possibility of comparisons, later, with a parallel aspect (a 'type') existing in a contemporary context of the text. Without such a comparison, a direct transfer of a text's historical meaning onto a contemporary audience would be impossible. Conversely, the contemporary context of the New Testament typological text would have to have certain aspects ('types') that are similar to the 'type' of the Old Testament being interpreted as such in the New Testament text; otherwise transference of meaning would be nullified. The similarity would not have to be a carbon copy, but would have to be significant enough to warrant seeing a correspondence. For these reasons, investigating and interpreting, on the one hand, the 'type' in Israel's history as would have been understood by the initial context of a given New Testament typological text, and doing the same, on the other hand, with a similar 'type' in the religious heritage of a contemporary context of the same text, would be an integral hermeneutical procedure in typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament.

In view of what we have just argued, I propose that typology-based theological interpretation is best suited for the theological interpretation of Hebrews and, particularly, its Christology in Africa. This is because the set of criteria for typology-based theological interpretations with regards to genre and context as just outlined, are met, respectively, in Hebrews and in its contemporary context in Africa. Specifically: 1. as alluded to above, and will be shown in detail later, Hebrews' genre

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<sup>39</sup> The 'outer form' is not critical for determining the genre we have in mind here.

is typological; it is in large measure a typological interpretation of aspects of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte* or religious heritage as portrayed in the Old Testament; and 2. as I shall argue later, an aspect of Africa's religious heritage can be shown to mirror the types of Israel's religious heritage as found in Hebrews' initial context. If this indeed is the case, then, in keeping with typology-based theological interpretations as argued above, the meaning of Hebrews' Christology for its initial context can be transferred directly to its contemporary context in Africa. More precisely, it would then follow, as I shall argue in my theological interpretation (kicked off by my historical-rhetorical study of Hebrews), that the signification of Jesus, for the original hearers of Hebrews, as a definitive mediator, greater than those who had been there before him, and, in consequence, superseding them and calling the audience of Hebrews to faith and loyalty to him as the definitive and, in this eschatological aeon, the only mediator, would be the same signification of Christ according to Hebrews in contemporary Africa's Christian communities. Only that in this case, the mediators in question would be ancestors and not angels, Moses, or the high priest.<sup>40</sup> So, the first procedure in our proposed typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews in Africa is to present the case for Hebrews as containing typological interpretations of the Old Testament, to probe the types being interpreted in Hebrews as would have been understood in its initial context, and then to compare this with the aspect in Africa's religious heritage which, I contend, mirrors them. We will begin this task in our fourth chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> This is the necessary alteration in the comparisons, the *mutatis mutandis*, mentioned before in this section of my study.

## CHAPTER 4

### JESUS, MEDIATOR *PAR EXCELLENCE*: HEBREWS' CHRISTOLOGY

We are concerned in this chapter with the Christology of Hebrews which we shall begin, in the following chapter, to seek to re-interpret in an African setting. However, an overview of the book is required before we can specifically look at its Christology, since its Christology is both an aspect and an integral part of its content. By this I mean that the Christology of Hebrews, as a part of its content, is related inextricably to the rest of its content and, therefore, can only be understood properly within the overall content of the book rather than in isolation. An overview of the book preceding an examination of its Christology would thus serve to clarify that Christology. Normally, it would be reasonable to expect that if a New Testament scholar looks at any New Testament text, he would do so through a full historical-critical reading; but we shall not do so in this thesis. It is necessary, therefore, in looking at Hebrews to begin by explaining why we are not going to do precisely that and, at the same time, argue for the suitability of the alternative approach we choose in the place of a comprehensive historical-critical reading.

#### 4.1 READING HEBREWS

##### 4.11 *Problems of Historical-Critical Readings of Hebrews*

When it comes to its historical context, Hebrews is shrouded in mystery: who wrote the book and when, to whom it was addressed, where these addressees were, what are its sources and tradition, and its *Sitz im Leben* are still unknown. This state of affairs is

witnessed from the earliest of times in church history where the inclusion of Hebrews among the Pauline corpus was not without qualification, nor was its acceptance in the canon without dispute (Metzger 1987, 191-206). In the end the tradition prevailed that Hebrews was written by Paul to some Jews to counter the threat of their falling back to Judaism.

The rise of historical criticism in the systematic study of the New Testament from the 1700s onwards, challenged the tradition on Hebrews' historical context and revived the problem of reading Hebrews. By no mere coincidence E.M. Roeth in 1636 (in Manson 1951, 16) argued for a Gentile readership of the letter, marking the beginning of a plethora of proposals on the historical context of Hebrews that still pervades scholarship on Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> The discovery of the Qumran scrolls in the middle of the last century raised the prospect of reading Hebrews by way of historical criticism, leading to a renewed interest in the book. Yadin (1959) set it off with the thesis that 'the addressees of the Epistle must have been a group of Jews originally belonging to the Dead Sea Sect who were converted to Christianity carrying with them some of their previous beliefs' (38).<sup>2</sup> However, the scrolls have so far not offered any solution to the problem of reading Hebrews but rather fostered various reconstructions of its historical background that on the whole have tended to be more detailed than the previous ones. It appears that the achievement of historical criticism on Hebrews has been limited to the establishment of three things (at least beyond considerable doubt): 1. the almost universal acknowledgement that Paul was not the author of Hebrews; 2. that Hebrews genre is ambiguous, i.e., it seems to be both a sermon and a letter; and 3. that the author

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<sup>1</sup> Some Hebrews scholars contend that this has jeopardized the task of reading Hebrews. Hurst (1990), as one of them, aptly writes 'the interpretation of Hebrews is in disarray because scholarly opinion vacillates from background to background as each new publication appears' (2).

<sup>2</sup> For more on the effect of Qumran studies on Hebrews scholarship, see Buchanan (1975, 1, 308-313) and McCullough (1981, 32-35).

was responding to a crisis (whose nature is highly contested). Beyond this, scholarship on the background of Hebrews has not in any qualitative way superseded that of the second century (we are still as uncertain of it as they were), making the problem of reading Hebrews its most enduring characteristic.

Why precisely has this problem persisted? The problem of the historical context in reading Hebrews is forced upon the reader by the paradox of a rich book matched with incomparably thin external and indeterminate internal evidence for its historical setting, the result of which is a multiplicity of proposals put forward by Hebrews scholars. We have two main competing views on its historical situation, which are both related to its original audience.<sup>3</sup> In the first, scholars of Hebrews view it to have been written to Christian Jews in Jerusalem faced with the threat of falling back to Judaism. Recent scholars who hold this view, with some differences in the details, are Buchanan (1972), Bruce (1990), and Ellingworth (1993). They put forward a number of reasons to support their view. For Bruce, the writer's 'insistence that the last covenant was antiquated ... is driven home repeatedly in a manner which would be pointless if his readers were not specially disposed to live under that covenant' (xxvi). This manner to him includes the bulk of the argument being conducted against 'a background of Old Testament allusions' (5), and an intimacy with Levitical ritual. Also, the 'foundation' (θεμέλιον) mentioned in 6.1ff and the description of Christ's 'death' (θανάτου) in 9.15, Bruce notes, 'implies the Jewish antecedents of the readers' (6) because they (Heb. 9.15 in particular) refer to 'redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant' (Ibid.). While Ellingworth (1993) cites the expectations of the author that his readers 'be thoroughly acquainted with Old Testament persons, institutions (especially

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<sup>3</sup> This is primarily because decisions on other components of Hebrews' historical context (such as destination, date of writing, and even authorship) not only hinge on the decision taken on the original readers but are also made to correlate with it.

cultic institutions, e.g. 9.1-10) and texts and Mosaic law' (23), the author's use of rabbinic procedures in his arguments, and the presupposition of 7.11 ff that the Levitical priesthood was God ordained even though now superseded by Christ. Accordingly, the central purpose of Hebrews is perceived as an attempt to pre-empt a falling back to Judaism through severe warnings of the consequences of such an action and a forceful argument that shows the superiority of Christ over Old Testament figures and *cultus*, and of his finality.

In the second, scholars of Hebrews such as Scott (1922), Moffat (1924), Attridge (1989) and Lane (1991) among others, *contra* the first view, view Hebrews to have been written to either a mixed ethnic audience or to a predominantly Gentile one. For Scott, the reasons are because Hebrews' use of the Old Testament, and its confinement therein to 'Levitical ordinance' (16) does not signify a Jewish readership, since the Old Testament was an authority both in the church and the synagogue, and any section in it was as much a part of scripture as any other. He adds weight to his position by calling attention to the use of the Old Testament in a similar manner by Apologists in the second century. Moreover, he argues that apostasy to Judaism was not a concern of the author because the epistle has no word about it. Its concern is with the mythical tabernacle and not the Temple: if a slide into to Judaism was a concern, the writer should at least have fixed his attention on the *Torah*, fidelity to it being a characteristic of first-century Judaism. On his part, Attridge (1989) especially emphasizes that the danger the readership was facing was a moral one, brought about by external and internal factors, and not by apostasy to Judaism, that threatened their initial commitment to Christ. In any case, he argues, the 'falling away' (*παραπεσόντας*, 6.6) from God could not be understood to mean turning back to Judaism, since Judaism could not be equated to unbelief, or to paganism. Hebrews, then, is read as a document set to

encourage Christians waning in zeal and succumbing to persecution. The writer is seen to do this through warnings and exhortations (*paraenesis*), and through an argument (thesis) hammered out of scripture intended to deepen his audience's understanding of the faith. The thesis of Hebrews is meant to serve its paraenetic aims; its substance should not be construed as having been determined by any of the circumstances of the original readers.

As mentioned, the reasons behind this problem have been the paucity of external and indeterminate internal evidence, which have rendered the arrival at any conclusive historical background to the book impossible. This results in historical-critical readings of Hebrews (limited as they are by the very methodology of the approach) that are, in practice, exercises in 'conjectural criticism',<sup>4</sup> where the reading depends on the background presupposed by the reader. A hermeneutical inconsistency is then created; that is, we have a reading of Hebrews that has the hermeneutical aims of historical criticism<sup>5</sup> as its point of departure but diverts from them by presupposing a historical context that is inevitably conjectural because of the lack of sufficient historical data. Such a situation makes the case for an alternative critical reading of Hebrews, one that does not depend directly on a precise historical context to assign the book to in order to make sense of it, but at the same time honours the fact that the book is a result of concrete historical contingencies. Of course, it is a complex matter to have a critical reading that apparently proceeds differently from historical criticism but, yet again, upholds the historical contingencies of a text (at the least that the text is a historical

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<sup>4</sup> Delobel (1994) in an article concerned with textual criticism coins this term to mean a textual correction not based on the original text (which is no longer available) but 'inspired by exegetical concerns for a meaningful text' (112). It seems appropriate here to borrow it from him since the assumed historical background of Hebrews by historical critical scholars is not based on clear historical data available but is conjectural and inspired by exegetical concerns.

<sup>5</sup> Namely that a text's meaning should be made sense of by means of its background, i.e., its historical context - author, audience, *Sitz im Leben* etc.

document addressing real people in real particular circumstances). But this, for the sake of theological interpretations of the Bible, is extremely important since - in line with arguments we set out in the last chapter - theological interpretations of the Bible must of necessity reckon with the historical contingencies of the biblical texts being interpreted if they are to pass muster as theological interpretations of the same. For our purposes, if we could be more specific, to have an alternative reading of Hebrews that would do away entirely with its concrete historical circumstances would not be in the interests of a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews in Africa since the theology of typology is anchored in the view that God is at work in history; a view that would be negated by an alternative reading that ignores history. To this alternative critical reading we turn now.

#### 4.1.2. *A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Hebrews*

Hebrews has impressed itself on its critics as a rhetorical discourse.<sup>6</sup> This has meant that it is perceived as persuasive discourse, geared to provoke action and to do this beyond its initial audience and context. As such, attempts have been made to read the book *via* rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> In principle, the critical reading of a text rhetorically is in part carried out by determining its *effects* on its audience; in part, too, by examining the strategies (*inventio*), such as discursive techniques, argument structures, use of evidence, treatment of subject, control of emotion etc., that a rhetor marshals to create those effects; and, not least of all, by considering the *exigencies* that occasion a text's emergence in the first place. The amalgam of these three components of rhetoric, but especially, if not primarily, *exigence*, is at times known as the 'rhetorical situation'<sup>8</sup> of a

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Attridge (1989), Black II (1988) and Buchanan (1972).

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography see Hauser and Watson (1994) and, also, Watson (1997).

<sup>8</sup> This concept in rhetorical scholarship was brought to prominence by Bitzer (1968) and has been judged as an attempt to 'bring a renewed sense of order into our understanding of the nature, purpose, and function of rhetoric' (Patton 1979, 38).



text. It is this rhetorical situation that allows the rhetorical critic to make sense of a given text. Three observations concerning the rhetorical situation should especially be noted here.<sup>9</sup> The first is that, unlike concrete historical situations of a text, rhetorical situations are not limited to their immediate or first audience in determining the *effects* of a text's rhetoric, since the text's rhetoric is understood to outlive its initial speaker and listener context. Olbrechts-Perelman and Tyteca (1969, 30-45) seem to have been the first to present an understanding of rhetoric that was not tied to an empirical audience of the rhetoric when they proposed that the concept of 'universal' and 'particular' audiences are both constructs of the rhetor. A particular audience (not to be confused with the real empirical audience) consists of the audience of a piece of rhetoric when the rhetoric appeals to such an audience on account of the audience's historical circumstances; while a universal audience is composed potentially of all humanity, irrespective of geographical and historical circumstances, since rhetoric contains elements that have universal appeal irrespective of audience's particularities. Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman point at rationality as one such element because they understand it to be an intrinsic quality of all human beings.<sup>10</sup>

The second observation is that the rhetorical situation is not limited to Greco-Roman rhetoric in the analysis of its *inventio*. In other words, other communication theories of rhetoric not addressed by Greco-Roman rhetorical theory can be employed to illumine the way a text works to produce the effects it is thought to bring about.<sup>11</sup> As a

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<sup>9</sup> Bitzer's (1968) contribution does not embrace the three observations we bring to attention since he seems to have limited rhetorical situations to the initial *exigence* (both in terms of causing the rhetoric, and the situation that the rhetoric aims to change) of any piece of rhetoric (6). But his position was challenged (see Amador [1999b, 28-3] for a brief survey of the debate), and the concept of rhetorical situations broadened beyond the descriptive and causalist.

<sup>10</sup> See Gross (1999) for a recent clarification of their contribution. Also see Wuellner (1987, 455-6), who points out that rhetorical contexts (audiences) should not be confused with historical audiences even when apparently identical because the way they are arrived at is fundamentally different.

<sup>11</sup> See Wuellner (1995, 920-22), Brodkey and Cooper (1993), Eagleton (1983, 205-206), and especially Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman (1969, 163-7) who are viewed as instrumental in refocusing rhetoric

consequence of such an understanding, rhetorical criticism includes, but is not tied to, a historically-based rhetorical criticism which, as Stamps (1995) points out, is 'interested in reconstructing the rhetorical form and function of the biblical text in its historically reconstructed situation' (136). This means that 'the text is analyzed as a piece of ancient Hellenistic rhetoric according to the historical-rhetorical categories gleaned from ancient rhetorical handbooks and ancient rhetorical compositions' (ibid.), to which, we are pointing out, rhetorical criticism is not limited when looking at a text.

The third observation is that the rhetorical situation is not limited to the rhetoric's immediate historical situation in determining its *exigence*, for the rhetoric of a text can generate its own *exigence* or find later situations that respond to the rhetoric. Amador's (1999b, 209-10) summary explicating this is worth quoting here:

...while it is an important part of the study of rhetoric to consider the intentionalities and (reconstructed) effects of the argumentative discourse at the time of its original utterance and in the context of its immediate audience, this focus is only one part of a larger spectrum of the function of the "text" as argumentation in time and through space. An approach to the Bible as argumentation must also confront the multiplicities of intentionalities (implied author, implied audience, actual audience, critics and so on) and the text's materiality as an act confronted every time the Bible is picked up and read, performed, depicted. Argumentation does not cease to be relevant once the original rhetorical situation has decayed, nor does its impact thereupon cease. An argumentation theory approach to the text can just as legitimately function to ponder the resonating "contexts" that are generated by and through argument, as well as the continuing argumentative use of the biblical texts and traditions in other argument-acts (209-10).

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away from the legacy and dominance of Aristotelian precepts towards concrete argumentation and persuasion (Gilbert 1997, 5-8). The legacy and dominance of Aristotelian precepts on effective communication (especially in his classification of rhetorical genres into the 'forensic', 'epideictic', and 'deliberative') is well known. But this, as brought out by Nelson et al (1987, 5-6) should not blind us to other perspectives on rhetoric in the ancient and classical period.

As a result, rhetorical situations of a text are not limited to a text's initial *effects*, *exigence* and *inventio* but transcend the historical situation of a text. With this in mind, beginning with Hebrews' *inventio*, I will utilize these three components as the foci of the rhetorical inquiry and analyses of Hebrews, thus reading it rhetorically.<sup>12</sup>

The identification of a text's rhetorical genre is critical in helping the rhetorical critic to understand and unlock its *inventio*, since rhetorical analysis presumes that rhetoric follows the logic of its genre (Meynet 1998, 169-172). Several rhetorical genres have been proposed in relation to the genre of Hebrews.<sup>13</sup> Of these, the most compelling is *synkrisis*, for it can be said to characterize the whole of Hebrews. Zuntz (1953) was the first to draw attention to the recurrence of *synkrisis* in Hebrews when he wrote:

... one of the reasons, with me, for regarding Hebrews as originally a homily is the excessive use which it makes of the rhetorical method of *synkrisis*. This is a traditional device of encomiastic Greek and Latin rhetoric: the person or object, to be praised is placed beside outstanding specimens of a comparable kind and his or its superiority ('ὕπεροχγή') urged ... And so does Hebrews, in contrasting Jesus, and his Church, with angels, Moses, Melchizedek, high-priests, the synagogue, the heroes of faith, &c. (286).

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<sup>12</sup> This way of approaching and understanding Hebrews' rhetoric may seem at odds with Kennedy's 'watershed manual in New Testament rhetorical criticism' (Stamps 1995, 133). His methodology offers four carefully defined stages in rhetorical criticism of a text (Kennedy 1984, 33- 38): The 'rhetorical unit' constitutes a whole in the discourse, having a beginning, a middle and an end; the 'rhetorical situation', the 'conditions that invite utterance' (34); the 'rhetorical problem', the over-riding problem; and the 'arrangement of the material in the text' which includes sub-divisions and their persuasive effects, and how they work together. At the end of the fourth stage, the critic is expected to review what he has come up with and judge whether the unit succeeds in meeting the exigence and whether his analysis is 'consistent with the overall impact of the rhetorical unit' (38). What should be borne in mind is that whichever rhetorical methodology one chooses, one will, ultimately, be dealing - wholly or partly and in all sorts of interrelations - with the three components that we identified (thanks to Bitzer) as constituting a rhetorical situation and this applies to Kennedy's methodology as well. So, for example, in his model, the 'rhetorical unit' would be part of the *inventio*; the 'rhetorical situation' would be part of the *exigence* etc. Bitzer deserves credit for offering a broad framework of reading texts rhetorically rather than providing a highly defined methodology. Unfortunately, as well noted by Amador (1999a, 30), Bitzer's contribution to rhetorical criticism and the debate thereof has not appeared at all in the discourse of biblical rhetorical criticism.

<sup>13</sup> Such as 'paranomia' (Jobes 1992), 'amplification' (Olbricht 1993), and 'homily' (Attridge 1990), or, in the case of Koester (2002, 106), Hebrews as a whole is seen as a standard form of a classical rhetorical speech consisting of an introduction (*exordium*), a statement of the case (*narratio*), supporting arguments (*confirmatio*), and a conclusion (*conclusio*).



### 4.1.3. Hebrews' Rhetoric

The rhetor (Hebrews' writer) introduces Jesus as the Son of God through whom he has spoken in 'these last days' (ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν, Heb. 1.1-2). As God's Son, the world was created through him, and he was appointed heir (κληρομόνον) of all things. He then turns his attention to angels from Hebrews 1.4ff to show that although they are both mediators Jesus is superior to angels because he is God's Son, who temporarily became a human being, while they are ministering spirits. The seven scriptural quotations (Heb. 1.5-1.14) underscore this superiority on the basis of his divinity, while Hebrews 2.5ff underscores this on the basis of the results of his incarnation (more on this later).<sup>14</sup> *Synkrisis* with Moses comes next in chapter 3 where the rhetor shows that although they were both faithful (πιστῶν) to the one who appointed them, Jesus is superior for, unlike Moses who is faithful as a servant (θεράπων) in the house of God, Jesus is faithful as a Son (υἱός) over his house.

Next is the *synkrisis* with Aaron the high priest. Even though both are called by God (Heb. 5.4), Jesus is superior because he is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδεκ), as expounded in Hebrews 7.1-28. This priesthood is permanent and precedes that of Aaron. In addition, Jesus' priesthood is superior by virtue of the efficacy of his sacrifice; hence its once-for-all (ἐφάπαξ) status that does away with the need for further sacrifices. The comparison with the Aaronic priesthood leads the rhetor to compare the new covenant, which Jesus mediates, and the old covenant (Heb. 8.1-10.18). The comparison, which draws out the superiority of the new covenant, is focused on the place of worship (the tabernacle) and the main activity therein (sacrifice). The old covenant had an earthly tabernacle which was a copy and

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<sup>14</sup> What this means is that Hebrews 2.1-18 contains a paraenetic section (2.1-4) and a *synkrisis* as well. This is not quite identified in Seid's (see above) rhetorical structure that we are using for an overview of Hebrews' rhetoric.

shadow of the heavenly one (Heb. 8.5). Sacrifices of the goats, bulls and other animals offered there were not able to take away sin (Heb. 4.4), hence the need to offer sacrifices again and again (Heb. 9.9). In contrast, the new covenant has Jesus who, as its high priest, entered the heavenly tabernacle with his own blood, which effectively took away all sin for all time (Heb. 10). Consequently not only is the new covenant superior to the old one, it replaces it as well (Heb. 10.15-18).

We may now consider the subject matter of the *paraenesis* from which we acquire, subsequently (against the background of the *synkrisis*) the *exigence* and *effects* of Hebrews. The first paraenetic section (Heb. 2.1-4) comes after the demonstration that Jesus is superior to the angels. It is a warning to the audience not to slip away (*παραρυωμεν*) from the word of Jesus, for such an action would carry a greater penalty than the one given those who disobeyed the message spoken to them by angels. We again encounter in the second section (Heb. 3.7-4.16) another warning from the rhetor just after the *synkrisis* of Jesus with Moses: 'See to it brothers, that there is not in any of you a wicked (*πονηρα*), unbelieving (*ἀπιστιος*) heart that turns away (*αποστῆναι*) from the living God' (Heb. 3.12). This warning is dwelt on by a lesson from the generation that Moses led, which failed to enter God's rest because of unbelief (Heb. 3.16-4.5). In the third paraenetic section (Heb. 5.11-6.20), the rhetor bemoans his audience's slowness of learning (Heb. 5.11-7) which prevents him from explaining more of his theme of Jesus as a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. He then warns them again of the dangers of falling away (Heb. 6.4-7) and of laxity, before exhorting them to be imitators of those, who through faith and perseverance (*μακροθυμιας*), inherit what has been promised' (Heb. 6.12). Most of the last paraenetic section (Heb. 10.19-12.29) is a reiteration of what the rhetor has previously said: in his exhorting them, for example, to hold fast (*κατέχομεν*) to their hope (Heb. 10.23); to watch out against sin (Heb. 10.26-

31); to persevere in their previous confidence (Heb. 10.35-39) and to endure struggles that are occasioned by their faith (Heb. 12.2-14); and not to turn away from God (Heb. 12.25-27). However, he now shows a concern for worship (he tells his audience to draw near to God in assurance of sins forgiven [Heb. 10.19-22] and with reverence and awe [Heb. 12.29]), and for his audience's ecclesial life when he gives them general pastoral advice (Heb. 12.12-17). Pastoral advice also predominates in the 'epistolary appendix'.

From these we could conclude that the *exigence* that spawns the rhetoric of Hebrews is that of a Christian community in imminent danger of drifting away from God through a combination of disobedience/sin and a crisis of confidence in their faith. Thus the rhetor seeks to pre-empt this by numerous warnings of the consequences of such an action, by motivation through examples, by reminding them of their past ways etc. The desired *effects* of Hebrews on its audience are to motivate them to obedience, faith and perseverance, the kind they had before this crisis (Heb. 10.32-35). The *synkrisis* in Hebrews, in keeping with the general aim of the rhetorical genre it belongs to, functions to help the audience see the superiority of Jesus (we will argue as a mediator) over angels, Moses, the Aaronic priesthood and its *cultus*. The rhetor then, in his *paraenesis*, uses this established superiority to motivate the community of faith to right action (in this case to obedience, faith and worship, and perseverance).

One may question here the validity of such a rhetorical reading as an alternative to a historical-critical reading, since this overview of Hebrews' message may be arrived at through historical criticism. The difference is that rhetorical inquiry arrives at such an overview *via* the rhetoric of the text and not through critically ascertained history to the background of Hebrews, which, as mentioned, is inconclusive. This, then, means that

the problems encountered in historical-critical readings of Hebrews are avoided while allowing the text to be made sense of in a way that does not do away with its historical contingencies. The import of this deserves further elucidation.

We mentioned that the *inventio*, *exigence* and *effects* of a work are not limited to its historical situation. There is a sense in which, as shown by Olbricht (1999,108-124 ), Watson (1999, 125-151), Meynet (1998, 337-350) and others, historical criticism makes, or can make, use of the insights of rhetorical criticism in order to confirm, or reject, its conjectures. When this happens, the historical contingencies of the text are arrived at *via* its rhetoric. Indeed, going by the literature available (Hauser and Watson 1994), the predominant form of rhetorical criticism is in the service of historical criticism in this precise way (though this is only useful in cases of lack of precise information on the contexts of biblical texts). When rhetorical criticism is used by historical criticism in this way, then, in seeking *effects* of a text (to recall section 3.12), the initial recipients of the rhetoric will be the rhetorical critic's chief object of attention; in seeking the *inventio* of a biblical text, rhetorical critics will seek to reconstruct and understand the *genres* that may have been available at the time of the rhetoric; and in seeking the *exigence* of a biblical rhetoric, the modern rhetorical critic will limit his reconstruction to its initial or first *exigence*. This, precisely, is what we have done in our rhetorical criticism of Hebrews as seen, especially, in our choice of *synkrisis* as the rhetorical genre to unlock Hebrews' rhetoric. (As noted, this rhetorical device would have been available at the time of Hebrews' rhetoric as a piece of ancient Hellenistic rhetoric.) What this means is that our rhetorical criticism of Hebrews takes its historical circumstances seriously, albeit arrived at rhetorically. Thus, our rhetorical criticism of Hebrews serves the interests of a theological interpretations of the Bible, not least *en route* to a typology-based theological interpretation of the Bible in Africa.



With this overview on Hebrews given *via* a rhetorical reading of Hebrews, we may now consider its Christology. Any attempt to comprehend the Christology of the book must of necessity also understand the figures with whom Jesus is compared and contrasted, and to whom he is shown to be superior. The understanding of those figures is key to establishing the Christology of Hebrews because it provides the religio-historical context to comprehend the same. But this should not be divorced from the workings of typology. As mentioned already, typology is embedded in Hebrews' *synkrisis*, so much so that, it could be said, typology orders the argument of Hebrews. In this respect, it will be seen that these figures to whom Jesus is compared and contrasted in Hebrews are types of Christ. And in each case, one or the other characteristic, or working, of typology is operative. So, we may say, there is *synkrisis*, and, with it, typology, with the result that to understand the figures with whom Jesus is compared and contrasted is to understand the types which, in keeping with typology, shed light on him, their antitype. Also, because the figures are taken from the Old Testament, it means a typological interpretation of the same is taking place. With this in mind, we now consider the Christology of Hebrews.

## **4.2 THE CHRISTOLOGY OF HEBREWS**

### ***4.2.1. Mediators: Middle Figures and Entities***

As will become clear in the following, we will be arguing in our thesis that the predominant Christology in Hebrews is mediatorial, i.e., that on account of the *synkrisis* in Hebrews, Jesus is best understood in Hebrews chiefly as a definitive mediator. Consequently, it is necessary for us at this stage of our thesis to establish a definite understanding of what we mean by, and how we use the term, 'mediator' in our discourse on the Christology of Hebrews. This understanding will apply in what follows immediately from here and throughout this thesis. In our understanding of the

term, we shall rely heavily on the work of Oepke simply because he seems to be the only scholar who has looked at the term in detail and, more importantly, done so with special reference to its use in the Old and New Testament.

In *TDNT*, Oepke (1967) comprehensively looks at the Greek term μεσίτης, which is usually translated into English as 'mediator'. He isolates three notions that the term stood for in Hellenistic usage. The first is a 'neutral' 'whom both sides can trust' (599). In this sense a mediator could be an 'umpire', a 'negotiator of peace', or even a 'guarantor'; in which case, Oepke points out, the term could be a synonym of (μετ)έγγυος. Concerning this first notion, Oepke writes that it 'became one of the most varied technical terms in the vocabulary of Hellenistic law' (Ibid.). Accordingly, its usage range from a 'witness' to a legal transaction, to a 'sequestrator' as 'a neutral with whom a disputed object or sum is temporarily left' (600).

This first usage represents the term as understood in its technical sense. However, Oepke goes on to point out two more notions (the second and the third) which have a less precise meaning relative to what the term stood for technically. These are, 1. "'intermediary in the general spatial sense' (Ibid.), and 2. "'mediator" or "negotiator" in the sense of 'the one who establishes a relation which would not otherwise exist' (Ibid.).

Turning to the Old Testament, Oepke points out that μεσίτης occurs only once in the LXX, and that is in Job 9.33 where it reads: 'Would that he our mediator were present, and a reprover, and one who should hear the cause between both' (Εἶθε ἦν ὁ μεσίτης ἡμῶν καὶ ἐλέγχων, καὶ διακούων ἀναμέσον ἀμφοτέρων). As Old Testament commentators observe, Job here seems to wish for some impartial judge (Gordis 1978, 111), or, for others, an arbiter (Hartley 1988, 181) or umpire (Pope 1965, 74) to settle

his complaint with God. In this case what is in focus is clearly the first of the three notions of mediator looked at above. But does this therefore mean that this is an isolated case, that is, that the concept and, consequently, mediatorial figures, are lacking in the Old Testament? Clearly not. As, Oepke (1967) shows, the concept is there but with no single term for it and that in fact, 'mediatorship is at the heart of Old Testament religion' (614). Indeed he puts it to us that Yahweh has his mediators. Of these, he points out, first, the non-human mediators (he calls them 'intermediary hypostases' [611]) on the grounds that in the Old Testament some of 'God's dealings with the world are through intermediary hypostases' (Ibid.). To him, three intermediary hypostases are especially important. In his own words:

There are three of these in particular. First, from the earliest to the latest times, there is the מלאך יהוה, the visible and for most part helpful messenger of Yahweh; then the רוח יהוה, known by its operations, which were at first merely ecstatic and later also moral; and finally the hypostatized divine חכמה, corresponding to the Greek *logos* concept' (611).

However this is not all there is of mediation in the Old Testament; Oepke also examines the human mediators found in the Old Testament. These are priests and prophets (of which Moses is especially singled out). Concerning Moses, he argues that even though the word 'mediator' is not used in the story of God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage using Moses (Ex. 3ff), 'the mediator concept is twice given classical formulation in this context' (612). The first is when Aaron becomes the mouth of Moses speaking to the people, and Moses becomes God speaking through him (Ex. 14.16, 7.11). Here the mediatorial function of Aaron and Moses is that of commissioned spokesmen of God to the people. The second is in Moses 'as a mediator giving the law' (612, Ex. 19.3ff, 9ff, 21ff; 20.18ff. etc.). Here he points out that Moses alone stands before Yahweh, and between Yahweh and the people, i.e., 'he receives the directions of Yahweh and passes them on to the people' (Ibid.). In addition, Oepke

points out the other side of this mediation, which is that Moses intercedes with Yahweh on behalf of the people (Ex. 20.19).

Our point, of course, is not to show or argue that mediation is at the heart of the Old Testament but, rather, to have a concrete basis for our understanding and use of the term in this thesis. So, from what we gather from the preceding, what/who would we say is a mediator? The following observation could be made. The term 'mediator' seems to have no one fixed meaning to it, but rather a single core, and integral, notion fixed to it. This core notion is that in one way or the other, and for one purpose or another, persons or entities (we may call them 'middle figures') are employed or used to facilitate a relationship of two persons or groups, or between a person and a group of people. More specifically (and perhaps importantly for our purpose) with reference to the Old Testament, we see that Yahweh often uses middle figures in dealing with the world and human beings, and, conversely, humans use middle figures in approaching, or relating to, God. Therefore, these middle figures, in whatever form or capacity they function, are what we are going to understand in this thesis as mediators. In other words, in this thesis, *we shall understand a 'mediator' as any person who, or entity which, is perceived to be used by God in his dealing and relating with the world and human beings, or any person who, or entity which, human societies use in approaching, or relating to, God.*

Given such an understanding, it is clear that, although Oepke omits them, angels in the Old Testament would feature as non-human mediators. This is because angels in the Old Testament are referred to as superhuman beings who perform some function in the world of human beings under the direction or will of Yahweh. For example, they announce births (e.g. Gen. 16.11-12), communicate Yahweh's word to the prophets (e.g. 1Kgs 13.18), and are Yahweh's agents of protection (e.g. Gen. 24.40, Ex. 14.19-20).

It is a well observed phenomenon in discourse on mediators in the religious tradition of Israel,<sup>15</sup> and in the literature of the time, that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period, belief in angels and certain prophets (but especially Moses) became more elaborate. This is an important point to note because in our discussion of Hebrews' Christology, we shall be comparing Jesus to mediatorial figures in the Old Testament albeit as understood in the various Jewish groups in existence at the time of Hebrews' writing. This means that we will have to reckon with a mediatorial Christology that is forged in dialogue with beliefs in mediators as understood then. We shall revisit this point and look at some of the elaborate beliefs in these mediatorial figures (found in Hebrews) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period in the relevant section of our thesis.

#### **4.2.2. *Preliminary Considerations***

We may begin with some preliminary considerations. In attempting to account for the language of Hebrews (i.e., its couching or idiom), Hurst (1990) discusses not less than eight possible backgrounds of Hebrews. These are: Platonism, Qumran, pre-Christian Gnosticism, the Samaritans, Merkabah Mysticism (these he calls non-Christian background), and the Stephen tradition, Pauline theology, and first Peter (which he calls Christian backgrounds). He scrutinizes the strengths and weaknesses of each background, with specific attention to its points of contact with, and divergences from, Hebrews. Though clearly in favour of Christian backgrounds (and he has a proposal to that effect) as those that best account for the language of Hebrews, Hurst concludes that all the other backgrounds can be posited with some basis in Hebrews. This, he argues, is because the parallels between Hebrews and the mentioned backgrounds proposed as candidates for the historical background of Hebrews are there not on account of exchanges between them of material, but, rather, because they

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<sup>15</sup> See for example, Oepke (1967, 617-18) himself, Yates (1971, 166-67), De Lacey (1987) and Chester

represent 'independent work on the same material' (132). The material in question is the Old Testament, and the candidates for Hebrews' historical background represent its application to different circumstances.<sup>16</sup> Hurst's study points us in the right direction: Hebrews background must be located in the general 'late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Israelite religion' (a religion that at the time is quite diffuse but held together by its roots in pre-exilic Jewish heritage ['Old Testament']<sup>17</sup> and its Hellenistic environment)<sup>18</sup> and not, for want of relevant information as earlier mentioned, in any specific historical situation. Indeed, Jewish writings of the time attach significance to angelic figures, Moses, high priests and kindred figures who are at the heart of the rhetoric of Hebrews. It is necessary, therefore, that the Christology of Hebrews should be understood in the context of these figures as portrayed in the complex Jewish religious writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period and in related material.<sup>19</sup>

We may inquire now into the precise significance of these figures, and what they have in common. As pointed out already in our discussion on mediators, angels, Moses and high priests are in one way or another mediators between God and human beings. We also pointed out that the mediation they carry out is found in the Old Testament but

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(1991).

<sup>16</sup> A case in point here is 'Melchizedek'. As demonstrated amongst others by Delcor (1971), Horton (1976, 12-83), Hurst (1990, 53-60), and Gieschen (1997), Melchizedek is a figure in pre-exilic Israelite writings (Gen. 14.17-20 and Ps. 110) on the basis of which are developed, by several Jewish communities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period, different understandings of his function and significance.

<sup>17</sup> It cannot be overstated that the Old Testament is crucial to all Jewish communities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period, only that the understanding of it is not uniform as portrayed in the 'fluidity of the Hebrew text in the 1st cent., i.e., the existence of families of texts differing from the MT' (Miller 1971, 55) and in the different exegetical traditions in existence then. Concerning the latter, Bowker (1969) sums it up well thus; 'to a great extent the common ground of Judaism lay in the past, and the diversity of Judaism at the time of Jesus was a consequence (and at times rival) attempts to apply the Torah, and other pre-exilic Old Testament literature, in life' (8).

<sup>18</sup> Hengel's (1974) *Judaism and Hellenism* is notable for indicating the telling influence of Hellenism on Jewish communities.

<sup>19</sup> Here I have in mind, though not exclusively, tannaitic rabbinic literature. This is so because for a variety of reasons (see Neusner 1998, 8-11), some ideas encapsulated in tannaitic rabbinic material can be identified in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period; and so that literature can act as a legitimate window to the beliefs and practices of that period. This is important to note because we shall consider a portion of tannaitic rabbinic literature in elucidating the mediation of Moses in our section on Moses-Christology.

beliefs in their mediation become more elaborate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period. For this reason we shall be examining, where relevant, the depiction of angels, Moses and high priest in some of the writings, and related material, in this period to gain more insight into their mediation. This will help us subsequently in perceiving the mediation of Jesus Christ more clearly, which, according to Hebrews, is superior to that by angels, Moses and high priests chiefly on the grounds of Jesus' ontology which results in his superior execution of the mediatorial functions in view. For want of space our discussion will be sketchy and will focus very selectively on the material that serves to illuminate the pertinent content of Hebrews.

#### 4.2.3. *Angelomorphic Christology*

In coming to grips here with the angelomorphic Christology in Hebrews 1.4-2.18 we contend that the *synkrisis* between Jesus and angels is pre-eminently mediatorial. This is to say that predominant in this pericope is the superiority of Jesus as a mediator over angelic mediators. In what follows, we will argue that Hebrews 1.4 not only introduces the *synkrisis* of Jesus with angels, but at the same time acts, as a counterpart to prophetic mediation in Hebrews 1.1-2, to introduce the subject of the *synkrisis*, viz., angelic mediation. We will show that this angelic mediation is alluded to in Hebrews 1.4 itself but made explicit in Hebrews 2.2-4 and, then, consider how the sections that follow these two, i.e., Hebrews 1.5-14 and 2.5-18, clarify this superiority of Jesus' mediation over angelic mediation. When this is done, the angelomorphic Christology of Hebrews will be thrown into sharp relief.

*Prima facie*, and given what precedes it, Hebrews 1.4ff (τουσὺτῶ κρείττων γένόμονος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφοπερώτερον παρ' αὐτοῦς κεκλερονόμηκεν ὄνομα) appears to be a sudden inexplicable introduction of angels in the discourse. This is on account of the subject of Hebrews 1.1-3 which seems to have nothing to do with angels but, rather, with God and his Son: he has spoken (ἐλάλησεν) now by his Son, unlike in the past where he spoke (λαλήθας) through the prophets. Also, God's Son, unlike the prophets, is his exact representation (Heb. 1.3) and is seated now at the right hand of his majesty (μεγλωσύνης). But on closer scrutiny this is not really the case; the movement of content from Jesus' comparison with prophets to his comparison with angels can be accounted for in one of three ways.

The first, proposed by some scholars of Hebrews such as Ellingworth and Nida (1983, 12), and Ellingworth himself (1993, 103), is that Hebrews 1.4 links together the introductory statement of Hebrews 1.1-3 and the extended comparison between the Son and angels. Ellingworth (1993) seems to suggest that this transition in Hebrews 1.4 is not arbitrary but is related to what precedes by a word association, and by a hook-word. The associated words (which have in common the notion of 'inheritance') are κληρόνομον in Hebrews 1.2b and κεκλερονόμηκεν in Hebrews 1.4b. However, Ellingworth is quick to point out that though the words are associated, their meaning is not exactly the same thus: '...the "inheritance" [as used in the two instances] is different, and the use of the perfect tense [in Hebrews 1.4b] introduces a change of viewpoint' (Ibid.). As concerns the use of a hook-word, Ellingworth is of the view that 'the mention of angels acts as a typical "hook-word"' (Ibid.) because it introduces the comparison between Jesus and angels whereas Hebrews 1.1-2b compares the prophets and the Son.



However, accounting for the introduction of angels in Hebrews 1.4 in this way seems to me unsatisfactory (especially with regard to angels acting as a hook-word). The argument of word association is a fair one in accounting for Hebrews 1.4 since word associations can be responsible for linking together and structuring a text. But then, Ellingworth does not tell us how this specific word association links the two together apart from recognizing that they could be linked. In fact, he concedes that their meaning is not even the same. So, it is not a satisfactory answer to the seeming abrupt introduction of Hebrews 1.4. As for angels as hook-word, we find one outstanding problem: it fails to account for what seems, on the face of it, the difference between the subjects of comparison with Jesus, i.e., prophets (in the content of the first comparison) and angels (in the second). For the introduction of angels not to appear abrupt and inexplicable, one must surely explain what holds prophets and angels together because explicitly they do not seem to have anything in common; hence what seems to be the abrupt introduction of angels in the first place. For these reasons we need to consider Ellingworth's account for the introduction of angels in Hebrews 1.4 as incomplete.

The second explanation for the introduction of angels in Hebrews 1.4 is that it is the mention of the Son seated at the right hand of the majesty, in Hebrews 1.3, that leads to the mention of angels. Because angels are understood in Hebrews 1.4 as part of the world of heaven, it is argued that there a possibility in the mind of the author that Jesus could be confused with them. Consequently, Hebrews 1.4ff is intended to pre-empt such a confusion of persons. Montefiori (1964, 40), for example, argues that the mention of Jesus at the right hand of the majesty in heaven would have likely led to Jesus being mistaken for one of the angels since they were commonly believed to wait upon the throne of God in heaven (Is. 6.2). This made it necessary for the author of Hebrews to show that Jesus is superior to the angels.

The main problem with this explanation is the implicit suggestion that the *synkrisis* between Christ and angels is one forced upon the author by his mention of Christ at God's right hand, and not being a deliberate part of his message to the Hebrews, fitting in with what comes before, and after, it, i.e., within Hebrews' overall structure. Yet it seems to me that Hebrews 1.4-2.18 is a forceful argument by the author on the superiority of Jesus to angels, that fits well in Hebrews' overall structure merely to be an argument forced upon the author by his mention of Jesus seated at the right hand of God's majesty. This makes the third explanation below to be preferred for it not only accounts for angels being a deliberate part of Hebrews' structure but also shows what holds together the comparison of Jesus with prophets, on one hand, and angels, on the other. In the final analysis, this explanation not only shows that the introduction of angels in Hebrews 1.4 is not abrupt, or inexplicable, as it may seem, but also throws light on the mediatorial nature of the *synkrisis* between Jesus and angels, thus tying neatly with Hebrews overall structure of Jesus' *synkrisis* with Jewish mediatorial figures. Let us turn to it now.

The third explanation is that the comparison of Jesus with angels provides a counterpart to his comparison with prophets in Hebrews 1.1-2 and, therefore, has angelic mediation in the background. As Lane (1991) explains: 'It provides a parallel to [Hebrews 1] vv 1-2a, where revelation through the prophets is contrasted with the ultimate word spoken through the Son' (17). Although not explicit, but alluded to, in Hebrews 1.4, angels were understood too in Jewish religious tradition (see section 4.2.1.) to be mediators of the Law and were, therefore, in some respects like the prophets. We can safely presume that this was the understanding of the author of

Hebrews on the basis of Hebrews 2.2 where he says that God's message was declared by the angels (more on this later). Lane, comes to this conclusion thus:<sup>20</sup>

In the Old Testament angels were ascribed a broad role in revelation and redemption (e.g., Exod 3.2; Isa 63.9). It was commonly understood that the law had been mediated to Moses, the greatest of the prophets, through angels (cf. *Jub.* 1.29; Acts 7.38-39, 53; Gal 3.19; Jos., *Ant.* 15.5.3; *Mek.* on Exod 20.18; Siphre 102 on Num 12.5; *Pesiq. R.* 21). This conception was shared by the writer and his readers (2:2). The description of the Jewish law as "the message declared by angels" in 2:2 is determinative for the interpretation of the reference to the angels in v. 4 (Ibid.).

If this is the case, then the purpose of the introduction of angels in Hebrews 1.4 is to begin to show that Christ's mediation of God's word or revelation is superior not just to that of the prophets but also to the angelic one. In other words, *Jesus is a superior mediator to angels and prophets*. This should be understood as what links together the two comparisons. As a result Hebrews 1.5-14, and indeed 2.5-18, should be understood as clarifications of the superiority of Christ's mediation over the angelic ones. But before we look at this, and thus articulate the angelomorphic Christology in Hebrews, a look at Hebrews 1.4 by itself is in order. This is because we need to show that there exists an allusion to the mediation of angels in Hebrews 1.4. When such an allusion is established, credence can be given to the view that Hebrews 1.4 gives perspective to Hebrews 1.5-14 as a clarification of the superiority of Christ as a mediator over angelic mediators.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, showing the existence of such an allusion would support the view that Hebrews 2.2-4 makes explicit, or is determinative of our understanding, of Hebrews 1.4. Finally, demonstrating this allusion would show indeed that Hebrews 1.4-2.18 is: 1. a single unit in the *synkrisis* of Jesus and angels in their role as mediators and

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<sup>20</sup> See Westcott (1889, 16) as well.

<sup>21</sup> This is all the more important because one could read Hebrews 1.5-14 as demonstrating the superiority of Christ to angels quite apart from the issue of mediation. On the grounds, for example, that deference to angels is being objected to (see Goulder 2003).

not just angelic beings *per se*, and 2. a deliberate part of the overall structure of Hebrews which concerns itself with comparing Jesus to mediatorial figures and showing him to be superior to them. In other words, demonstrating this allusion would show that the *predominant thought in this section of Hebrews is that Christ's mediation is superior to that of angels* which suits well with Hebrews' overall structure of *synkrisis* between Jesus and Jewish mediatorial figures.

From my survey of commentaries on Hebrews 1.4, scholars have largely been of the view that the name (ὄνομα) Jesus has inherited (κεκληρονόμηκεν) which is more excellent (διαφωότερον) than that of angels is 'Son'.<sup>22</sup> Although this may in all probability be the case, it is not a foregone conclusion since the author of Hebrews does not spell out what he means precisely by ὄνομα in this verse. Of course, the immediate context, i.e., Hebrews 1.2,3, and especially, Hebrews 1.5, suggests that 'Son' is the name, but, as Ellingworth (1993) points out, in Hebrews 1.2, 3.6 and 5.8, 'sonship is spoken of as a permanent attribute of Christ, not as a title which is given or acquired at the time of his exaltation' (105). This is important to note for it leaves room for the possibility of another name.

This inheritance of a name by Jesus is in the context of a comparison with angels: he has inherited a more excellent name than theirs (παρ' αὐτούς). But what does this mean exactly, particularly with reference to angels? All Hebrews scholars agree that this verse means that Jesus' name is superior to that of angels, but, apparently, with one exception: Attridge (1989) is of the view that the name of Jesus is not merely superior to that of angels, but that it is more excellent 'than angels themselves' (48).<sup>23</sup> We may

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<sup>22</sup> For example see Bruce (1990, 50), Lane (1991, 17) and Kistemaker (1984, 32).

<sup>23</sup> This he asserts on the basis of παρ' αὐτούς which literally would read 'to them' not 'to theirs'.

presume that what Attridge may be arguing for here is that Jesus, i.e., his status and identity ('name'), is more excellent than angels. The problem is that Attridge does not tell us what this means and if it would in consequence change, in real terms, the meaning of the verse as understood by the majority, that Jesus has a name that is superior to the name of angels. To the contrary, Attridge has left his own interpretation of the verse, that Jesus has a superior name to the name of angels (and not to angels themselves [his suggested understanding]), intact. So, we take it in this thesis that the comparison being made is between the name of Jesus and the name of angels, that the name of Jesus is more excellent to the one of angels.

However, although scholars on Hebrews are agreed that the comparison has to do with Jesus' name being greater than angels', there is no attempt, however, to ponder what this comparison between the name of Jesus and that of angels could mean for the understanding of Hebrews 1.4. Yet I strongly think that the implication therein that angels have names is an allusion to their mediation, and in view, therefore, is the superiority of Jesus' mediation over that of angels. In this regard, there would be value in exploring in detail the phenomenon of naming angels and determining what it means,<sup>24</sup> but we shall not do so here. What we need to pay attention to is that in Jewish religious tradition, not all angels bore names but only the 'senior' ones and they were understood chiefly as mediators. Let us examine this more closely and consider how it bears on our understanding of Hebrews 1.4 as alluding to angelic mediation and, consequently, to the superiority of Jesus' mediation to theirs.

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<sup>24</sup> The significance of names in biblical and post-biblical literature has been noted (see for example Eichrodt 1963, 40, and [Bietenhard 1967, 252-69]); an observation that may well have relevance to angels having names. But apart from Olyan (1993) who attempts to track the origins of, and account for, the naming of angels rather than the significance of so doing, there is nothing forthcoming on the significance of angels having names.

As pointed out in our section on mediators (see section 4.21), beliefs in angels in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period became more elaborate. During this period, it is emphasized that, 'God is enthroned in heaven while carrying out his work in the world by means of angelic leaders who have myriads of other angels at their command' (Gieschen 1998, 124). These angelic leaders, unlike the many created angels, are distinct and honoured by the Jewish groups which revere them. Apparently, these angelic leaders (or 'principal angels' [Hurtado 1998, 71-2]) are the ones that assume names.<sup>25</sup> Given that this was the wider religio-cultural context of Hebrews, it is possible, then, to conclude that in Hebrews 1.4 Jesus is not being compared to angels in general, but to principal angels and is being perceived to be more excellent than them because he has a more excellent name to their names as the verses that follow Hebrews 1.4 seek to clarify. Coincidentally (we would say by no mere coincidence) it is the role of a principal angel which is found in Hebrews 2.2<sup>26</sup> (which then makes explicit what is alluded to in Hebrews 1.4). We consider that role in what follows.

In Hebrews 2.2-4, the word (λόγος) spoken by angels is compared to the word spoken by Jesus, thereby contrasting their mediation to that of Jesus'. Angels, according to Hebrews, were responsible for giving God's message to the people: (εἰ γὰρ ὁ δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος ἐγένετο βεβαίος καὶ πάντα παραβάσις καὶ παρακοή ἔλαβεν ἔνδικον μισθαπαδοσίαν ... 2.2). But whence did this belief come and could the same enlighten Hebrews' Christology? Its provenance is certainly not the Massoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible where the Torah is given directly to Moses (Ex. 19 and 20), but, as is

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<sup>25</sup> See Gieschen (1998, 126-151) for a survey and discussion on these angelic leaders in 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period literature. See also Davis (1994), De Lacey (1987) and Hurtado (1998, 71-92), whose discussion, though, is limited by concerns to account for the genesis of the worship of Jesus without a compromise on monotheism in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>26</sup> The importance of this point should not be underestimated in understanding the issue of mediation here for it is only in this passage, and possibly Hebrew 2.5 (see footnote 33), that we encounter in Hebrews the role of angels in a more concrete way. The effect of this is to shed light on the precise role of angels in view in Hebrews 1.4-2.18.

widely recognized,<sup>27</sup> from the LXX where it is understood that when God came down from Sinai, 'angels were with him at the right hand' (ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ ἄγγελοι μετ' αὐτοῦ, Deut. 33.2). This notion finds further development and elaboration in the Maccabean period in the *Book of Jubilees* (see for example, 1.27, 2.1 and 26-7) during which we encounter the perception that the Torah is dictated to Moses by 'the Angel of the Presence' (both in plural and singular form).<sup>28</sup> Given Hebrews' religio-cultural context, it is apparent then that the comparison is between Jesus' mediation and that of a principal angel, 'the Angel of the presence'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed it is out of this contrast that the audience of Hebrews are asked to pay attention (προσέχειν) in Hebrews 2.1 to what they have heard, which is the great salvation (τηλικαύτης σωτηρίας) first spoken of through Jesus (λαλεῖσθαι διὰ τοῦ Κυρίου -Heb. 2.3). His mediation is superior since, first, it concerns a weightier word, i.e., a great salvation while that of angels is the giving of the law, and second, that word has been confirmed by God and the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2.4). But on the whole, all of this, i.e., Jesus' superior mediation, is on the basis of who he is, and what he has done, as the verses that follow (Heb. 2.5-18) clarify. This leads us now to consider very briefly how both Hebrews 1.5-14 and 2.5-18 clarify the superiority of Jesus' mediation to angelic mediation.

Following Hebrews 1.4 are seven scriptural quotations from the Old Testament which serve to make clear the superiority of Jesus over angels, and thus, according to our foregoing argument, make him a superior mediator. The first two (Ps. 2.7 in Heb. 1.5a

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<sup>27</sup> Most commentaries on Hebrews point out this despite their reticence on its ramifications (such as the one we are arguing for).

<sup>28</sup> See Gieschen (1998, 137-42) for a relatively detailed discussion on the 'Angel of his Presence' (singular and plural) who are understood to be four or seven and serving immediately before the throne of God.

<sup>29</sup> This raises the possibility that the conception of Jesus as a superior mediator here ought not to be limited to this aspect of mediation carried out by a principal angel but should be broadened to cover the other mediatorial roles of these principal angelic beings. If this view is correct, then some of these functions would include: intercession (Tob. 12.5, *1 En.* 9.1-3, 40.6, *T. Levi* 5.5-6, *T. Dan.* 6.2), and revelation and guidance (Dan. 7.16-27, 8.15-16, 9.21-27; *1 En.* 72.1, 74.2, 75.4; *4 Ezra* 4.1; 5.20; 10.28).

and 2 Sam 7.14 in Heb. 1.5b) declare the Sonship of Jesus. Angels may have been collectively called 'sons of God'<sup>30</sup> but no angel was singly declared a Son of God. Such a quotation, then, in reference to Christ would have underlined his superiority. The third quotation (Ps. 2.7 in Heb. 1.6) brings out the point that angels worshipped him.<sup>31</sup> The fourth (Ps. 104.4 in Heb. 1.7) shows that angels are winds or spirits (πνεύματα) and as his servants, flames of fire (λειτουργοὺς). This, as argued by Attridge (1989, 57-8), may well show two things concerning angels. One is their transitory and mutable nature 'apparent in their images of wind and flame' (58) which would contrast with the abiding quality of the Son in Hebrews 1.8-12; and the second is that they are servants who, as Hebrews 1.14 makes clear, are sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, whilst he is Lord, as Hebrews 1.13 indicates, seated at God's right hand (Hebrews 1.13). So, we turn now to the fifth, sixth and seventh quotations.

The fifth quotation (Ps. 45.6-7 in Heb. 1.8-9), as Ellingworth (1993) notes, in Hebrews 1.8a, 'expresses briefly the eternity of the Son' (122), a theme which is developed further in the sixth quotation (Ps. 102.25-27 in Heb. 1.10-12). In this sixth quotation the main emphasis is the eternity of the Son in contradistinction to all creation (angels too) which are the work of his hands. In Hebrews 1.8b the point of distinction between Jesus and angels is not that clear but, I think, given the literary context, is showing the superiority of Christ over angels. Ellingworth (1993) is right in saying that the point seems to be that 'the the Son exercises royal power, whereas the angels are mere λειτουργοί [Heb. 1.7]' (122). The quotation's latter content in Hebrews 1.9a

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For their discussion and fuller references, see Chester (1991, 47-71), Gieschen (1998, 126-51) and Hurtado (1998, 71-92). See also footnote 32.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Gen. 9.2, 4, Job 1.6, 2.1, and Ps. 29.1.

<sup>31</sup> Kistemaker (1984, 38) thinks that this refers to the birth of Jesus 'when a multitude of the heavenly host praised God in the fields near Bethlehem (Luke 2.13)'. This is because the word 'world' (κοσμος) is Hellenic and would have been used to 'refer to the populated world' (Kistemaker 1984, 38).



seems to be saying, again given the literary context of Hebrews, that Jesus' anointing by God sets him above angels (Attridge 1989, 60).<sup>32</sup> The seventh quotation (Ps. 110.1 in Heb. 1.13) shows the seating of Jesus at God's right hand, and already mentioned (in Hebrews 1.3) is an 'enthronement accomplished at the invitation of God' (Lane 1991, 32), and one that is only given to him and not angels who, in contrast, are servants of those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1.14).

We may turn our attention now to the other clarification of Jesus' superiority to angels in Hebrews 2.5-18. The opening, 'It is not to angels...' (Οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις) in Hebrews 1.5a makes it clear that the subject of what follows, yet again, is a comparison, albeit one which follows, as shown above, a more explicit comparison between Jesus' mediation and angelic mediation in Hebrews 2.1-4. In Hebrews 2.5 the point is that the world to come will not be subjected to angels<sup>33</sup> but to the Son, a point made clear in the following verses. If we may turn to them, beginning with Hebrews 2.6-9, it seems most likely that the superiority of Jesus over angelic mediators was called into question in the mind of the audience from the consideration of Jesus being a man, i.e., of his incarnation.<sup>34</sup> If the Psalmist had declared (Ps. 8) that human beings are lower than angels, and Jesus became a man, how could he be superior to angels? Hebrews uses the Psalm to point out two things. The first is that Jesus' humiliation was temporary (and for an important purpose) since he is now crowned with glory and honour, precisely because of his incarnation (Heb. 2.9). The second is that now, after his incarnation,

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<sup>32</sup> This is not a foregone conclusion for there are some who argue otherwise (see Ellingworth [1993, 124] for more on this).

<sup>33</sup> Implicit here is that the present world is understood to be in some way under subjection to angels. Indeed, there seems to have been a belief in principal angels ruling particular peoples on behalf of God. Sections of the Septuagint (Deut. 32.8 and Dan. 10.21-7 for example) alluded to this. See Kistemaker (1984, 63) and Bruce (1990, 71-2) for more. It is worth noting that if this is correct, then, our earlier argument that the comparison is between Jesus and principal angels and not just general angels is strengthened further.

<sup>34</sup> Nash (1977, 112) and Lane (1991, 43), amongst others, think so.

crowned with glory and honour, all is subject to him, although at present we do not see everything having been subjected (ὑποτεταγμένα) to him (Heb. 2.8b). So here the author of Hebrews argues that Jesus' glory, honour and, eventually, total dominion are tied to his incarnation. His incarnation, therefore, he seems to say, does not make him lower than the angels but, to the contrary, superior to them. This argument is made at the end of the section (Heb. 2.9b) where the author states that it is because Jesus suffered (πάθημα) death, that he is crowned with glory and honour, and, eventually, will have total dominion thus: 'But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death...' (τὸν δὲ βραχύ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους ἡλαττωμένον βλέπομεν Ἰησοῦν διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου δόξη καὶ τιμῇ ἐσταφανωμένον, ὅπως χάριτι θεοῦ ὑπὲρ παντὸς γεύσηται θανάτου).

Ellingworth (1993, 158) points out that a further reflection on Hebrews 2.9b is given in Hebrews 2.10, which is that it was fitting (ἔπρεπεν) that God should make Jesus perfect through suffering in order for him to lead many to glory. However, these two verses (Hebrews 2.9b and 10) do not say how his humanity, death and suffering have made him superior to angels, as one crowned with glory and honour, and also made him lead many to glory. For that, we have to look to Hebrews 2.14-18.

But before the author of Hebrews gets to say how Jesus' humanity, suffering and death make him superior to angels as one now crowned with glory and honour, and, eventually, total dominion, he makes the point in Hebrews 2.11-13 that Jesus who sanctifies and the people he sanctifies (Heb. 2.11) are of the same family (ἐξ ἑνός).<sup>35</sup> Seemingly to emphasize this, the author of Hebrews states that, for that reason, Jesus 'is not ashamed to call them brothers' (Heb. 2.11b). Accordingly, he draws the audience's

<sup>35</sup> The precise meaning of ἐξ ἑνός ('[are] all from one') is unclear. It could mean are of 'one origin', or of 'one stock' or 'common humanity' etc. I think 'are from one family' (New International Version's

attention to the words of Jesus, taken from the Psalms<sup>36</sup> that show Jesus' pride in the ones he has made holy. We should note that although the purpose of the author here is to show that Jesus is of the same family with the people he sanctifies, this motif of holiness introduced here is still related to the suffering which Jesus had to undergo as a human being in order to be a faithful and merciful high priest (Heb. 2.17). This leads us, then, to Hebrews 2.14-18.

The reasons why Jesus was incarnated and suffered death are now finally given. The first is to destroy the one who holds the power of death (Heb. 2.14) and free those who have been held in bondage by the fear of death (Heb. 2.15). However, how this happens and what it means exactly the author does not say. The second and more explicit reason is that he may help Abraham's descendants (Heb. 2.16). He does this by becoming a merciful and faithful high priest (Heb. 2.17a) and making atonement for their sins (Heb. 2.17b). This, as Ellingworth (1993, 190) notes, is clarified in Hebrews 2.18: Jesus is a merciful high priest, able to help those who are being tempted (πειρασθείς) because, as a human being, he too was tempted (Heb. 2.18). In other words, the author of Hebrews is saying, in the words of Attridge (1989, 95), 'the incarnation and suffering of Christ took place so that he might be a high priest characterized by mercy and fidelity'. After he suffered and achieved this, and for this reason, he is now seated at the right hand of God in glory and honour (Heb. 1.3, 1.13, 2.7-8) and will, eventually, rule over all.

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translation of this text) fits best with the context which speaks of familial relationships (i.e., those that Jesus makes holy are his brother - Hebrews 2.11b-12). For more see Ellingworth and Nida (1983, 42).  
<sup>36</sup> Here, the words of the Psalm are understood to be the words of Jesus. However, as Attridge (1989, 90) points out, the occasion and circumstances when Jesus spoke these words is not mentioned.

To put this in a clearer perspective of Jesus' comparison with angels (Hebrews 2.5-18), Jesus became man but that does not mean that angels are superior to him. In fact, the author seems to be arguing, because he became man and suffered death, he has been brought to honour and glory, a rank and dignity which is greater than that of angels (Hebrews 2.9). This is because his experience of suffering and death enables him to become a merciful and faithful high priest, thus helping human beings as their mediator in a way the mediation of principal angels cannot aspire to.

Given the above, we may conclude that, according to Hebrews, Jesus is like principal angels but greater. More precisely, he is greater than principal angels, because: 1. like them he mediates God's word but, unlike them who are spirits, he is God's Son, which makes him superior to them and; 2. he has shared in the lot of humanity which also makes him superior to them because the kind of mediation he is now able to offer, of a merciful and faithful high priest, is one the angels cannot offer. In short, Jesus is greater than principal angels because, being God's Son and having become a man, he is a superior mediator: Hebrews 1.4-14 alludes to this whilst Hebrews 2.1-18 makes it explicit. This is Hebrews' angelomorphic Christology.

I wish to point out here that such an understanding of Hebrews 1.4-2.18 is the beginning of a train of thought that will continue on in the author's *synkrisis* of Jesus with Moses and then with the Aaronic high priests and in so doing bring out the mediatorial Christology of Hebrews. In the words of Stanley (1994), the author of Hebrews 'begins with the figures (mediators) that have the closest contact with God - the angels- and works out from there - Moses, Joshua and then Aaron and the priests' (264). This being the case, Hebrews 1.4-2.18, as mentioned earlier, forms an integral part of the overall structure of Hebrews, of Jesus' *synkrisis* with Jewish mediatorial

figures, rather than a digression forced on the author by his mention of Jesus seated in heaven.

Turning to typology, the first characteristic we mentioned as embodying a working of typology as a theological hermeneutic was the correspondence of an Old Testament personage on the one hand with Christ on the other. Such a correspondence, not being absolute, can issue out as an analogy, a contrast, or in an objectified prophecy (or as a combination of two or of all of these). This characteristic is present in the *synkrisis* between Jesus and angels as seen in their correspondence that issues out in a contrast. More concretely, going by the first point of our conclusion above, angels correspond to Jesus in that they are both mediators but (and herein is the contrast) Jesus is God's Son, and, also, became man. And on account of the latter, the kind of mediation he offers, i.e., of a faithful and merciful high priest, is one that angels cannot offer. The second characteristic of typology mentioned is the intensification, escalation or heightening in the antitype of an aspect of the type. This too is present in the *synkrisis* between angels and Jesus. The first is that the word Jesus mediates is weightier (a great salvation) than the word they mediate (the law). The second intensification is that Jesus has inherited a name more excellent than theirs. (Because the third characteristic, that of typologies being christocentric, is self-evident here, i.e., Jesus is the antitype, as it is in the other *synkrisis*, we shall not comment on it here and in other instances below where it occurs.)

Typology, then, can be seen to be operative in the *synkrisis* between angels and Jesus. Such an observation may come as a surprise since, even though Hebrews scholars pick out the contrast between angels and Jesus brought out in the pericope under consideration here, they do not perceive it as a typology. Reasons for this are not given;

in fact Hebrews' scholars seem oblivious that this could in fact be the case.<sup>37</sup> This in my view is a grave omission because angelomorphic Christology brought out through *synkrisis* in Hebrews is an integral part of its overall Christology, and of its argument, and should, therefore, be reckoned with. There is no reason why typology in Hebrews should be limited only to Moses and to the figure of the Aaronic high priests when some of its characteristics are clearly evident in the *synkrisis* between angels and Jesus. As we have shown, there is a correspondence between principal angels and Jesus with aspects of the former variously contrasted and intensified in the latter. And this makes for a typological relationship between principal angels and Jesus.

I surmise that the reason why principal angels are not seen to be in a typological relationship with Jesus is because they are not typical historical figures as are Moses or Aaronic high priests. But should this be reason enough to fall short of accepting a typological relationship? The figure of Melchizedek is not a typical historical figure and yet, he is seen to be in a typological relationship with Jesus (see footnote 16 and 58). Still, whatever may be said of the presence, or lack, of a typological relationship between principal angels and Jesus, their comparison with Jesus shows them anticipating his mediation and shedding light on him and his work. As will become clear, this observation is crucial in our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa.

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<sup>37</sup> This is best exemplified in the works of two scholars of Hebrews (Sowers 1965 and Smith 1976) who to date seem to be the only ones to have dealt at length with typology in Hebrews. Both of them are mute

#### 4.2.4. *Moses-Christology*

The perception of Moses as the greatest prophet of Israel is beyond doubt.<sup>38</sup> As the leader of Israel and the mediator of the *Torah* he was believed to have received on Sinai, diverse traditions developed around him, with the burning bush account (Ex. 3), his ascent of Sinai (Ex. 19), and the manner of the end of his life (Deut. 34) providing critical points (even raw data) for speculation in the said traditions. It would seem *prima facie* that these traditions as found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period are unrelated to the discourse of Hebrews 3.1-6, which contains the *synkrisis* between Moses and Jesus, and cannot therefore provide any meaningful religious context for the explication of the Moses-Christology therein. Consequently, commentators on Hebrews seem to make no use of post-biblical Moses traditions in considering the content of Hebrews 3.1-6. By this I mean the following. In the comparison of Moses and Jesus here, it is clear that Hebrews 3.2 (πιστὸν ὄντα τῷ ποιήσαντι αὐτὸν ὡς καὶ Μωϋσῆς ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) and Hebrews 3.5 are central, and that between them, v.5 (καὶ Μωϋσῆς μὲν πιστὸς ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς θεράπων εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν λαληθησομένων) is decisive, not least because in it we encounter the only Old Testament citation in the pericope<sup>39</sup> but also because it elaborates and gives precision to Hebrews 3.2.<sup>40</sup> It is for this reason that I view it as a key verse whose explication within 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Moses traditions enlightens considerably the Moses-Christology of the pericope. Yet in discussing

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on the typological relationship (or even the possibility of such a relationship) between angels and Jesus as portrayed in Hebrews!

<sup>38</sup> For more on 'Moses traditions' see Meeks (1967, 100-285) and Gager (1972).

<sup>39</sup> There are some such as Attridge (1989, 110) who feel it is not a citation from LXX but rather one derived from it, possibly because its word order is not quite the same (Kistemaker 1984, 87). We should bear in mind here that a lack of complete verbal correspondence between a citation and the two principal witnesses to LXX, (Alexandrian Codex [A] and Vatican Codex [B]), should not rule out a citation, given the apparent multiplicity of Septuagintal manuscripts in existence then. Consequently, Old Testament quotations in Hebrews that do not verbally correspond with LXX<sup>A</sup> or LXX<sup>B</sup> may in fact have been from his Vorlage. For more on the discussion of Old Testament quotations in Hebrews, see Kenneth (1964), Howard (1968) and, especially, McCullough (1986).

<sup>40</sup> A few such as Lane (1991, 76-77), D'Angelo (1979, 69) and Aalen (1962, 236) see I Chronicles 17.14 as another scripture cited (or at least alluded to) in this pericope. Such an observation would still not remove the decisive role of v.5 since, as they themselves argue, the presence of I Chronicles 17.14 is to structure the comparison between Jesus and Moses, rather than to explain it (which v.5 does).

Hebrews 3.5, Hebrews commentators do not see the need to use Moses traditions existing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period in illuminating this section of Hebrews,<sup>41</sup> even though the scripture cited in it is taken from the LXX (which embodies an exegetical tradition current to Hebrews' time of writing). We need, then, to look at Hebrews 3.5 closely, and explain it using exegetical traditions on it in existence in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period. In so doing, we shall see clearly that, as with angels, the comparison between Jesus and Moses in this pericope has to do with their mediatorial function. We turn to this in what follows.

To the best of my knowledge, D'Angelo (1979) offers, to date, the most comprehensive reading of Hebrews 3.1-6 (of which she gives Hebrews 3.2 and 3.5 special attention as key to the understanding of the pericope). More importantly, she relies mostly on exegetical traditions of the Hebrew scriptures - i.e., the LXX, the Targumim (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period), and Rabbinic literature to illuminate Numbers 12.7, the scripture cited in Hebrews 3.5. (Much of our quite brief examination then of Hebrews 3.5 will be based on her study.) D'Angelo looks at the Moses tradition of the Hebrew scriptures originating from, or based on, Numbers 12.7 by examining its function as far as it can be determined by its literary context, Numbers 11-12. She shows that what is at issue here, and subsequently addressed, is the question of the role of Moses as a prophet and the nature of his prophetic authority (98). The nature of his prophetic ministry is answered by Numbers 12.6-7 (99ff): *Moses enjoys an intimate more direct communication with YHWH than any other prophet*. The details of these immediate and direct revelations that Moses enjoys occupy later exegetical traditions on

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<sup>41</sup>For example Moffat (1924, 43-44) hardly took time to consider v.5, while Lane (1991, 78), Bruce (1990, 92), Attridge (1989) and Kistemaker (1984, 86-7) limit their discussion to the Moses tradition of Hebrew scriptures. Buchanan (1972, 59) is the only commentator I found who attempts to look at this pericope in dialogue with the Moses tradition among the Samaritans but even so, he does not examine v.5 *vis á vis* that tradition.



Numbers 12.6-8, as D'Angelo goes on to illustrate.<sup>42</sup> She shows that the LXX's translation of Numbers 12.7 gives the same 'an increasing degree of definition' (100), in the sense that in that translation the reference to the oracle in the encounter of Moses with YHWH is Exodus 33.17-23 where Moses asks YHWH to show him, and is granted to see, his glory. Also, she points out, the LXX translation relates Exodus 33.11 and Deuteronomy 34.5, 10 (all dealing with Moses' encounters with YHWH in a 'face to face' manner) more closely to Numbers 12.7 (101-102). D'Angelo demonstrates that the Targumim are similar to the LXX, in interpreting Numbers 12.6-8 with reference to Exodus 33, 34 and Deuteronomy 34 (102-104). However, in both renditions, 'my house' (בֵּיתִי) is substituted with 'my people' (עַמִּי).

Coming to the Sirach (45.4-6), D'Angelo points out that the 'occasion of when God spoke face to face with Moses is further defined' (105) as being at Sinai when, and where, Moses received the commandments from God. For our purposes, it is important to note that these interpretations of Numbers 12.7 underscore the uniqueness of Moses as a mediator between God and the people. Without reference to them as a background against which we read Hebrews 3.1-6, we would have no way of being enlightened on this allusion to Moses in the *synkrisis* between Jesus and Moses in Hebrews 3.5. As it were, God speaks face to face with Moses because He trusts Moses, and because God speaks face to face with him, Moses is able to give the people the commandments of the Lord.

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<sup>42</sup> Though she points out two more occupations of later exegetical traditions on Numbers 12.6-8, viz., the role of Moses as servant in God's house and the establishment of the uniqueness of Moses's prophecy (107), they ultimately spring from the one we have mentioned, i.e., the character of the immediacy and directness of Moses' revelation.

Tannaitic Rabbinic literature, like the others in their exegesis of Num. 12.6-8, continue to occupy themselves with the nature of Moses' revelations. In *Siphre Zuta*, for example, D'Angelo shows that Job 4.13-18 is used to explain the distinction between Moses' prophecy and that of other prophets (108-109). The main reason given as to why they do not share the immediacy of Moses' revelation in their mediation is because they are not *trusted* by God (109). In fact, such an understanding would make Hebrews 3.5b more clear since, we may argue, the reference, which comes immediately after the quotation of Number 12.7, of Moses' testifying of things to come (εἰς μαρτυριον των λαληθησομένων)<sup>43</sup> has to do, precisely, with God's closeness to him on the basis of his trustworthiness. The other reason (we may look at it as secondary) brought out is that his prophecy is without any mediation, i.e., not 'by the hand of an angel' (110).

What, then, we see here in the preceding exegeses of Numbers 12.7, the verse cited in Hebrews 3.5, is the unique mediatorial role of Moses in Israel. This unique mediation of Moses is not only found in the exegetical tradition of the Old Testament just looked at, but, also, in other 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Jewish literature as well.<sup>44</sup> Indeed these writings have some portions delineating the unique nature of Moses' revelation and thus his superiority to other prophets (for example *Jubilees* 1.1-6, 26; *4 Ezra* 14.1-9; *Syr. Bar.*

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<sup>43</sup> Although, we have to acknowledge, as shown by Ellingworth (1993, 208-209) that the precise meaning of εἰς μαρτυριον των λαληθησομένων is hard to pin down because it is not clear, on the grounds of grammar and Old Testament context, who the witness is, the reference, to my mind, must surely be Moses. For this reason, Kistemaker (1984, 87), Attridge (1989, 111) and Lane (1991, 78), for example, point out that this is a reference to Moses' prophecy of things that have now come with the advent of Jesus.

<sup>44</sup> Indeed, without the help of these exegetical traditions the uniqueness of Moses as a mediator in this passage of Hebrews would not be thrown in sharp relief. Let us take for example the exegesis of Isaacs (1992) as an illustration of the point I am making here. For Isaacs, Numbers 12.7, as the LXX cited in Heb. 3.2&5, enables the author to: 'stress, not that Moses was supreme among the people of God, but that among the wilderness generation he alone was faithful' (135). Moses' mediatorial role in her exegesis here is not brought out because she does not contend with the ways that Numbers 12.7 has been understood in exegetical traditions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple. Had she done so, she would probably have arrived at a different conclusion since the faithfulness talked of in the said traditions has to do so with the trust that God has in the prophet, enough to speak to him in a very direct way. The audience of Hebrews would have in all probability understood any allusion to Number 12.7 within the exegetical traditions we

59.8; and *Bib. Antt.*, xix.14ff), showing that they are not unrelated to the discourse of Hebrews 3.1-6 as implied by most commentators on Hebrews when they fail to use these traditions in elucidating Hebrews 3.1-6. (Thus the writings provide a religious context too for illuminating a Moses-Christology.) If granted that this is the case, then, in effect, what Hebrews 3.1ff says is that Jesus is like Moses: like him because he is the closest to God and speaks with him face to face and also like him because he is appointed and trusted over God's house. Yet he is not like Moses but superior to him because: he has more glory (δόξης) than him as a builder has over the house he has built (Heb. 3.3-4); and unlike Moses who is a servant (θεραπον) in (ἐν) God's house, he is the Son (υἱος) over (ἐπὶ) God's house.<sup>45</sup> (It is possible to add here also: because Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant.)<sup>46</sup>

Again, in respect to typology, we see in the *synkrisis* between Moses and Jesus the first characteristic of typology mentioned above, which is that of a correspondence that issues in, in this case, a contrast. Moses, the type, corresponds to Jesus, the antitype, through his closeness to God and through his appointment and trust in the house of God. However, in contrast to Moses, Jesus is superior by virtue of being a Son over, rather than a servant in, God's house (and being a mediator of a better covenant). The second characteristic of typology mentioned above, that of intensification of an aspect of the

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have used to explain Hebrews 3.5, i.e., they would have understood that Jesus is a superior mediator to Moses.

<sup>45</sup> The contrast encapsulated in the prepositions 'in' and 'over', i.e., of Jesus being a Son *over* the house and not *in* the house may further the superiority of Jesus over Moses. As Lane (1991) suggests, Moses being a servant ἐν the house and not ἐπὶ the house shows that he is a servant *within* the household, while Jesus is more; the Son who presides *over the house's administration*.

<sup>46</sup> This is brought out incidentally in the course of the *synkrisis* between Jesus' high priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood (Heb. 7.11, 22; 8.6; and 9.1, 15). What seems to be the case is this: the Aaronic priesthood is connected with Mosaic law, and so to replace it with a different order of high priesthood presupposes the replacement as well of Mosaic law; thus if a high priesthood emerges that is superior to the Aaronic one, it follows that the law/covenant that undergirds it must as well be superior to that of Moses. For more see Horbury (1983, 54-55).

type in the antitype, is present when it is said that he has more glory than Moses (glory, an aspect in the type, is intensified in the antitype).

#### 4.2.5. *High-Priestly Christology*

The bulk of the content of Hebrews has to do with high priesthood (first introduced in 1.4, touched on in 2.17 and 3.1 and the focus of 4.14-10.18), and because priests must have a sanctuary to attend to, discourse on the high priesthood also has to do with the tabernacle<sup>47</sup> and the activities therein.<sup>48</sup> To set the stage for the *synkrisis* between Jesus and the Aaronic high priests, a few preliminary remarks are in order. There have been studies on the high priest based on the Hebrew Bible and on later developments from it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period with both astonishing conclusions and far-reaching consequences.

One such conclusion is that the high priest, particularly on the 'Day of Atonement', was apotheosized (some would have, angelomorphosized) when he entered the holy of holies.<sup>49</sup> Inextricably related to these conclusions is the view that the temple (or sanctuary) is a microcosm of creation, wherein heaven meets the earth, with the holy of holies being heaven itself (Barker 1991 and Hayward 1996).<sup>50</sup> Though important in bringing out the mediatorial role of high priestly figures and in contributing to the understanding of the religious context of Hebrews' discourse on high priesthood and

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<sup>47</sup> The fact that Hebrews does not mention the temple is subject to a variety of interpretations. We should note that the temple and the tabernacle could be viewed as synonymous and as different (Koester [1989, 2] and Haran [1978, 198]). With respect to their synonymity, they are, first, both sanctuaries of YHWH and, secondly, the description of the tent in the Pentateuch and sacrifice regulations to be observed therein would seem to apply in both - hence my usage of tabernacle/temple in the relevant section below. This is to say that whatever interpretation one would make of the fact that Hebrews does not mention temple would not invalidate the high-priestly Christology there.

<sup>48</sup> Johnsson (1977) argues that it is in fact the *cultus* that is central to understanding Hebrews.

<sup>49</sup> See especially Barker (1998a, 93-111 and 1998b, 1-21), Fletcher-Louis (1997a, 118-29, 186-96 and 1997b) and Gieschen (1998, 169-75).

<sup>50</sup> We may even add here studies of 'Heavenly Temple Traditions' that are numerous in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period and especially in Hekhalot literature (De Conick [1998, 310-21]).

related matters, these studies will not concern us here. For our purposes, we must restrict ourselves to the very specific discourse of Hebrews on high priesthood, the tabernacle and sacrifice (as the principle activity therein that Hebrews considers) by giving priority to its immediate context in all our efforts to elucidate it. As noted by a good number of commentators, the discourse of Hebrews on the high priest, especially on his role in the liturgy of *Yom Kippur*, is informed by what is found in Leviticus and Exodus (we may add; through the eye of the Septuagint)<sup>51</sup> with only two exceptions; Hebrews 7.5 and 9.3.<sup>52</sup> We shall therefore take this to be the immediate context for understanding the high-priestly Christology resident in Hebrews.

The place, then, to begin is by seeking to determine the mediatorial roles of the Aaronic high priesthood that are in focus here. Two (intercession and mediation of forgiveness) stand out, and are brought out in contrast to, and side by side with, the superiority of Christ's high priesthood. Intercession is mentioned directly with regard to Christ, who lives forever to intercede (ἐντυγχάνειν) for those who come to God through him (Heb. 7.25), but it is mentioned as such in the context of the Aaronic priesthood, whose primary role is to intercede for the people.<sup>53</sup> With the Tabernacle/Temple *cultus* this intercession is done partly in virtue of the high priest appearing before God on behalf of the people (Heb. 9.24), which he does cardinally on the Day of Atonement. As for mediation of forgiveness/cleansing, most of the discourse on the high priest is to do with his activities on the Day of Atonement, thus the spotlight is on the sacrifice that he offered on that day and, accordingly, the author of Hebrews discusses this at relative

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<sup>51</sup> I must single out Horbury (1983) for his, in my view, conclusive argument on this.

<sup>52</sup> Though this could be viewed to indicate influences outside the Pentateuch or pentateuchally-rooted traditions, they should be understood, as argued by Horbury (1983, 51), to reflect 1<sup>st</sup> century understanding of the Day of Atonement.

<sup>53</sup> Montefiore (1964) points out how Aaron took on this responsibility by bearing the names of the Israelites 'on the breastplate of judgement when he went into the Holy Place' (129 [Ex. 27.29]). Later speculations that revolved around the symbolism of the high priest's vestments all point to his

length (Heb. 9.1-10.18). What is important to note here is that on the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered a sacrifice for his sins and those of his people (Heb. 9.7) through which they were forgiven and cleansed. The Hebrews' writer, however, perceives, for a number of reasons, that the expected cleansing and forgiveness did not actually take place or was at best only an outward cleansing (more on this to follow).

The Aaronic priesthood's roles of intercession and mediation as mentioned is highlighted in contrast to, and interwoven with, the superiority of Christ's priesthood. The first contrast is with the sanctuary (σκυνης) in which they minister (8.1-6). The Aaronic high priesthood serves on earth in a sanctuary made by hands and 'as a copy (ὑποδείγματι) and foreshadow (σκιᾷ) of what is in heaven' (5), whilst Christ serves in heaven, in the 'true tabernacle set by the Lord' (8.2). In virtue of this, Christ has a superior ministry (λειτουργίας)<sup>54</sup> and is a superior mediator.

More importantly (because it is more specific than the first) the second contrast is with the ineffectiveness of the Aaronic priesthood's mediation of forgiveness compared to the efficacy of that of Jesus. Hebrews points out that the sacrifices offered by the Aaronic priesthood in the Tabernacle/Temple did not (and could not), save for outward purity (9.13), bring cleansing and forgiveness to the people, and thus free or effect access to God (9.8),<sup>55</sup> necessitating the giving of the sacrifice annually (9.9-11 and 10.1-4, 11). Also, he considers the Aaronic priesthood's mediation as part of the old order, which is in the process of being dispensed with (9.9-10).<sup>56</sup> But Christ's priesthood,

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intercessory role (Barker 1991, 112-24). Also, by pointing to the relevant literature, Attridge (1989, 211) shows that priests as well were understood to function primarily as intercessors in 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period.

<sup>54</sup> As Lane (1991, 208) points out, the LXX usage of the verb λειτουργεῖν has 'a cultic nuance' of divine service.

<sup>55</sup> Sin being inimical to the approach to God; also echoed in Hebrews 9.14.

<sup>56</sup> See Young (1981) for a detailed discussion and further reference.

heralding the new order and the dissolution of the old (9.11), is effectual: not only does he enter a sanctuary not of this creation (9.11,24) but does so with his own blood which cleanses indeed (9.14), hence the once-for-all nature of his sacrifice (9.25-26, 10.10, 12-14). He is therefore a superior mediator of God's cleansing and forgiveness. This contrast between the Aaronic high priesthood and Christ's high priesthood is done only after the validation of the high priesthood of Christ (Heb. 4.14-5.10): because a high priest must be able to sympathize with those he represents (5.1-3), Jesus sympathizes with those he represents (4.14-15 and 5.7-10). Because a high priest must be divinely appointed (5.4), Jesus is appointed a priest in the order (τὰξιν) of Melchizedek.<sup>57</sup> In explicating the latter (7.1-28), Hebrews again brings to relief the superiority of Christ's high-priestly intercession and mediation over the Aaronic one. Scholars of Hebrews are not agreed on exactly what kind of relationship there exists between Melchizedek and Christ.<sup>58</sup>

For our purposes, it suffices to note that we have a correspondence between Melchizedek and Jesus, which Hebrews uses to validate and illuminate the priesthood of Christ, with the result that the understanding of the high priesthood of Christ in Hebrews is interpreted with reference to the priesthood of Melchizedek. There are two basic correspondences which are used accordingly to show an aspect of the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Aaronic one.

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<sup>57</sup> No consideration is given here to the Qumran's Melchizedek tradition as possibly contributing to the religious context of Hebrews because, as shown by a number of studies (see Aschim 1998 and De Jonge and Van Der Woude 1966), it does not contribute significantly to the interpretation and use of Melchizedek that is found in Hebrews.

<sup>58</sup> Proposals on Melchizedek's relationship to Christ include the following: an antitype of Christ (Horton 1976, 161-64), a pre-figurement of Christ (Delcor 1971, 125-27), even a pre-incarnation of Christ (Hanson 1964, 398-402).

The first is with the eternity of Melchizedek and his priesthood (7.3, 7):<sup>59</sup> because Christ's priesthood is in the τὰξιν of Melchizedek, it is forever. Therefore Christ's priesthood is superior to the Aaronic one since, unlike Aaronic high priests, he has a permanent priesthood, and thus always lives to make intercession (ἐτυγχάνειν) for 'those who come to God through him' (7.23-25).

The second correspondence is with the 'other' in the Melchizedek priesthood, i.e., Melchizedek shows the existence of another order of priesthood not founded on Aaronic pedigree (σακρίνης) but on indestructible life (ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου) and on an oath that is unchangeable (7.11, 15-20). So, Jesus' priesthood, being of the order of Melchizedek, is introduced to replace the Aaronic one that has failed to perfect the people (7.11, 18).<sup>60</sup> So we see again Jesus being like an Aaronic high priest because he meets the requirements of being a priest, and also performs their roles. However he is superior to them because, being a priest in the order of Melchizedek, he surpasses them (thus making them defunct) by his effectiveness in those roles.

Here again we see the replication of the two kinds of typologies encountered in the *synkrisis* between angels and Jesus, and between Moses and Jesus. Specifically, we have the first characteristic of typology where, as mentioned, there is a correspondence between the type and antitype that ends in a contrast. The Aaronic high priest (the type) corresponds to Jesus' high priesthood (the antitype) in the sense that both mediate forgiveness/cleansing and intercede for people, but Jesus' high priesthood, unlike the

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<sup>59</sup> We shall not discuss here the enigmatic ἀπάτωρ ἀμήτωρ ἀγενεαλόγητος, μήτε ἀρξὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων (Heb. 3.7) but only note that whether conceived of literally, or symbolically, or otherwise (see Demarest's [1978] for some history of its interpretation), it signifies eternity, which will suffice for our argument.

<sup>60</sup> Note how the Aaronic priesthood is tied to the Mosaic covenant, just as Jesus' priesthood is tied to the new covenant; see footnote 35.



Aaronic one, serves in heaven, is effective in mediating cleansing, is of a new order, and is eternal in nature. The second characteristic is in the intensification of an aspect of the type in the antitype, which we encounter here in the sacrifice offered. That is, one of the reasons Jesus' mediation of forgiveness is superior to that of Aaronic high priest is because the sacrifice Jesus has given is his own body in a heavenly tabernacle and not a goat or bull in an earthly one.

However, it must be stated here that while we had to justify why we think a typological relationship between Jesus and angels exists, and argue out from Numbers, and its interpretation tradition, the nature of the typology between Jesus and Moses, the typological relationship here between Jesus and the Aaronic high priest is quite forthright and spelt out in Hebrews itself. This is best encapsulated in the words of the author himself in Hebrews 10.1, where the Aaronic high priesthood and its *cultus* are understood as foreshadows (σκιάν) of the good things to come (τῶν μελλόντων ἄγαθων),<sup>61</sup> (the Hebrews writer has already intimated that with Christ have come the good things [Heb. 9.11 Χριστος δὲ παραγενομενος ἄρχιερευς τῶν γενομενων ἄγαθων]).

Putting all the foregoing together, I submit that, according to Hebrews, Jesus is the mediator *par excellence*, or the definitive mediator. He is greater than angels, Moses, and the Aaronic high priest, because his being is superior to theirs, and because, and for

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<sup>61</sup> Apparently none in more recent Hebrews scholarship would take the view that σκία here in Hebrews is used in the Platonic sense of a shadow, something unreal or passing, a lesser reality of the eternal, as was held before by scholars such as Moffatt (1924, 135). If this was indeed the case, then the cultus of the Old Testament would stand in quite a different relationship to Christ than the one given above which understands the *cultus* as having a 'horizontal nuance' (phrase from Hurst 1990, 16) by pointing to Christ in a temporal (eschatological) way. As Peterson (1982) puts it '... our writer does not use σκία in the Platonic sense, as if the things referred to were unreal or even deceptive: our writer is not primarily a Platonic idealist but an eschatologist. He means that "the new order was at hand, at the door, projecting itself on the plane of OT history, announcing its advent. The history, the law and the *cultus* of Israel were to this extent witnesses in advance to the Christian salvation"' (144-45).

this reason, he carries out more effectively the mediatorial roles they are understood to carry out. This Christology is one that selectively exploits the religious context of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period, with regard to mediators, broadly conceived, but also adds to it. Consequently, we can say that Hebrews' Christology is to a large extent indebted to, and indeed derived from, the said religious context. That is, Jesus in Hebrews is understood to be the definitive mediator between humans and God, an apprehension that is conceptualized and expressed through the use of known mediatorial figures (angels, Moses, and high priest) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period, and as they were conceived at the time. As we have shown, this exploitation is not random but carried out consistently within a typology framework, which is debatable in the case of angels, alluded to in the case of Moses, but most clearly seen in the case of Aaronic high priests. A brief critical comment now on the implication of typology in Hebrews is in order, for it will help advance our typology-based reading of it in Africa in subsequent chapters.

In the previous chapter we discussed how typology acts as a theological hermeneutic of the Old Testament in the New; this is precisely what is taking place in Hebrews. Through typological interpretations, the Old Testament is interpreted and made sense of in a way that speaks anew to the faith and life of the Christian community which Hebrews addresses. The result of this - on account of the theology of typology earlier discussed that God is the entelechy of history bringing it to a fulfilment in Christ - is that the figures in *synkrisis* with Jesus can be understood to anticipate him (thereby illuminating him), and in varying degrees to be incomplete or imperfect, so that their roles are completed or perfected in him, i.e., are fulfilled in him. *As it were, these mediatorial figures in the history of Israel are works of God in its history in order that they may lead to, and in some cases, be fulfilled in Christ.* So strong is this motif in Hebrews that the Aaronic high priesthood and the cultic institution of Israel and the

revered mediatorial figures of principal chief angels and Moses are surpassed and made redundant by Jesus. As Hays (1989) observes, the typological strategy of Hebrews is uniquely 'relentlessly supersessionist' (98). If the typological strategy in Hebrews were to be divested of the theological presupposition just described, the pointing to Christ and the fulfilment motif thereof would cease to be meaningful or even to exist altogether.

## CHAPTER 5

### JESUS, THE GREATEST ANCESTOR: HEBREWS' CHRISTOLOGY IN AFRICA

The kind of New Testament biblical interpretation we proposed, one which is characterized by the direct transfer of a New Testament typological text's<sup>1</sup> meaning from its initial context onto a present contemporary one, we called typology-based theological interpretation of the New Testament. This is how we pointed out that it works. When we have parallels between a New Testament typological text's initial and contemporary contexts, where portions of the text's initial context correspond to elements in a contemporary context, then, on the basis of the theological conviction that correspondences between the two are due to God's working in the histories of both contexts, we can have a direct transfer of the text's message from its initial audience onto its present contemporary audience. In this chapter, we wish to carry out such an interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. In other words, we shall attempt to transfer Hebrews' Christology of 'Jesus the mediator *par excellence*' directly onto a contemporary African context. In order to do this, we must show a clear parallel between Hebrews' initial context and its contemporary African one. Such a parallel is found in the traditions of mediation that exist in both contexts: principal angels, Moses, Aaronic high priests in the one, and ancestors in the other.

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<sup>1</sup> That is, as we explained, New Testament texts that are themselves typological interpretations of parts of the Old Testament.

So, it is necessary to investigate critically and interpret the ancestor tradition in Africa *en route* to a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa.

## 5.1 ANCESTORS IN AFRICA

In this section we are interested in establishing, as far as we can, a general picture of the role of ancestors in Africa, with the purpose of showing, within this general picture, that they function as mediators. We should, then, bear in mind two things: the first is that the portrait of ancestors in Africa that we shall paint in this chapter is only a general one. Any detailed, unitary, or over-arching view is illusory since there are differences in the details of the beliefs in, and veneration of, ancestors among various African peoples. Consequently, we must be content with a modest attempt to establish a general view of ancestors in Africa, for anything other than that, unless restricted to a particular ethnic group, would not be true to observations on the ground. Secondly, whatever may appear excursive in any section of this chapter, i.e., not directly relevant to the crux of our study, should not be dismissed as such, since all that is discussed below is designed to aid our conception of ancestor figures in Africa and thus, in turn, our grasp of their mediatorial functions.

Years back, in an apparent concession to the ubiquity of ancestors in Africa's religious heritage, Young (1950) wrote: 'No approach to any appreciation of indigenous ideas regarding God can take any path but through the thought-area occupied by ancestors' (38). Whilst this is the case, it must be emphasized, as Fortes noted (1965), that ancestors 'are only a part of a total complex of religious and ritual

institutions of an African people' (16). This means that any study of ancestors in Africa not only has to look at the beliefs in, and thus rituals concerning, ancestors, but also should try to make sense of them within the cosmology in which they operate. Starting with the ontology and the abode of ancestors, therefore, we will attempt to do this against the background of my reading, which covers more or less 14 ethnic groups found in different regions of Africa.<sup>2</sup> At the end, we should be able to grasp something of a concrete but generalized view of ancestors in Africa, and, more importantly, their mediatorial functions.

### *5.1.1. The Ontology and Abode of Ancestors*

On looking at ancestors in Africa, one encounters a plethora of beliefs in and rituals concerning them that converge in some ways but also diverge and are in tension in other ways. Nevertheless the following is common. Ancestors are believed to have been human beings (now spirits) who have died and are understood to have a close relationship with the living, pervasively influencing their affairs by helping or punishing them (depending on their conduct). The ancestors themselves are in certain cases classified into various groups. The Shona, for example, have three groups: supra-tribal ones from the past ruling class, tribal ones, and family ones (Daneel 1970, 51). It would appear that in all cases, upon death and subject to the necessary funeral rites, the qualification to be an ancestor would normally be parenthood and a virtuous life (Mutah 1999, 119, Uchendu 1976, 292ff, and Idowu

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<sup>2</sup> The Igbo of Nigeria (Mutah 1999), the Kamba of Kenya (Gehman 1989) the Tellensi of Sierra Leone (Fortes 1987), Xhosa of Southern Africa (Hodgson 1982), the Ganda of Uganda (Kyewalyanga 1976), the Tiriki of Kenya (Sangree 1974), the Yoruba of Nigeria (Idowu 1973), the Mende of Sierra Leone (Sawyer 1970), the Shona of Zimbabwe (Daneel 1970), Sotho-Tswana of Southern Africa (Setiloane 1973), the Anlo of Ghana (Gaba 1969), the Songo of Tanzania (Gray 1963), the Zande of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1962), and the Lugbara of Uganda (Middleton 1960).

1973, 186). But there are exceptions to this: Kabasale (1991, 118) for example, though without reference to any ethnic group in particular, has death in old age, i.e., a death that is not premature, as a qualification; the Malawi people seem to have no qualifications except, perhaps, adult initiation (Morris 2000, 222); and the Lugbara admit the childless into ancestorhood (Middleton 1960, 33).

As opposed to the ontology of ancestors and the qualifications of ancestorhood, the abode of ancestors is vague. Some like Middleton (1960, 28), with reference to the Lugbara, have concluded that details on the abode of ancestors are not available; however, this is not representative. Despite a 'lack of elaboration and indeed interest among the Africans in the cosmography of the afterworld in which the ancestors reside' (Kopytoff 1971, 129), some details on the abode of ancestors have been gleaned from the amorphous information available from some studies of African people. For the Zande of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1962, 201) they live with *Mbori*, the Supreme Deity, in the sacred caves,<sup>3</sup> while for the Suku of Congo (Kopytoff, 1971, 130) they live near graves and at crossroads, or even in places that are natural phenomena, such as lakes, rivers, forests, caves and mountains. What is significantly prevalent in this fragmentary information on the beliefs concerning the abode of ancestors is that wherever they are, they are not beyond reach, time or space. This is an observation that would fit with the belief (even where information on the abode of ancestors is not forthcoming) that ancestors are near and around African peoples: they have a living presence amongst them.

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<sup>3</sup> Some names of God in African languages are the same as the name of the abode of ancestors (Dammann 1969, 87-89), which suggests that ancestors live with God.

### 5.1.2. *Ancestor Worship?*

A look at ancestors in Africa cannot avoid the question of whether ancestors are worshipped, if only because some perceive this to be integral to the ancestral phenomena in Africa and proceed to describe it as such, i.e., 'ancestor worship'. According to the literature on African religions that I have studied, it appears that prior to the 1960s it was taken for granted that Africans worshipped their ancestors.<sup>4</sup> But this was increasingly called into question with different scholars of African religions (e.g., Brain 1973, 126 and Mbiti 1969, 8-9) arguing that they did not. In my opinion the answer given to the question of whether Africans worship ancestors will always be relative to the assumed understanding of worship. So, as a first example, we have some African theologians,<sup>5</sup> probably due to their theological commitments to monotheism and the subsequent implications that worship of ancestors may have, denying ancestor worship, and preferring, (following St. Augustine's categorization of kinds of worship) to look at the beliefs and attitudes of Africans to their ancestors as *Dulia*,<sup>6</sup> i.e. the 'veneration of ancestors' or 'communion with ancestors'. Then, as a second example, we have scholars such as Hammond-Tooke (1978), who call into question such an understanding and categorization of worship. Hammond-Tooke questions what 'veneration' here really means and thinks that importing our own ideas of worship into the concept, laden as they are with

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<sup>4</sup> Kenyatta (1938, 265-68) is one of the exceptions here; he felt that worship was not a true depiction of the relationship between Africans and their ancestors.

<sup>5</sup> These are Bediako (1994), Kabasale (1991), Ela (1989), Nyamiti (1984), Fasholé-Luke (1974); Sawyerr (1966 and 1970) appears here to be the exception.

<sup>6</sup> As opposed to *Latria* which is given only to God. In traditional Roman Catholic theology reverence is classified into three categories: 1. *Dulia*, which is understood as honour usually given to saints 'who manifest in a unique way the activity of God in their lives' (McBrien 1995, 435). This reverence is said to honour God by 'recognizing the presence of God manifest in the lives of the saints' (Ibid.). 2. *Hyperdulia*, which is special honour given to Mary. She is 'uniquely honoured because of her role as the Mother of God' (646). 3. *Latria*, which is 'the worship and adoration owed to God alone' (758). It



Judaeo-Christian theological presuppositions, does not help in assessing whether Africans worship their ancestors or not, but to the contrary, borders on cultural arrogance. He consequently proposes a different understanding of worship adopted from Smart and, accordingly, uses it to judge that Africans indeed worship their ancestors. According to Smart (1972), there seem to be five basic elements that constitute worship. These are:

First, worship is a relational activity: one cannot worship oneself... Second, the ritual of worship expresses the superiority of the Focus to the worshipper(s). Third, the ritual also performatively sustains or is part of the power of the Focus. Fourth, the experience which worship expresses is that of the numinous, and the object of worship is thus perceived as awe-inspiring (26-27).

These elements, in Hammond-Tooke's view, are all fulfilled in the way that African relate to their ancestors except in the case of the fourth element, which he does not consider as necessary to the concept of worship. He thereby concludes that Africans worship their ancestors.

But discourse on the nature and meaning of worship is complex, even within the circumscription of a particular religion. And, *contra* Hammond-Tooke's view, there is no escaping theological presuppositions since it is from the practice of religions that the concept has arisen in the first place (which means one cannot have definitions and understandings of worship that are independent of the practices of religion - they are inextricably related. Indeed Smart's understanding is on the basis of the religions he observes!). In consequence, taking up this debate on worship in this thesis would take us too far afield and distract us from our main purpose, so we

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is such distinctions between reverential attitudes that African theologians have found useful in understanding, and defending, the attitude of Africans to their ancestors as not worship, i.e., not *latría*.

must refrain from it. In any case, as what follows will show, I do not consider it as immediately crucial to the argument of my thesis. It suffices for us here to note simply, whatever our views on worship, that African peoples have traditionally had a thriving and elaborate ancestor cult: shrines are built for them, there are special places designated for them, sacrifices, libations and other offerings are made to them, and they are consulted, appealed to and invoked in a variety of ways and in various circumstances. We may call the beliefs in, and rituals concerning, ancestors in Africa, 'the ancestor cult', <sup>7</sup> which seems more acceptable as a descriptive term to most, than the more evaluative and, for reasons alluded to above, threatening, 'ancestor worship'.

### ***5.1.3. Interpretations of the Ancestor Phenomena***

Tensions are to be found in attempts to make sense of the ancestor cult. The problem is made more acute because of the indefinite nature of the data available. Several interpretations have been advanced but seem to suffer from 'reductionism' and, with it, the loss of accountability for vital aspects of religion, which is always rich, diverse, and even ambiguous. For example, based on his study of the Tallensi in Ghana, Fortes (1987, 66-82) proposed that the ancestor cult (he called it worship) 'is rooted in domestic, kinship and descent relations, and institutions' (66). Thus it could be understood as an extension of such relationships, or as a reflection of such relationships, or even as ritual expression of such relationships. In other words the

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<sup>7</sup> Whereas the term 'cult' may have a more technical meaning where, for example, it refers to worship that involves sacrifice, or as a small closed group that is distinct from the mainstream religious body, I am using the term here in a rather loose way to denote some form of veneration. In using it this way, I follow the way it has been used in much literature on Ancestors in Africa, and in some literature on Saints (e.g. 'Cult of Saints' [Horbury 1998, 445]), to denote or signify some kind of veneration a group, or groups, may have for a particular figure.

ancestor cult is, in essence, the extension of kinship or communal (human) relations beyond the gulf occasioned by death. A good number of scholars dealing with ancestors in Africa take this view.<sup>8</sup> However his interpretation reduces, or limits, the understanding of ancestors in the religious life of Africans to what can be accounted for sociologically. Yet as Turner (1981, 13) points out, any study of African religious heritage that limits it to what can be accounted for sociologically, or psychologically, or philosophically, or even phenomenologically would blind the person concerned from seeing some of its other features and meanings.<sup>9</sup> Indeed two important suggestions of how traditional African religion can be interpreted and understood are bedevilled by reductionism.

The first suggestion was by Tempels (1959) who proposed that the concept of *vital force* should be used in the understanding of African philosophy and religion among the Bantu. Tempels' argument is centred on the belief that a people's ontology ('a concrete conception of being and of the universe' [17]) will define and thus unlock, *inter alia*, their beliefs and religious practices. We, therefore, understand people to the degree that we are cognizant of their ontology. Tempels' investigation of the Bantu of the Congo led him to the conclusion that their ontology is to be found in the notion of *vital force* (30-39). Tempels himself struggles to define this concept precisely. But the general impression created from his explication of it is that *vital force* is the power or force of life or behind life, so that 'being' to the Bantu is to have this vital force (34ff). This force is of utmost importance to the Bantu; the 'Bantu

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<sup>8</sup> For example Ela (1989, 15-17), Fasholé-Luke (1974), and McKnight (1967).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed there are a number of approaches to making sense of religious phenomena (see Whaling 1984). See Idinopulos and Yonan (1994) for more discussion on reductionism.

soul hankers after life and force' (33), Tempels writes. It can be made stronger, weakened or even rendered powerless. Nürnberger (1975, 176-79) employs Tempels' concept to explain the place and role of ancestors amongst the Sotho in Southern Africa. According to him, *life-force* is the experience of reality among the Sotho people and whose 'operational centre is the lineage' (176). By this he means the life of a son is derived from the father, who in turn derives his life from his father etc. This endowment of life should not be taken in a biological sense since, he explains:

The decisive criterion of true sonship is that the son is endowed with the life-force of the lineage through the mediation of the father or his rightful representative... Once he is integrated into the ongoing lineage he becomes a potential channel of its life-force. This life force has passed through many generations before it reaches the son through the father... All members of the lineage, not only those who are still to be born, depend on the vitality of this life-stream, which manifests itself through its forceful perpetuation (176).

When this is understood, the role of ancestors is grasped as that of being the *life-force's* 'most formidable channel and representatives' (178).

The second suggestion is by Mbiti (1969, 15-28), who proposes that the African concept of time be used to make sense of African religion. Mbiti is of the opinion that, 'the concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices, and the general way of life of African peoples...' (16). According to him, time in African society must be lived to make sense and to become real. This renders the future, except the future that is expected ('what is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena' [17]), an alien concept in African societies. Consequently, there are only two dimensions of time in Africa: the past (*Zamani*) and the present (*Sasa*). *Sasa* is the 'time region in which people are conscious of

their existence, and within which they project themselves both for the short future and mainly into the past (*Zamani*); *Zamani* is the past into which people on the whole cannot project themselves (because this time region goes further back beyond than their capacity to do so). So, in traditional African societies, history moves backwards, 'from the *Sasa* period to the *Zamani*, from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing goes' (23). The effect of this is to make *Zamani* foundational for African peoples as the place towards which they see all of life ever moving, and thus the place to look to for issues of life. Mbiti then concludes that it is in the *Zamani* period that we ought to look to understand African philosophy and religion. Accordingly, this is the context in which he locates his discussion of African religion and philosophy. It would be interesting to see what interpretation one would come up with using this concept of time to make sense of the phenomenon of ancestors in Africa. In my research, I have yet to come across anyone who has used it to do so. Mbiti himself does not use it to look at ancestors, whom he seems least interested in; and in the end he dismisses the term 'ancestor' offhand as a rather unhelpful, if not, confusing one (85)!

The main point, then, is clear: both Mbiti and Tempels limit the interpretation of African religion to what can be accounted for by their African philosophical schema<sup>10</sup> thus suffering the consequences of reductionism just alluded to. We must, therefore, look for an alternative interpretation of the Ancestor cult that is, perhaps, a more inclusive one, able to offer a truer perception of the role and function of ancestors in Africa.

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<sup>10</sup> This is in the sense that their philosophical schema is derived from African peoples themselves.

Mbiti (1969, 4-5), more promisingly, observed that African religions are anthropocentric, an observation that seems to me both acute and relevant to understanding the ancestral phenomena in Africa. Mbiti is not alone in this observation; Zahan's (1970) study on the religion of traditional Africa led him to the following conclusion:

...the essence of African spirituality lies in the feeling that man has of being at once image, model, and integral part of the world in whose cyclical life he senses himself deeply and necessarily engaged. All of African spiritual life is based on this vision of man's situation and role. The idea of a finality outside of man is foreign to it. Man was not made for God or for the universe; he exists for himself and carries within himself the justification of his existence and of his religious and moral perfection. It is not to "please" God or out of love for God that the African "prays," implores, or makes sacrifice, but rather to become himself and to realize the order in which he finds himself implicated. The sky and the divinity are only thought of insofar as they represent something about man, who constitutes, so to speak, the keystone of the African religious structure (5).

Indeed it may well be, as argued by Horton (1993, 192), that the chief elements in the religious life of most African societies are explanation, prediction and control of the world around them. Instead of seeing these elements as orientated merely to worldly events as he does, I would see them orientated to the community in the entirety of its life. Accordingly, it seems to me, the sustenance or preservation of the community is what determines the role, if not the *raison d'être*, of ancestors: it is squarely at the heart of the ancestor cult. It is in such a context that one can understand the remarks of Chidester (1991), that, 'Historically, ancestor religion has operated as a force of conservatism, maintaining lifestyles and social relations associated with the past' (12), in short sustaining the community. This is why ancestors are consulted, appeased, appealed to, and invoked. I should think that such an understanding allows for most of the multifarious functions of ancestors (such as

guardians of the land, providers, guarantors of fertility, custodians of the morality, and customs of the community etc.) to be accounted for.

One such function, which is strictly my prime interest in the ancestors of Africa, is mediation. Allusions to the mediatorial role of ancestors are frequent in literature on African ancestors,<sup>11</sup> but they do not meet with universal countenance.<sup>12</sup> The crucial question that needs to be answered for our purposes at this juncture is this: Between whom do ancestors mediate? Should it be taken for granted that it is a straightforward mediation between an Ultimate Deity (God, the Supreme Being etc.) and humans? This leads us to the discussion of the cosmology that ancestors operate in, for it is only against the background of African cosmology that the mediatorial role of ancestors is thrown into relief.

#### **5.1.4. *Ancestors as Mediatorial Figures***

As Idowu (1973, 139), amongst others, makes clear, the religious cosmology of Africa is encompassed by spirit beings: ancestors/ancestor spirits, spirits, and divinities or deities. It could be further argued that to this be added nature or natural forces (whether as animistic or theophanous). This supra-human or spirit world is hierarchically ordered. Some communities such as the Shona of Zimbabwe (Daneel

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Sawyerr (1970, 5), McVeigh (1974, 35, 115), Kyewelyanga (1976, 274), Morris (2000, 231), Idowu (1973, 184), Hodgson (1982, 85), Daneel (1970, 18), and Gaba (1969, 78).

<sup>12</sup> A notable example is Ilesanmi (1991). He asserts that in the past, the Yoruba understood their ancestors as deified (i.e., given the status of gods), and the only and final point of reference (thus not intermediaries) when appealed to or invoked (221). In response we may note that other studies (see Idowu 1973) suggest otherwise, whilst the fact that an ancestor figure may be appealed to without further reference to any other force or person does not rule out a mediatorial role; one can still be the final reference in acting on behalf of another or because s/he or it has been given the powers to do so as we argue in the following section. Another example here is Hammond-Tooke (1978). He writes, '... the oft-repeated statement that the ancestors stand in a hierarchical relationship to the supreme being and mediate between him and man, is not part of any indigenous world-view', (138). His bold

1970, 51) may have a simple hierarchically-ordered spirit world starting with humans (themselves having a hierarchical ordering) at the bottom, then ancestors, and then a Supreme Deity at the top, while others such as the Yoruba of Nigeria (Idowu 1973, 139) have a complex hierarchically ordered spirit world, having humans at the bottom, then ancestors, then a horde of deities, and lastly a Supreme Deity at the top. Simple hierarchically-ordered spirit worlds seem to characterize East, Central, and Southern African societies, while complex ordered spirit worlds characterize West African societies.

At issue in the understanding of these spirit worlds, and therewith the understanding of the mediation of ancestors, is the notion of a Supreme Deity. Contingent on how one understands African beliefs on the notion of a Supreme Deity, the spirit world, so described, could be understood as a form of polytheism, in which case the mediation of ancestors would be between humans and a deity, or not be there at all. Those who are convinced that the latter is the case (e.g. Illesanmi 1991 and Hammond-Tooke 1960, 138) perceive the ancestor cult to be an end in itself, meaning that ancestors are autonomous entities, acting in their own power and authority, and independent of other *personae*. Alternatively the spirit world could be understood as more or less a pantheon which has an Ultimate Deity at its head; in which case the mediation of ancestors is understood to be between humans and the Ultimate Deity. Here, other deities (applicable only to West African societies)<sup>13</sup> as well as the ancestors are understood to have power and authority that is derived from,

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and sweeping judgement cannot be accepted because it is based only on his study of the South-Eastern Bantu peoples and, also, is not checked against data from elsewhere in Africa.

<sup>13</sup> This is so because in East, Central and Southern Africa the belief in other deities seems to be lacking unlike in West Africa where it is pervasive.



and finally accountable to, this Ultimate Deity. Furthermore, their role is seen as a delegated one and they are, as a result, seen as representatives of the Ultimate Deity (some would say his manifestations).

So what notion of the Ultimate Deity prevails in African societies? From West to Southern Africa we encounter (at least traditionally) most widely the notion of a great deity who is above all others primarily because he/she/it ('he' from here on)<sup>14</sup> is, essentially, believed to be responsible for the creation of all things. However, for a variety of reasons, he is now far away up in the sky and thus almost inaccessible (cf. McVeigh 1974, Gaba 1969, Evans-Pritchard 1962 and O'Connell 1962); a characteristic that is at times called *Deus otiosus* or *remotus*.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, this Deity is commonly associated with, if not identified as, the sky and sun, and it is for this reason, that the term often used for this Deity is the 'High God/Deity'. Though on some points debatable, Damman (1969) captures this phenomenon appositely in writing:

...besides spirits and deities there is an isolated deity, quite independent from and not related to other deities, solitary and of unknown origin, without dependants, neither wife nor family. Certain general characteristics always recur. This High God is usually known as creator, but not necessarily in the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*. He has set certain rules of human conduct. The phenomenon of death is traced back to him, and it is he who calls away those whose time on earth is over. In the beginning he used to live near places of men, but later - sometimes in consequence of some human awkwardness - he has withdrawn (6).

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<sup>14</sup> I have chosen to use 'he' when referring to this higher deity in African cosmology more for convenience than anything else, since it is evident that not all notions of a higher deity conceive of the deity as, male, or even, as female.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough the same fate follows ancestors: with each succeeding generation the current crop of ancestors - apart from those who become deified - begin to recede in the background and are eventually forgotten as they join the family of ancestors no longer having any crucial relationship with the living.

This notion of a High Deity in Africa is found in the mythologies of the African peoples.<sup>16</sup> The most common reason put down in the myths for the withdrawal (though by no means absolute) of the High Deity is, as alluded to by Damman, in the quotation above, due to the unacceptable conduct of human beings. So, for example, among the Barotse of Zambia, the High God withdrew because *Nyambi* (the first man) murdered other creatures (Sprowl 1991, 35-36); among the Yao of Tanzania (36-37), it is because they were burning up everything in their environment; whilst among the Ngombe of the Congo, it is because of the quarrelsomeness of human beings (47-48).

However, the withdrawal of this High Deity is not absolute; he may be withdrawn but he has not disappeared altogether. This means that some things can be said about him apart from credit for creating the world. Indeed there are beliefs in, and conceptions of him that can be gleaned through a semantic study of his names. One of the best illustrations of this is found in Setiloane's (1973) study of 'Modimo: God Among the Sotho-Tswana', where he looks at not only the significance of the name of the Supreme Being, but also the praise names given to *Modimo*. For instance, he points out that *Modimo* is a noun of the second class. "This class contains also *mosi*, "smoke", *motto*, "fire", *moya*, "wind", *ngwedi*, "moon", *mohodi* (Sotho) or *muwane*, "mist" and *meane*, "lightning" (6). All of these are intangible elemental objects which points to a perception of *Modimo* as intangible and mysterious, a primary quality of the deity, Setiloane notes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A collection of some of these myths can be found in Sprowl (1991).

<sup>17</sup> See also Gaba (1969) for a similar study on *Anlo*.

Generally, with few exceptions, there is no worship around this High Deity; but if he is ever approached, whether directly or through intermediaries, it is mostly in times of a major crisis (Pobee 1979, 47) or when all else has failed (McVeigh 1974, 35). It is not clear whether the deity is a *persona* and, thus, whether in anthropomorphic representation he is male or female; neither is it clear whether he is moral or amoral. What seems clear from my reading of the relevant literature is that the spirit world of Africa's religious cosmology has a sense of a superior deity in its hierarchy of power and authority and would therefore best be described as a pantheon with the High Deity, at its head. This High Deity in Africa's religious cosmology may then be conceived of as the Ultimate Deity, as God.

Ancestors and other spiritual beings, consequently, can be understood to function as mediators of the Ultimate Deity. This is more openly the case, for example, amongst the Ngoni of Malawi (Read 1956, 191-192), the Mende of Sierra Leone (Sawyerr 1970, 66) and the Ibo of Nigeria (Mutah 1999, 90), where *Unkurukulu*, *Ngweno*, and *Chukwu*, respectively, have mediators in ancestors.<sup>18</sup> However, we must concede that in some African societies, there is vagueness in the precise relationship of God to spirits, divinities, ancestors, and human beings principally because addressees of prayers are the ancestors themselves. They seem to be understood to act in their own power without recourse to God to whom they would, presumably, forward the prayers of the people. (In fact it is this that has led to some scholars to reject the notion of an ultimate Deity.) But then vagueness of relationship

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<sup>18</sup> Consequently attempts have been made to classify the different types of mediations that exist in Africa's religious cosmologies. Shorter (2001, 48-50), for example, classifies them into six models, viz., 'strict theism', 'modified theism', 'symmetrical mediation', 'asymmetrical mediation', 'modified deism', and 'strict deism'.

does not mean there is none whatsoever. The very fact of a transcending and defining ultimate Deity (defining in the sense that he is credited with creation and, by extension, life) means there is a relationship of ancestors and other beings to this Deity. Such a relationship could be understood in various ways, of which I consider two.

We argued earlier that ancestors in Africa should be understood chiefly in terms of sustaining and preserving the community they belong to - that is, they serve as guarantors of life to their communities. It would therefore follow that if the Ultimate Deity is credited with creating life, then those who serve to sustain it are not quite unrelated to him but on the contrary are mediators between him and the people. If we may paraphrase this: *to have power to sustain life is to mediate for the one whom the people understand ultimately to be the source of that life*. It is for this reason that on rare occasions ancestors are simply bypassed and the Ultimate Deity invoked directly. Nürnberger (1975), while looking at the relationship of *Modimo* and the ancestral spirits of the Sotho in South Africa isolates this argument in a way that deserves full quotation:

There can be no doubt that the real addressees of prayers and sacrifices are the ancestors themselves and not a further authority beyond them, to whom they have to forward the supplications. There is also no doubt that they act - benevolently or malevolently - in their own right and power. Nevertheless there is a connection of some sort, and it has to be. After all dynamistic reality is unitarian. The life-stream of the lineage is part and parcel of a greater whole of dynamistic power. If Modimo is the source of all dynamistic power around, then it is obvious that ancestors are "closer" to the Modimo in the sense that more of such power is at their command than at the command of the living. This power they are expected to utilize for the benefit of the living offspring. Put into mythological imagery the ancestors appear as mediators (*batseta*) between man and Modimo. Obviously the example of normal social relationships between a minor and a superior (say a commoner and a chief) through the agency of intermediaries lends itself perfectly to such an imagery ... Existentially nothing more can be said than that there is some sort of continuity between the power of ancestors (i.e. that of lineage) and Modimo as the great beyond of all dynamistic power (187).

The second kind of relationship between ancestors and the Ultimate Deity is the perception that the Ultimate Deity manifests himself, consequently becoming immediate to the people, through ancestors and other beings. Here ancestors are understood to be his proxy. This is very clear amongst the Lugbara of Uganda where the power of *Onyiri* is manifest in, amongst other things, the form of spirits which include ancestors (Middleton 1960, 27). *So then, this much can be said, even in the absence of a clear and openly defined relationship between the High Deity and ancestors: ancestors function variously as mediators between people and God.*

Some, such as Horton (1993, 161-193), have sought to vitiate the conclusion just made that there is an Ultimate Deity in Africa's religious cosmology by insisting that such a view is an interpretation highly shaped by Judaeo-Christian and, I should add, Muslim templates. Sharevskaya (1973, 38-48) has gone even further in criticising this conclusion by insisting that the conclusion is a product of the 'fideists', of the church and its objectives and that in Africa, there is no existence whatsoever of an

Ultimate Deity. We need not take Sharevskaya's sustained critique seriously; her thesis is not backed at all by any concrete data on studies done on the religions of Africa's peoples, nor has she taken time to ponder the significance of the numerous myths in Africa that support heavily, as pointed out, the notion of an Ultimate Deity.

We may turn now to Horton's critique. Whereas I concur that Judaeo-Christian and Muslim templates are a factor in the descriptions, if not analyses, of the notions of an Ultimate Deity as found in Africa's religions (missionaries tended to study African religion to help their efforts to evangelize Africa, history of religion studies privilege one religious tradition in analyzing the other), I think that our conclusion would largely be accounted for by the encounter of African societies with Christianity and Islam. The impact of these encounters has been colossal, making their mark on all aspects of Africa's cosmology and not least in their conceptions of, and belief in, a supreme Deity.<sup>19</sup> Of course, this is not to say that the impact was one-way or on a passive recipient (Sanneh 1980).

So, our conclusion should not be in question, since we are dealing with African ancestors in the Africa of today (not in the pre-colonial Africa of yesteryear) and within the cosmology they are understood to operate in today. Such an Africa has a cosmology that bears simultaneously both the marks of Africa's religious tradition and the legacy of Christianity and Islam. It therefore follows that it is the second of the two conceptions of the spirit world mentioned above (i.e., a pantheon with an Ultimate Deity at its head) that should be taken as the proper cosmology in which to

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this see Frankl (1990), Hodgson (1982), Hexham (1981), and Daneel (1970, 36ff).

understand the role of ancestors in Africa. This role, as mentioned, is that in a variety of ways ancestors mediate between humans and 'God'. Having established this, we conclude, then, that ancestor figures in Africa provide a parallel context to Hebrews' initial context because as mediators they correspond to mediatorial figures in Hebrews' initial context of principal angels, Moses, and Aaronic high priests. It is now possible to proceed to a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa.

## 5.2 HEBREWS' CHRISTOLOGY AND ANCESTORS

What we want to do now is it to transfer directly Hebrews' Christology from its initial audience onto a contemporary African audience. We can do this because we have shown that there are parallels between Jewish mediatorial figures in Hebrews and ancestors in Africa who provide for Hebrews' contemporary context in Africa. Such a transfer, therefore, will consist of the typological interpretation of ancestors along the same lines as the typological interpretation in Hebrews of Jewish mediatorial figures. We will carry out this direct transfer in two, not unrelated, distinct stages: the first stage will be broad and general, based on the communication principle of analogy/metaphor,<sup>20</sup> while the second stage will be narrow, based strictly on the theology of typology.

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<sup>20</sup> How is analogy different from metaphor? Perelman is of the view, for example, that a metaphor is a 'condensed analogy' (92), (analogy, to him, understood as a similitude of relations); while for Black (1962), a metaphor (the comparative view of it) is related inextricably to analogy because it consists in the *presentation* of an underlying analogy (35-36). This is not the place to argue against, or for, the nuanced distinctions between metaphors and analogies, nor even to show the nuance. It suffices here for us to note that basic to analogy and metaphor is that communication is in varying degrees sought to be made of something unfamiliar, or hard to grasp, or unclear, or even alien etc., by relating it to what is already known and familiar. In other words, analogy and metaphor overlap considerably in

The communication principles of analogy are integral to typology-based theological interpretations because they are used when there are some significant similarities between what is known by subjects of a discourse and what the communicator seeks to be known,<sup>21</sup> whereby the known is used to communicate the unknown (or the unfamiliar and less known), as is the case in type-antitype relationship. In this first stage of transferring Hebrews' Christology to Africa, we see this communication principle at work when Jesus is reconceptualized in Africa as an ancestor: because ancestors have similarities, as mediators, with Jewish mediatorial figures, and since they are known in the African world, they are used accordingly to know Jesus as the definitive mediator.

However, we need to understand here that this re-conception is only a part of transferring the understanding of Hebrews' Christology from the world of its initial audience onto the world of its African context. The transfer is completed when it is related to the typology that attends it (this will be the subject of our second stage in the said transfer). A purely analogous re-conception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa, devoid of the typology that goes with it, will not suffice to be considered an outcome of a direct transfer of Hebrews' Christology to Africa envisaged in typology-based theological interpretations. It will not suffice because it is not related to typology and is thus disqualified from being a typology-based theological

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meaning and usage. So, although using the term analogy more frequently than metaphor, I simply use the two terms interchangeably throughout this study.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note here that the 'known' and the 'unknown' not only have significant similarities but that, also, they have fundamental differences, else the use of analogy will not be needed. At this stage in our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa we are concerned only with the similarities that enable the reconceptualization of Hebrews' Christology in Africa, hence our understanding of 'Jesus as ancestor' (section 5.2.1.). In the next stage, which is in our sixth chapter, we shall consider the outcome of fundamental differences in this analogy, which issue out in Jesus being understood as 'the greatest ancestor' (section 6.1.3.).



interpretation. It is for this reason that we have the second stage of the transfer alluded to, where we relate this analogical re-conception of Jesus in Africa to typology by considering the theological bases for such a re-conception. It will be seen that these bases - the whys and wherefores - are found in typology, which then make the interpretation a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. *In other words, even though the direct transfer of Hebrews' initial Christology to Hebrews' present context in Africa involves the usage of analogy, the transfer is based on the theology of typology.* It is this relationship of analogy to the theology of typology that makes the interpretation, which we are in the process of giving of Hebrews Christology in Africa, a typology-based theological interpretation. We turn our attention, then, to the first stage of transference of Hebrews' Christology to Africa.

### **5.2.1. *Jesus as 'Ancestor'***

We must preface the first stage of transferring Hebrews' Christology to Africa by giving more thought to what I call Hebrews' predominant Christology, in order to have a proper grasp of the basis, in the first instance, of the re-conception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. We may do this by asking: how did the conception and articulation of Jesus as the mediator come about? And how is it related to the possibility of an ancestor-Christology?

We noted in the first chapter that Christianity started with a particular historical person: Jesus of Nazareth, his person, work and deeds. However it was left unsaid that Jesus himself did not go around spreading news of himself and of his

significance to all and sundry; it was those who claimed that in him they had met God who did so. Cognizance of this would make us appreciate that, interwoven with the person of Jesus, both in his words and deeds, were the experiences of those who believed in him. Much as other valid accounts centring on Jesus may be given credit for the provenance of Christianity, the dimension of religious encounters with him cannot be overlooked as a factor as well. Though seemingly a neglected point of view, especially the post-crucifixion or Easter Jesus experiences, religious experiences are very important in understanding the origins of Christology. This granted, we should be able to perceive that it was because the early Christians encountered Jesus, and had their lives changed in one way or another, that they accentuated his significance, made efforts to make sense of (or interpret) their encounters with him, and not least, made efforts to express that significance of Jesus to others in an intelligible manner. Both making sense of their experiences of Christ and communicating it in an intelligible manner were done inevitably within and through their religio-cultural milieux. Johnson (1986), who gives credit to the phenomenon of religious experiences of Christ as a factor behind the emergence of Christianity and the New Testament writings (11-18, 86-113), brings out this point well when he writes:

It is in the experience of the first believers that the origin of Christianity and of the New Testament must be sought. Something happened in the lives of real men and women; something that caused them to perceive their lives in new and radically altered fashion and compelled them to interpret [and express] it by means of available symbols (96).

He also makes the point that there was no core experience to these experiences of Jesus but rather a variety of experiences evidenced in the plurality of the New Testament writings (93-96). So some had, for example, experienced in Jesus a

release from cosmic powers that had hitherto controlled their lives (1Cor. 2.6-10; Rom. 8.38; Eph. 2.1-10; Col. 1.13; 1Pet. 3.22), while some had experienced peace in him (Rom. 5.1; 1Cor. 7.15; 2Cor. 13.11; Eph. 2.17, 4.3; Phil 4.13; Col. 3.15; Jas. 3.18).

Given the above, we could understand Hebrews to be an expression of one claim, amongst others, by the early Christians, which is based on a particular experience of Christ that they had (in the midst of other experiences). It is an expression of Jesus as a definitive mediator through the use of Jewish 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple religious milieu, as we sought to demonstrate, because he was experienced as such in the lives of the early Christians. It could be argued that had the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple religious milieu been inhabited by a different set of mediatorial figures, they would have been the ones used to communicate Jesus as the definitive mediator and not angels, Moses and the Aaronic high priests. In other words, had the context and audience been different, the mediatorial figures in question would have been different. It is important to note that this predominant Christology does not preclude, but rather is interwoven with, a substantive typological interpretation of the Jewish mediatorial figures in question as would have been understood from the Old Testament at the time. In the final analysis, what we have, then, is the usage of mediatorial figures to communicate Christ as the definitive mediator, accompanied by a theology of history about them which, in the first place, justifies their typological interpretation.

Given the above, what, then, needs to be made sense of in Africa and re-conceived of is *Jesus as the definitive mediator*, the predominant Christology of Hebrews, and not so much Jesus as the one greater than Principal Angels, Moses and Aaronic high priests. It is precisely here that we look to the ancestor figure in Africa for the purpose of re-conceiving and speaking of Jesus as the definitive mediator between humans and God in Africa, and in effect re-conceiving Jesus there as an 'ancestor'. As discussed in the preceding section, ancestors are integral to Africa's religious cosmology and are chiefly, if not entirely in some cases, mediatorial figures. It follows that if Jewish mediatorial figures are used analogously, as noted above, to conceive and speak of Christ as the definitive mediator,<sup>22</sup> there is no reason then why ancestors should not be used, as such, to conceive and speak of Jesus as the definitive mediator in Africa. For just as principal angels, Moses and high priests straddled the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Jewish religious cosmos as mediators between God and humans, so do ancestors, as such, straddle Africa's religious cosmos.

Consequently, and as an outcome of employing the ancestor figure, the perception of Jesus as an 'ancestor' in re-conceiving and expressing Hebrews' Christology in Africa means we are doing two things. Firstly, we are applying the same communication principle of analogy at work in Hebrews, a principle that could not apply in re-conceiving Hebrews' Christology in Africa were it not for the similarities the context in Africa (as Hebrews' present contemporary context) shares with

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<sup>22</sup> Two Hebrews scholars have made some detailed comments on metaphor in Hebrews. Isaacs (2002, 69-71) judges Hebrews with bringing 'us face to face with the metaphorical character of much of the language of the New Testament' (69), whilst Smith (1976) sees Hebrews as an extended metaphor. However, it is apparent that their discourses, though, are not concerned with the use of metaphor in Hebrews in the conceiving of Christ. Isaacs is concerned to underline the point, within her discourse of why we ought to bother with the study of Hebrews, that metaphors are not literal but useful in

Hebrews' initial context. Secondly, we are *ipso facto*, through the use of analogy, transferring Hebrews' Christology from its initial audience onto its contemporary audience in Africa. Crucially, this second point is accompanied theologically, as we shall see, by the typological interpretation of ancestors in the same way that angels, Moses and Aaronic high priests can be understood to be interpreted in Hebrews.

But this is not all in this stage of transferring Hebrews' Christology to Africa. In employing the ancestor figure to re-conceive Jesus as the definitive mediator in Africa, we need to do so *mutatis mutandis*. This is because the similarities between Christ and ancestors are not *in toto*, which, then, necessitates comparisons and contrasts between the two. This, too, is a characteristic of analogy, for in an analogy there is tension between affirmations and negations, similarities and differences. Such a process, as we saw, takes place in Hebrews, in the *synkrisis* between Jesus and the Jewish mediatorial figures, where Jesus is like a principal angel but superior, like Moses but greater than him, and like the Aaronic high priest but of a different order. Consequently, I submit that Jesus as the greatest ancestor, being the result of a direct transfer of Hebrews' Christology to Africa, is the proper re-conception of the same in Africa. Jesus is an ancestor on the basis of the similarities in mediation that he has with African ancestors, but greater than them on the basis of significant differences with them. This, as far as I can see, is how an African Christian could easily hear, read, and understand Hebrews' Christology for his/her faith, ethos and worship in Africa today.

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acquisition of new insights (71), while Smith is concerned to argue out that (*contra* Sabourin [1973]) Christ's priesthood should not be taken literally but metaphorically.

Some objections could be raised against the re-conceiving of Christ as an 'ancestor' in Africa. We begin with an objection that we may term metaphorical, which we need to respond to given that our transference of Hebrews' Christology to Africa as part of a typology-based theological interpretation of the same makes heavy use of analogy. Associations between ancestors in Africa on the one hand and Jesus on the other are not isomorphic. Ontological and some functional differences exist that, for some, would bar Jesus from being conceived of as an African ancestor. Jesus, for example, is the 'Son of God' (Hebrews 1.1-5ff), while ancestors are not. Furthermore, some may feel that we have an inherent problem of 'christifying' the African mediatorial categories with the result that, instead of understanding Jesus as an 'ancestor', ancestors are understood as Jesus; or, instead of the ancestor category acting as an analogue to conceive of and articulate Jesus, Jesus sheds light on who the ancestor is.<sup>23</sup>

Two reasons may account for this kind of objection to the re-conception of Christ along the lines of an ancestor. The first we could call the subversion of a metaphor. To use Black's (1962, 38-47) analysis, a metaphor has a principal and subsidiary subject, and works by applying to the principal subject features associated with the subsidiary subject. But this can be subverted when the subsidiary subject takes the place of the principal subject and *vice versa*. The metaphor then would be working in reverse. So that in our case, Jesus who is supposed to be the principal subject in the metaphor becomes the subsidiary, while the ancestor figure becomes the principal subject.

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<sup>23</sup> Schoffeleers (1989) in a section of his work, 'The Nganga (a mediator) as Christ' (169 brackets mine), cites several examples in which *Ngangas* have been understood as Jesus or as an alternative to

The second objection to seeing Jesus as 'ancestor' is primarily because the worldview (world of meaning) in which the functions of African mediators are comprehensible (and in which 'ancestors' acquire meaning), has differences from the one in which Jesus may have been understood to function, in Hebrews. To illustrate: the ancestor cult has traditionally been understood within a cosmology that recognizes the interdependence between two spheres: the world of the living and the spirit world of the dead. As King (1994), albeit in a highly oversimplified way, describes it:

Ancestors are considered to have passed from this plane of existence to a new plane which is sometimes referred to as the supernatural, or the invisible. ... Whatever the metaphysical system involved, this change is seen as giving the ancestors a closer access to God or the Supreme Being. This role can be seen either in terms of distance or language: the ancestors who now know the languages of the invisible are better adapted to such communication than men and women in this realm. The personal relationship of the ancestors to the living also helps what we might call the "downward" communication in which they engage as mediators: their position makes the ancestors more familiar with the petitioner as well as the Supreme Being. Communication is thus enhanced in both directions (11).

One may wonder whether Jesus as the definitive mediator, the dominant Christology of Hebrews, would be understood both concretely and noetically, significantly altered, or distorted against the background of such a worldview.<sup>24</sup>

Before we respond to these objections, we should note that the charge of an analogy working in reverse such as cited by Schoffeleers (1989, 169) seems to me a deliberate choice, on the part of those involved, to use Christ (who then functions as

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Jesus.

<sup>24</sup> For more, see especially Gerhart and Russell (1984) who provide a useful discussion on the relationship of analogies, metaphors, and worldviews.

the subsidiary subject in the analogy) to shed light on 'Nganga'<sup>25</sup> (the principal subject in the analogy); it is not something that occurs because an analogy has gone wrong. In principle, I think that what is really being objected to here is fundamentally a way of communication which we must address. Analogies are linchpins in communication, especially in communicating something new, the knowledge of which cannot be attained directly.<sup>26</sup> Analogies function on the presupposition that there is some measure of similarity between the 'known' and the 'unknown' so that the unknown is made known through some of its similarity with the known. The fact, therefore, that analogies often bring with them some measure of accretions and distortions such as the extreme one (subversion of analogy) pointed out above ought not to lead to their invalidation. In any case, analogies are inevitable in communicating the unknown especially when it cannot be known directly. What is crucial is that, despite differences (which must be there, otherwise there is no need of analogy) between the known and the unknown, there is something sufficiently similar between them, resulting in knowledge of one leading to knowledge of the other - the very thing envisaged in our foregoing re-conception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. The assumption is that it is ancestors who are the 'known' (or familiar) in this analogy, and Jesus as the mediator the 'unknown', with ancestors leading to the knowledge or conception of Jesus as a mediator, or at the very least, deepening that conception.

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<sup>25</sup> As alluded to, a common figure in Africa who is understood multifariously as priest, healer, medicine man etc.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson (2001, 245-64) and Martinich (1996) provide helpful readings on this.



As for the different worldviews of the two entities in the analogy distorting knowledge that could be gained of the unknown *via* the analogy, I do not think that the different worldviews of the known and unknown entities constitute a serious objection to an ancestor-Christology. This is because the worldview of the known holds sway as the one used to shed light on the unknown, and in which the unknown entity must be understood. In Hebrews itself, for example, it seems that Christ as the mediator is interpreted within the worldview of 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple religious heritage. On this assumption, we could say that the making sense of Jesus as mediator in Africa must be plotted on Africa's religious cosmos, to which conceiving him as an ancestor is already a step in so doing. This, of course, may lead to some significant changes and to new meanings in the worldview in which the unknown is being made sense of.<sup>27</sup> In fact it is apparent that in Hebrews' Christology, the conceiving of Jesus as the definitive mediator, by the very fact of *synkrisis*, moves beyond 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple perceptions of the key Jewish figures of the Old Testament in question.

There would have been a second objection, but we have already forestalled it through our discussions of the hermeneutical basis for typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament. This is the theological objection that is against the use of ancestors for re-conceiving Jesus in the same way as Jewish mediatorial figures in Hebrews. It is felt that to do so is to perceive them as preparatory to, and fulfilled in, Jesus in the same way that Jewish mediatorial figures are understood to be in Hebrews. Of course, such an objection cannot be divorced from the wider canvass of those who object to any non-Jewish religious heritage acting as a

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<sup>27</sup> Masson (2001,584-89) has succinctly brought out this aspect in his discussion of the workings or results of analogies in the making known, and in the creation of, meaning. More on this in the next

*praeparatio Christi* (or having prophetic elements which find their eschatological fulfilment in Christ) since that would be giving them a theological status akin to Judaism, and also Christianizing them, both of which are judged to be erroneous.<sup>28</sup>

The crux of this objection is simply the perception that the working of God in history is exclusive to the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel. We shall not rehearse here the argument we made (see section 3.2.2.) that God's working is not limited to the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel. This brings us to the second stage of our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa.

### 5.2.2. *Jesus an Antitype of Ancestors*

Our re-conceiving of Jesus as one greater than an ancestor, as the outcome of the transfer of Hebrews Christology to Africa, has been based, so far, on the communication principle of analogy. So far as it goes, this should be understood as the first stage or instance of a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews in Africa. This is because the communication principles of analogy may have other bases quite unrelated to the theology of typology. For example, the legitimacy of the use of analogy could be justified by the following argument.

2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism was not monolithic and simply to be understood *en bloc* as brought to fulfilment in Christ, but diffuse. The Old Testament for example, is, firstly, to be found in its Hebrew, Septuagint and Targumim versions, and, then,

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chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Fornberg's (1995) article based on Hebrews is a good introduction and reference to those who resist (and some who welcome) the view given to the Jewish religious heritage being extended to other religious traditions as well. As for the interpretation of Africa's religious heritage as a *praeparatio Christi*, P'Biteck (1990) is most representative. He vehemently attacked such interpretations by African Christian scholars claiming that they were based on their fictions of African religions and as failing to honour African religions in their own right. See also Kato (1975, Ch. 5-9).

secondly, understood through the exegetical traditions of the diverse Jewish groups. Even though the Old Testament is the religious heritage of the Jews and authoritative to them, its inherited versions and continued use are not homogeneous. In addition, no particular inheritance and exegetical tradition lends itself freely to be seen as fulfilled in Christ. This precipitates the need for it to be made to relate to Christ through an interpretative, highly selective and creative process, since it is not self-evidently a preparation for, and fulfilled in, Christ.

One such interpretative procedure brought to bear on the scriptures by the early Christians, and which is unique to them, is Christological interpretation of selected texts.<sup>29</sup> It could be argued that this is exactly what is going on in Hebrews, implying that the conceptualization of Jesus was not so much formulated as a fulfilment of the diverse Jewish religious heritages encapsulated in the Old Testament (i.e. a typological interpretation) but, rather, was itself used to interpret those traditions in relation to him. From such a perspective, Jesus' re-conception in Africa as an 'ancestor', on the basis of Hebrews' Christology, can be understood as an interpretation, even a selective and creative one, of the existing religious traditions on ancestors. So, it could be argued further, the practice of the early Christians interpreting their religious heritage through a Christological prism does not become

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<sup>29</sup> Following Fitzmyer's (1961) analysis, concerned though with explicit citations, we may understand the other interpretative procedures to be: 1. Literal, 'in which the Old Testament is actually quoted in the same sense in which it was intended by the original writers' (305); 2. Modernization, 'in which the Old Testament text, which originally had a reference to some event on the contemporary scene at the time it was written, nevertheless was vague enough to be applied to some new event' (Ibid.); 3. Accommodation, 'in which the Old Testament text was obviously wrested from its original context, modified or deliberately changed by the new writer in order to adapt it to a new situation or purpose' (Ibid.); and 4. Eschatological, 'in which the Old Testament quotation expressed promise or threat about something to be accomplished in the *eschaton* and which the Qumran (or Christian) writer cited as something still to be accomplished in the new *eschaton* of which he wrote' (305-06 in brackets mine). For more on biblical interpretation in early Christianity, see Dodd (1952), Miller (1971), who

exclusive to that period or generation but is a paradigm for succeeding Christian generations.

The point of this argument is that the basis for the use of analogy in the re-conception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa could be placed elsewhere and not on a theology of typology, which would bar it from being a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. Moreover, this would expose it to the second objection that we cited could be raised against such a re-conception of Jesus in Africa, that ancestors as part of Africa's religious heritage cannot be understood in the same way as Jewish mediators in Hebrews. To do so, it is felt, is to perceive Africa's religious heritage to be on the same footing with Jewish religious heritage and, consequently, to see it as *praeparatio Christi*, having prophetic elements which find their eschatological fulfilment in Christ. Such an objection would prevail unless, apart from analogy, we offer a theological basis for such a re-conception. This means that our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa must go further and show that the re-conception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa by means of analogy is on the basis of typology, which would then make it a typology-based theological interpretation proper of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. We do this in what follows.

We argued in the last chapter that Hebrews is a typological interpretation of some key Old Testament mediatorial figures as understood in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period: in the *synkrisis* between Jesus on the one hand, and angels, Moses, and the Aaronic high

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gives a good survey and discussion of studies available (up to the time of his article's publication) on the use of Old Testament in the New Testament, Ellis (1991), and Evans and Stegner (1994).

priests on the other, these Jewish mediatorial figures are types of Christ, and he is their antitype. As pointed out (section 3.1.2.), the theology of typology would have it that God is at work in history, ordering it according to his own goals and purposes, hence the invariable interconnectedness between type and antitype, past and present. In consequence, the Jewish mediatorial figures are perceived as the working of God with the ultimate purpose of shedding light on Jesus the definitive mediator who had appeared then. So, in their roles and functions among the Jewish people, they anticipate him and, *ipso facto*, prepare the people for the understanding and reception of Jesus as the definitive mediator, hence their typological interpretation in Hebrews. When looked at closely, the converse of this typology is that the use of Jewish mediatorial figures analogously to conceive of and speak of Jesus as the definitive mediator is directly tied to the relationship of type to antitype. This is because the type and antitype are in an analogous relationship, by virtue of the known, or familiar, in 'types' (principal angels, Moses and Aaronic priests) being used to communicate what needs to be known of the 'antitype' (Jesus).

The question that presses itself on us here, then, is this: can the same be said of ancestors in Africa? Can it be said that God is at work in Africa's religio-cultural heritage with the purpose of shedding light on Jesus the definitive mediator in the same way that he has in Jewish religious heritage? If such is the case, can ancestors be typologically interpreted in the way that Hebrews can be understood to interpret Jewish mediatorial figures? This is an important question. Important because if the answer is 'yes', then the use of ancestors analogously to re-conceive of Jesus as a mediator in Africa becomes an integral part of typology-based theological

interpretation of Hebrews, as the means by which the direct transference of Hebrews' Christology to Africa is carried out. In other words, the analogical re-conception of Jesus as ancestor just made would simultaneously be a typological interpretation of ancestors in the same way that Hebrews can be understood to interpret typologically key Jewish mediatorial figures - the stuff of typology-based interpretations of the New Testament. We need to consider briefly the specific reasons for this.

Analogy is a tool of communication, while typology is a theological issue, and invariably they both meet in an inseparable way in Hebrews' Christology: the type-antitype relationship is at the same time an analogous one. We, therefore, cannot be at liberty to use analogy in re-conceiving Hebrews' Christology, wherever that may be, if there is no accompanying typological relationship between what we are using analogously (in the given context) to re-conceive of Jesus, and Jesus himself. It would be possible for us to be at liberty were we to separate the analogous relationship from the typological one, but that would mean we were no longer conducting a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology since our basis for such a re-conception would have to lie elsewhere. So, because ours is a typology-based theological interpretation, we cannot use the category of ancestors analogously to re-conceive Hebrews' Christology in Africa simply on the grounds that they are the mediators in an African context as angels, Moses and Aaronic priests are in the initial context of Hebrews.

But we are at liberty to use them analogously, if ancestors can be shown to be in a similar kind of typological relationship with Jesus which Jewish mediatorial figures enjoy with him in Hebrews. In other words, there is a theological element required for the above analogical re-conception of Hebrews' Christology to pass muster as an outcome of a typology-based theological interpretation of the same. This way, the transfer of Hebrews' Christology from Hebrews' initial context to Africa is made on the basis of typology but through the use of analogy. With this in mind, we return to our question: Can God be said to have been at work in Africa's religio-cultural heritage in the same way that he is understood to have been in the Jewish religio-cultural heritage?

We have already argued for the view that God's working in history cannot be limited to the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel (section 3.2.2.). However, this argument, that God is at work in all histories directing them to their finality in Christ just as he was in the history of Israel, is only in principle. It does not resolve the problem of the question that arises subsequently, viz., how are we to tell whether this or that aspect of a religio-cultural heritage of a particular people is the working of God? It is one thing to subscribe to the view that God is at work in all histories directing them to Jesus, but another matter to detect what particular aspects of those histories are a work of God pointing to Jesus.

It is here that the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel, through, specifically, its typological interpretations in the New Testament, becomes the means by which we can identify specific aspects of a history to be the work of God pointing to Christ. This it does in

this way. Any aspect of a religio-cultural heritage that is similar to an aspect of the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel, as interpreted typologically in the New Testament, qualify to be discerned as the work of God (the same God as the one of Israel and for the same typological purpose). To paraphrase, what we perceive as the working of God in the specific aspects of the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel, interpreted typologically in the New Testament, we perceive to be his working as well in aspects that are similar to them in other histories, precisely on account of their similarities. The similarities are the evidence of the workings of the one and the same God, and for the same purposes. It is for this reason, to go back to our third chapter, that the criterion of similarity of contexts is central to typology-based theological interpretations of the New Testament. The similarities, as evidence of God's working in other histories in ways similar to Israel's allows for the transfer of the message from the initial context to the present one to take place. In consequence, the transfer of the message consists in the interpretation of an Old Testament person, event or institution as a type of Christ in the New Testament being applied to a person, an event or institution of the religious heritage in question in a contemporary context. This person, event or institution in the religious heritage of the present contemporary context becomes, then, a type of Christ in the same way as those of Israel's personage, event or institution are interpreted to be in the New Testament pericope.

The question, then, is whether ancestors could be said to represent the working of God in Africa in the same way that Jewish mediatorial figures in Hebrews are perceived to be in Jewish religious heritage, thus qualifying, in application of the reading of Hebrews in Africa, to be interpreted as a type of Christ. This we have



answered affirmatively by showing, in the first half of our chapter, that, as mediators, ancestors are somewhat similar to the Jewish mediatorial figures and therefore provide a similar context to the one in Hebrews. And so we have to conclude that ancestors in Africa are a 'type' of Christ similarly to the way Jewish mediatorial figures are interpreted as 'types' in Hebrews. Because God is at work in both histories, similarities are an indication of his work in both histories, and for the same purposes. It follows, then, that what is said and interpreted of one, can be said and interpreted of the other.

I submit, therefore, that ancestors are a type of Christ, and conversely, Jesus an antitype of ancestors. This is what constitutes, on the basis of typology, the transfer of Hebrews' Christology to Africa, where 'Jesus, the definitive mediator', as the Christology of Hebrews, is re-conceived in, and thus transferred to, Africa as 'Jesus, the greatest ancestor'.

Consequently, it needs to be noted, our analogous use of ancestors in the re-conception of Hebrews' Christology is here, in the second instance, typological (i.e., on the basis of typology) since its usage is in virtue of ancestors' type-antitype relationship with Jesus. Indeed, we have used ancestors analogously in the re-conception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa as the typological interpretation of this Christology in Africa in the same way that Hebrews uses analogously Jewish mediatorial figures in its conception of Jesus in its initial context. We have done so on the conviction that it is the same God at work in the two histories (as supported by the similar contexts) and for the same purposes. Consequently, in their roles and

functions among African peoples, ancestors, like Jewish mediatorial figures, anticipate Jesus and thereby prepare the people for the understanding and reception of Jesus, and their functions are understood here to be fulfilled in him.

Our two-stage theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology is almost complete now. We mentioned, only too briefly, that using ancestors to articulate analogously Hebrews' Christology in Africa was not all there was to such a Christology. In employing the ancestor figure to re-conceive Jesus as the definitive mediator in Africa, we pointed out that we needed to do so with some qualifications because of the fact that the similarities between Christ and ancestors are not there in all respects, a situation that necessitates comparisons and contrasts, and affirmations and negations, between the two. This is why we submitted that Jesus is not *an ancestor but 'the greatest ancestor'*; he is an ancestor on the basis of the similarities in mediation that he has with African ancestors, but greater than them on the basis of some of the contrasts he has with them. We now have to articulate this Christology in more detail and ponder it concretely in what remains of a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. This will make up the beginnings of our sixth chapter, which will also see us explore the significance and implications of the typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa for the faith, ethos, and worship of African Christians. Consequently, we shall be able to see how an African theology on the basis of a sustained and appropriate interpretation of a biblical text plays a significant part in the life of Christian communities in Africa, the very aim of African theology.

## CHAPTER 6

### JESUS, THE GREATEST ANCESTOR: QUALIFICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

We mentioned in our last chapter that employing the ancestor figure to re-conceive of Jesus as a definitive mediator in Africa was not all there was in a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. We said we needed to do so *mutatis mutandis* because the similarities between Christ and ancestors were not *in toto*. That this ought to be the case should be obvious on account of the nature of typology. This is because, as the discourse of our last chapter made clear, typology presupposes similarities and contrasts between the two elements it has brought together in a typological relationship. In effect then, any interpretation or conception of Jesus typologically calls for some qualifications. This necessitates, in what follows shortly, some qualifications of Jesus' reconception in Africa along the lines of the ancestor category. The qualifications will also be the means by which we will articulate this ancestor-Christology in slightly more detail. Thereafter, we shall consider the implications for African Christianity of this theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. But first, we need to revisit the way the understanding of Jesus as the definitive mediator is qualified in Hebrews. This will add clarity, as a parallel and prelude, to the qualifications we shall give of Jesus as a mediator along the lines of an ancestor in Africa.

## 6.1 QUALIFICATIONS OF JESUS AS MEDIATOR

### 6.1.1. *Jesus as the Definitive Mediator*

Beginning with angels, we will highlight from previous reflection (section 4.23) the similarities in the *synkrisis* and the typology embedded therein, between Jesus and angels, Jesus and Moses, and Jesus and the Aaronic high priests. Jesus is like an angel (a principal angel to be precise) because like them he mediates God's word and, like them, we may say, he too has (inherited) a name. With regard to Moses, Jesus is like Moses for he is close to God, and, also, like him he has a role with regard to God's house. As for the Aaronic high priest, Jesus is like an Aaronic high priest because he intercedes for God's people and offers sacrifice for their cleansing. Looked at carefully, one thing runs through all of these similarities, viz., in a variety of ways, Jesus acts like, or is, a mediator in a similar way to the Jewish mediatorial figures in question. As we showed in a previous chapter, these similarities are the ones that warrant the typological relationship. In other words, the similarities are the ones that enable the audience in view to understand Jesus as the definitive mediator. But this is not all in the articulation of Jesus in Hebrews' Christology. Were this to be the case, Jesus would be no different from principal angels, Moses and the Aaronic high priest, and only one amongst them as a mediator in Jewish religious heritage, an understanding far from the Christology of Hebrews as discussed in this thesis.

Highlighting, therefore, from previous reflection the differences brought out in the typological relationship, by means of which Jesus' identity and function is explicated in the Christology of Hebrews, helps us to see the ways in which Hebrews'

mediatorial Christology is qualified. Starting with principal angels (see section 4.2.3.), the first difference we may highlight is that, although Jesus mediates God's word like principal angels, unlike them who are ministering spirits and flames of fire, he is the Son of God but who, also, became man. Secondly, Jesus has inherited a name more excellent than theirs. With Moses, we see that although Jesus, like him, is close to God and has a role over God's house, he is different from him by virtue of being a Son over, rather than a servant in, God's house, and having more glory than him. As concerns the Aaronic high priests, although Jesus mediates forgiveness/cleansing, and intercedes for people, he: 1. serves in heaven; 2. is effective in mediating cleansing; 3. is of a new order; and 4. is eternal in nature being a priest in the likeness of Melchizedek.

In principle, we may understand these differences to be of two kinds: functional and ontological. Functional differences are the differences that are there by virtue of the higher quality or kind of mediatorial roles offered by Jesus, in comparison to those offered by Jewish mediatorial figures. For example Jesus' mediation as a high priest is in one sense of a higher quality than that of the Aaronic high priest because his is effectual while that of the Aaronic high priest is not. In another sense, it is of a higher kind because the sacrifice offered is himself and not a goat or a bull!

Ontological differences are those that set Jesus apart from the Jewish mediatorial figures by virtue of who he is, his being. For example, in the case of Moses and angels respectively, he is superior because he is a Son over, not a servant in, God's household, or a ministering spirit; while in the case of Aaronic high priests, he is of the likeness of Melchizedek and not from the Aaronic pedigree.

Consequently, we may say that Jesus is like principal angels, Moses and Aaronic high priests to the extent that, like them, he functions as a mediator, but that he is unlike principal angels, Moses and Aaronic high priests to the extent that his functions are of a higher quality and kind, and his being is different from theirs. In the final analysis, the result of these contrasts, as argued, is that Jesus is not only understood to be a mediator in the same manner as the Jewish mediatorial figures, but he is understood to be the mediator *par excellence*, the definitive mediator. Moreover, there is another important result of the qualification of Jesus as a mediator so conceived that we need to note, viz., we have a mediatorial Christology that uses Jewish traditional understanding of mediators but at the same time, moves beyond them. Because of the importance of this observation to our qualification of Jesus as ancestor in Africa, it is important that we consider it and its implications however briefly. A look at the qualification of Jesus as mediator along the lines of Aaronic high priests will help us do this.

### ***6.1.2. New Understandings of Jewish Mediatorial Notions***

We have just noted how the author of Hebrews, in qualifying Jesus as a mediator like an Aaronic high priest, brings out a number of differences between the two, the result of which makes Jesus superior to the Aaronic high priests and thus a definitive mediator. In consequence, the understanding acquired of Jesus as a definitive mediator is not only that he perfects or supersedes the mediation offered by Aaronic high priests, but that his is a unique kind of priesthood. This is manifest in the qualification of Jesus as different from the Aaronic high priest on the predicate of being a priest in the likeness of Melchizedek. Here the author of Hebrews, as it

were, introduces us to Jesus as a priest functioning in a certain sense as an Aaronic high priest but who does not belong to the Aaronic pedigree but rather the Melchizedek one. This merging of the two traditions - of Aaron and Melchizedek - in the conception of Christ as a definitive mediator is alien to, and a clear break from, the Jewish traditions on both of these priestly figures. Though there is an abundance of literature on eschatological and angelic traditions around the figure of Melchizedek (see Ch. 4 footnote 16), Hebrews confines itself to the two that appear in the Old Testament (Gen. 14.18-20 and Ps. 110.4). A look at the two Old Testament passages indicates that there is nothing in them to suggest a merging of the priesthood of Melchizedek with that of Aaron. On the contrary, Genesis 14.18-20 seems to contemplate a priesthood that is royal, superior to, and different from, the Aaronic one,<sup>1</sup> while Psalm 110. 4 has been regarded as a reference to a royal priesthood modelled on that of Melchizedek,<sup>2</sup> which is quite distinct from the Aaronic high priesthood. If it is granted that Hebrews is in fact drawing from interpretative traditions that understood Genesis 14.18-20 and Psalms 110.4 as references to a royal priesthood, then the merging of the two is a creation of a unique high priesthood, one that functions in the Aaronic mould but is in being of the likeness of Melchizedek, and is, therefore, endless (i.e., an eternal, royal high priesthood). So far as scholarship can tell, there is no Jewish tradition that envisages the Messiah as a Davidic personage receiving the priestly prerogatives of the tribe of Levi.<sup>3</sup> So, here we witness an instance where the articulation of Jesus as a mediator

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<sup>1</sup> There are many discussions of Hebrews' treatment of Psalm 110.4 that bring this out. See, for example, Fitzmyer (1963, 309-321), Ellingworth (1993, 354-64) and Rooke (2000, 84-86)

<sup>2</sup> See Delcor (1971, 120-122) and Hughes (1977, 258).

<sup>3</sup> The closest we come to this is with the Hasmoneans, if it is understood that they used Psalm 110 as a precedent to legitimize their double function of Priest and King (Longenecker 1978, 162-64). Nonetheless their fusion of priest and king would have failed to capture the fusion we find in Hebrews on three counts. Firstly, the Hasmoneans were not members of the tribe of Judah to lay any claim on

is based on the tradition of the Aaronic high priesthood but in a qualified way and, *ipso facto*, introduces a new conception of priesthood lacking in the tradition. Two implications obtain from this, one analogical in nature, the other typological.

From the point of view of analogy, this means that analogies can go beyond the function of shedding of light on the unknown through the use of the known, to that of the generating of new understandings. As alluded to, the potential of this is already resident in the fundamental differences in the two entities (the 'known' and the 'unknown') in the analogy. We may understand how this happens in the scheme developed by Gerhart and Russell (1984), known as the metaphoric process. According to their scheme (as analyzed by Masson [2001, 584-94]) which is concerned about how new understandings and meanings develop through the use of metaphor, comprehension of the world, and of ourselves, occurs in worlds of meanings, which are 'made up of networks of interrelated concepts' (585). Further:

The concepts within these fields do not stand directly for things in themselves, but for our notions of these things. These notions are defined by their interrelation with other notions. For example, to get some conception of "house," one must have other notions available (lumber, bricks, tin sheets, wall, window, roof etc.) These other notions are variable, as well as the relations between them.

On this basis, meaning is understood to arise,

...out of the interaction of concepts and relations, and is expressed in the topography of the field. Necessary concept changes, such as those which might arise from a new experience, alter relations; and changes in relations, such as occur when one attempts to understand an experience in a new way, relocate old concepts (Gerhart and Russell 1984, 119, in Masson 2001, 585).

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Psalm 110, and therefore, secondly, could not claim any association with Melchizedek. We may take it then that, in the words of Bruce (1990, 126), 'the writer to the Hebrews was the first to identify these two eschatological personages in such a way as to provide the fulfilment of the divine oracle in Ps. 110: 4.' Moreover, thirdly, they were a non-Aaronic and non-Zadokite high priesthood (Rooke 1998, 207).



What this means is that new associations between existing notions in a field of meaning can significantly alter their meaning, if not change the field of meaning altogether. I suggest that this is what is going on in some of the qualifications made on the identity of Jesus as a mediator in Hebrews generally, and in particular Jesus' identity as a mediator along the lines of the Aaronic priesthood. According to this scheme, we can take mediatorial figures in the various Jewish traditions, their functions and purposes therein, as a field of meaning. It would then follow that we take mediator figures like Aaronic high priests and angels as notions within that field. This being the case, the association of Melchizedek and the Aaronic high priesthood (two distinct notions in Jewish thought and belief) through their merging by the author of Hebrews, brings about changes in this field, significantly altering these notions by the formation of a new notion, viz., a unique priesthood which functions in the Aaronic mould but is in being of the likeness of Melchizedek, and thus perpetual (an eternal royal high priesthood).

From the point of view of typology, it means that the generation of new meanings and understanding is to be anticipated in typological relationships. This is so because typology, as we mentioned, is characterized by some aspect of the type contrasted with, or intensified in, an aspect of the antitype. Contrasts and intensifications can easily end up with new meanings. Going by the theology underpinning typology, we would understand that God is the architect of new meanings that come about in typological relationships, having ordered the past into the present in this way. That is, it is the type (God's work in history) that allows the new understanding of an aspect of it in the antitype; a situation which from the

standpoint of the theology of typology, is intended by the providence of God. So in this case, the Aaronic high priesthood prefigures that of Jesus, and Jesus' appearance results in a new understanding of a high priest different from the Aaronic ones. (They are not identical, but have similarities that have enabled the one to foreshadow the other.)

I have discussed the qualification of the identity of Jesus as a definitive mediator and its implications as a prelude and parallel to the objective of the first half of this chapter: the qualification of Jesus as an ancestor in Africa and what that may mean. We turn to this now.

### ***6.1.3. Jesus as the Greatest Ancestor***

In our last chapter, we made the point that ancestors straddle African cosmologies as mediators in somewhat similar ways to those in which angels, Moses, and Aaronic high priests do in Jewish cosmology of the 2nd Temple period generally, and of Hebrews in particular. On this basis, given our elaborated theology of typology, we argued, subsequently, that Jesus could be understood in Africa as an ancestor, analogous to the way that he is understood in Hebrews' cosmology as a mediator along the lines of angels, Moses and Aaronic high priests. It then follows that similarities exist between Jesus as conceived of in Hebrews and ancestors in Africa. In principle, these similarities are that both of them are mediators, who have once shared in earthly life but are now living in a different sphere (see below), from which they carry out their mediatorial functions. Jesus, in effect, is an ancestor to the extent that like them he is a mediator who has shared human life, has passed through death,

and now lives in God's presence where he conducts his mediatorial functions. However, as we noted, this is not all there is in the reconception of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. Were it to be the case, we would end up with a Christology that interprets Jesus as one in the family of ancestors in Africa, which would not pass for a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. Therefore, to complete our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa, we must attend to the differences and in the process qualify, and add some details to, the conceiving of Jesus as an ancestor in Africa by pointing to his greatness over them.

We start by highlighting the ontological differences. As we noted (section 5.1.1.), ancestors in Africa are perceived to have been human beings who have lived in a particular community and have died, thus becoming spirit-beings or, better put, disembodied human beings. It is apparent that in all cases, upon death and subject to the necessary funeral rites, the qualifications to be an ancestor are normally parenthood, a virtuous life and death in old age. Furthermore, we noted, ancestors do not live forever; they cease to exist as such (in the sense that they are no longer appealed to as ancestors) after about five generations of their existence, which is the time when they are no longer in the collective memory of the living in the community.<sup>4</sup> Compared to ancestors, Jesus, as presented in Hebrews, is different from ancestors on two main scores. The first is that whilst the identity of ancestors springs essentially from their relationship to a particular community, as those who

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<sup>4</sup> It is well known amongst Africans that one's family tree goes back up to more or less the fifth generation. As a child, when my family tree was recited to me, I was only given the names of my forefathers up to the fifth generation, and so was my father. Now, since ancestors exist so long as they

have once shared in its human life as one of its members, Jesus' identity is that of the Son of God but who has also shared, concretely, in the human life of a Jewish community. The second is that whereas ancestors cease to exist after about five generations of their existence on becoming ancestors, Jesus lives on eternally.<sup>5</sup>

What about functional differences? In what ways are the functions of mediators in Africa different from the functions of Jesus as a mediator in Hebrews, on account of which he becomes the greatest ancestor as alluded to already? The answer to this question is slightly complex. This is primarily because in Hebrews, the mediatorial figures of angels, Moses and the Aaronic high priests have relatively clearly defined functions, which makes it easy for one to bring Jesus' mediation alongside theirs and, then, draw out the ways his mediatorial functions are portrayed to be superior to theirs. But this is not the case when it comes to the functions of ancestors in Africa, because their functions are not as clearly defined (to enable one to highlight easily Jesus' mediation alongside theirs in order to draw out the superiority of his mediatorial functions). The modality, then, of identifying the functional differences between Jesus and ancestors in pointing out Jesus' greatness over them is not the same as the one in Hebrews between Jesus and Jewish mediatorial figures, regardless of the similarity of motif that exists between Jewish and African mediatorial figures. Consequently, in contrast to our preceding subsection, in order to point out the functional differences between Jesus and ancestors which encapsulate his greatness

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are still retained in the collective memory of the community, they 'disappear' after the fifth generation of their existence (certainly ancestors are not believed to live endlessly as such).

<sup>5</sup> We may want to go on here and cite, *inter alia*, that Jesus was never a parent, nor did he die old, as other differences. However, this we are not at liberty to do for at all times in this thesis we have limited what we consider and interpret of Jesus to what we can gather, directly or otherwise, from the discourse of Hebrews.

over them, it will be necessary to look at, by way of reminder, the general function of ancestors. When this general function of ancestors is understood, it is possible to perceive Jesus on account of who he is (in Hebrews) as best suited to perform them effectively. In other words, unlike our previous exercise in pointing out the differences between Jesus and Jewish mediatorial figures, we are here formulating the functional difference between Jesus and ancestors in relation to ancestors' general functions, as opposed to their numerously varied, specific, and localized functions. (The general and specific functions of ancestors, however, are inextricably related, because the specific functions are carried out in fulfilment of the general functions.) It is on this basis that we shall demonstrate the greatness of Jesus over ancestors.

We pointed out earlier (section 5.1.4.) that, often, there was vagueness in the precise relationship of God to spirits, divinities, ancestors, and human beings, principally because addressees of prayers are the ancestors themselves. They seem to be understood to act in their own power without recourse to God to whom they would, presumably, forward the prayers of the people. But we argued that vagueness of relationship where it exists did not mean none whatsoever. The very fact of a transcending and Ultimate Deity who is credited with creation, and by extension life, in African cosmologies means there is a relationship of ancestors and other beings to this Deity. Indeed, we pointed out two types of relationships that exist. The first was that, since ancestors in Africa are understood in virtually all mid-African ethnic groups as sustaining and preserving the community they belong to (that is, they serve as guarantors of life to their communities), they mediate life on behalf of the Ultimate Deity who is credited as the source of life. The second was that ancestors

mediate the presence of God who is believed to manifest himself through spirit beings and, not least, ancestors. Indeed, ancestors are understood to be his proxies. What is to be noted here is that at the heart of these mediatorial roles of ancestors is concern for the wellbeing of the community, a point which ties in with the first, but is also related to the second, of the two mediatorial roles just outlined. In Africa, as we argued, it seems that the sustenance or preservation of the community is what determines the *raison d'être* of ancestors: it is central to the ancestor cult, despite the differences that may be found in the details of how this is carried out. For this reason, Africans for a variety of purposes related to their general wellbeing, consult, appease, appeal to and invoke, their ancestors. This wellbeing of the community they belong to is what we need to understand as the general function of ancestors in Africa. This understood, we shall now focus on the ontology of Jesus and use it to show how he is better placed to carry out the general function of ancestors in a more effective manner, thus making him the greatest ancestor in Africa.

The greatness of Jesus over ancestors lies in Hebrews' presentation of him as the Son of God, which also crystallizes Jesus' basic contrast to ancestors: while they are the sons of the community who cease to exist after about five generations on becoming ancestors, he is the Son of God who lives eternally. In the first instance, Jesus' greatness over ancestors is seen in his being closer to God than ancestors because he is God's Son. The belief that ancestors possess the power to look after the wellbeing of the community stems largely from the belief that as spiritual beings they are closer to God, the source of life, than earthly humans. As such, they are in a

position to mediate this life to the community on behalf of God. King (1994)

comments on this appositely:

Ancestors are considered to have passed from this plane of existence to a new plane which is sometimes referred to as the supernatural, or the invisible. ... these planes are not seen as distinct, but overlapping. Whatever the metaphysical system involved, this change is seen as giving the ancestors a closer access to God or the Supreme Being (11).

But following Hebrews' emphasis, Jesus, as God's Son, is closer to the source of life than any other ancestor, since none of them is God's son. Indeed, as God's Son, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Heb. 1.3), a position of closeness that no ancestor in African belief can be said to have. Jesus, therefore, can be regarded as being much more effective in taking care of the wellbeing of the community than ancestors.

The greatness of Jesus over ancestors can be seen, in the second instance, in Jesus being a better mediator than ancestors in regard to interceding for the community before God, and in regard to guiding the community on behalf of God, because he is God's Son. Ancestors (in instances where their intercessory mediation and guidance is recognized) have been expected to intervene through presenting the needs of the community to God and offering God's guidance to the community. This is so because, perceived to be spiritual beings, they are believed to present the needs that pertain to the wellbeing of the community to God more effectively than earthly human beings. Also, having participated in the human life of the community they are believed to have intimate knowledge of what would contribute to the wellbeing of the community they intercede for. Together with this, they are seen to offer God's guidance in a way better than, say, other spirits or divinities, because the

communities they serve know them personally and thus feel closer to them. This role, to quote King again:

... can be seen either in terms of distance or language: the ancestors who now know the languages of the invisible are better adapted to such communication than men and women in this realm. The personal relationship of the ancestors to the living also helps what we might call the "downward" communication in which they engage as mediators: their position makes the ancestors more familiar with the petitioner as well as the Supreme Being. Communication is thus enhanced in both directions (11).

Jesus, then, can be regarded as the greatest ancestor because, being God's Son and having lived amongst human beings, he is more effective than ancestors in performing both functions of intercession and guidance in taking care of the wellbeing of the community. In him, we may say, we encounter the ideal ancestor, who shares both in the life of God and that of the community.

An objection, however, can be raised to this second instance of the greatness of Jesus over ancestors. If intercession and guidance is based on an intimate knowledge of the community an ancestor is said to serve, how can Jesus be an ancestor to a specific community in Africa if he has not shared in its life as one who has once lived in this community? The answer to this objection lies in the incarnation of Jesus. According to Hebrews, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7.14) and lived amongst Jews at a particular time and place (Heb. 1.6, 2.9-17, 5.7-9). Although this would seem to limit his mediatorial role to Jews from the standpoint of belief in ancestral function in Africa, its implication is that Jesus has lived amongst us as a human being and so understands and knows the needs of our communities in the same way as ancestors are said to. Moreover, it is apparent that Hebrews 2.5-18 allows for the viewing of Jesus' participation in human life generally, which would



lend itself to an argument for his participation in the life of African Christian communities.<sup>6</sup> Consequently Jesus is an ancestor to the extent that like them he functions like a mediator in catering for the wellbeing (we may think here of the redemption) of the community, due to his closeness to God and his participation in the life of the community. However, he is unlike ancestors to the extent that he is the Son of God and eternal, and, *ipso facto*, conducts their functions more effectively. Consequently, Jesus is not only an ancestor in Africa but rather, and more importantly, the greatest ancestor, i.e. the definitive mediator in Africa.

#### **6.1.4. *New Understandings of African Ancestral Notions***

The reconception of Jesus as an ancestor in Africa as qualified above means that we have a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa that uses African perceptions of mediators, but at the same time moves beyond them. This is on account of, firstly, ending up in our Christology with an 'ancestor' who is the Son of God seated at his right hand, and who lives forever. Secondly, Jesus is an ideal ancestor who is not limited to a specific community but who relates to all of humanity. Such an ideal ancestor is unheard of in ancestral traditions of Africa, for he is an ancestor who is both human and divine (here in the sense that he is related to the Ultimate deity, to God, as his Son). For this reason there are some who may want to say that we have pushed the notion of ancestor beyond recognition or even distorted it in re-conceiving Hebrews' Christology in

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<sup>6</sup> For others such as Bediako (1994), the implication is deeper than this and manifests the greatness of Jesus over ancestors. He argues that: 'Ancestors are considered worthy of honour for "having lived amongst us" and for having brought benefits to us; Jesus Christ has done infinitely more. They, originating from amongst us, had no choice to live amongst us. But he, reflecting the brightness of God's glory and the exact likeness of God's own being (Hebrews 1.3), took our flesh, shared our human nature and underwent death for us... His incarnation implies that he has achieved a more

Africa. However, analogies, as we mentioned earlier, can go beyond shedding light on the unknown through the use of the known, and can generate new understandings. This is precisely what is taking place here; a new understanding is generated that there is an ancestor who is both human and divine. To be even more precise, if we may go back to our previous discussion (section 6.1.2.), the merging of ancestors (a notion in the field of mediatorial figures in Africa) with Jesus (understood as an ancestor) who is both human and divine (an alien notion in the field of mediatorial figures in Africa) brings about a change in this field by significantly altering the notions in question, viz., the concept of the existence of the greatest ancestor, an ancestor *par excellence*, we may say.

Such a new understanding of an ancestor does not stand alone in our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews, but is anchored first in the dynamics of typology, and, secondly, in its theological underpinnings. Since typological relationships are characterised by contrasts or intensifications of the type in the antitype, they easily end up in the generation of new meanings. Here we have contrasted the being (i.e., ontology) of ancestors with that of Jesus, and on that basis we have seen how ancestors' functions are intensified, and performed more effectively in him, ultimately leading to a new understanding of a unique type of ancestor. This typological relationship, ending up in a new understanding, is legitimized theologically by the theology underpinning typology. God is the architect of the new understanding because he has so ordered the past (ancestors) to point to the present (Jesus) in this way. It is God's work in history that allows for the

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profound identification with us in our humanity than the mere ethnic solidarity of lineage ancestors can ever do' (117).

new understanding in the present. Ancestors prefigure Jesus; they are not identical, but, owing to God's work, have similarities that have enabled the one to foreshadow the other. In effect, Jesus as the greatest ancestor surpasses and consequently displaces the ancestral cult in Africa. So, for example, whereas there existed previously a number of ancestors in Africa, with the emergence of Jesus in African cosmology we now have only one ancestor as a mediator. Also, whereas we had a number of ancestors continually joining, or making exit from, the family of ancestors, the exits and replacements no longer affect who the community looks to for mediation, for the greatest ancestor does not need to be replaced since he lives forever. This conclusion appropriately leads us to the next section in which we grapple with the implications of Hebrews' Christology in Africa, so interpreted for the faith, life and worship of African Christian communities.

## **6.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA**

We have so far conducted an interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa by reconceiving it in an image appropriate to Africa. Such an interpretation, i.e., Jesus as the greatest ancestor, should be taken as part of an African theology that comes about *via* the interpretation of the Christology of a specific biblical text in an African context. This is in keeping with the aim of our thesis, which is to carry out an interpretation of Hebrews' Christology within an African context as part of African theology. Since an integral aim of African theology is the building and sustenance of authentic African Christian communities in faith, ethos and *cultus*, what remains now is to consider the implications of this interpretation of Hebrews Christology for Christianity in Africa. Also, from the standpoint of theological interpretations, this

consideration of the implications of Hebrews' Christology for African Christianity remains because theological interpretations of biblical texts seek to make them accessible to the Church in its contemporary setting for the sake of actualizing them in, or applying them to, the life of the Church as the word of God. What follows, then, is not only the use of an African theology (Jesus the greatest ancestor) arrived at through biblical interpretation for the building of Christianity in Africa, but simultaneously the completion proper of the theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa.

Before we proceed, we need to recall summarily a critical assumption we touched on earlier in this thesis, to help us grasp what underlies and informs this latter exercise. We mentioned that the Bible, however conceived, holds a central position in African theology insofar as it wishes to be a Christian theology and thereby be of service to the building and sustenance of authentic African Christian communities. The reason for this, we argued, was that the Bible is the locus of what is authentic to Christianity, and as such, any theology, or *praxis* that wishes to be considered Christian, must be validated by it. What this means is that our considerations of the implications of our theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa will be characterized by a bringing together of that interpretation on one hand and relevant aspects of Christianity in Africa on the other. The aim of such a dialogue will be to let the said interpretation (as part of the Bible) bear on African Christianity as an affirmation or instruction or correction to its faith, life or worship for the sake of fostering authentic embodiments of the Christian faith in Africa. In other words, if an African Christian were to hear the word of God from Hebrews saying to

him/her that Jesus is the greatest ancestor, what would be the possible implications to him/her of that word? This brings us full circle to the question of this thesis: what would be the significance of Hebrews' Christology for African Christian communities? We are now in a position to argue for an answer to this question.

### ***6.2.1. The Character of Christianity in Africa***

To understand the possible implications of our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa for African Christianity, we need to consider, for reasons that will become clear, the character of African Christianity. More precisely, we need to take into consideration an aspect of the context of African Christianity and, subsequently, how that aspect affects the issues that African Christianity grapples with and the forms it takes. As we noted in our fifth chapter on ancestors in Africa, the religious cosmology of Africa is made up of ancestors, spirits, divinities or deities and natural forces (whether animistic or theophanous). To Africans, this higher world is in constant interaction with the material world of humans, greatly influencing its fortunes. As Gifford (1998) notes, 'for most Africans, witchcraft, spirits and ancestors, spells and charms are primary and immediate and natural categories of interpretation' (382).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Some commentators on African Christianity, for example Harris (2000), call this a magical worldview.

One may be tempted to think, as suggested by Schoffeleers (1988)<sup>8</sup> that such a phenomenon is limited to rural Africa, or has been attenuated by the economic and social modernization forces of globalization. But clearly this is not the case. This phenomenon is still alive in Africa even in the very big cities as shown by Setiloane's (1978, 407-8) reflections, *contra* Schoffeleers (see footnote 8 below), on the persistence of traditional world-view in Africa. Moreover, there are suggestions (Chabal 1996, 32-34) that due to the current conditions of Africa, there is a re-traditionalization of Africa where 'individuals in Africa increasingly are, or are perceived to be, behaving according to norms, criteria, values and so on, more readily associated with what passes for "traditional" Africa than with the Africa which the colonial masters thought they had constructed' (33). Put differently, there seems to be a revival, relatively speaking, of the traditional African worldview, contrary to the expectations that economic and social modernization following on the worldview of the Enlightenment would eliminate it. This African worldview, which sees a constant interaction of the physical and spiritual world, with the latter perceived to be heavily influencing the former, is a significant part of the context of Christianity in Africa. Indeed, one could argue that it is the most significant context for African Christianity given its ubiquity; no avenue of life in Africa is spared the influence of this traditional worldview.

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<sup>8</sup> He suggests this in the context of his argument that Black theology, and not African theology, took hold in South Africa because it was an urban creation unlike African theology which derived from peasant culture. This argument implies that the mentioned African cosmology does not hold sway in the urban centres of Africa because it is limited to peasant cultures. Indeed, according to him, the migration of blacks in South Africa from their rural homes to black townships meant that, 'the rural world-view which had been once dominant ideological orientation for black South Africans, gradually lost its relevance and self-evidence' (101-2).

From various perspectives and concerns, surveys of Christianity in Africa show that it is punctuated by its efforts to deal with this context.<sup>9</sup> In the words of Gray (1990): 'These fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world and the place of human beings within it have profoundly influenced the development of African Christianity' (6). To put it perhaps in a clearer perspective, Christianity in Africa has had to (and still does) address the spiritual world that African Christians find themselves immersed in, and this rightly characterizes the forms that Christianity assumes. What orientation are African Christians to have towards these spiritual entities which they cannot ignore and are particularly prone to deal with in times of crisis? Are they to be taken as illusory or real? If real, are they to be identified with forces in conflict with the Christian God, or benevolent and not contrary to the Christian God? If they are in opposition to the Christian God, how are African Christians supposed to deal with them? If they are benevolent, how are they to be incorporated into the Christian faith? Nowhere else do we see this world being addressed head-on in African Christianity than in the so-called 'African Independent (or Instituted) Churches' (AICs),<sup>10</sup> and in particular, following Sundkler's (1970, 38-59) typology of AICs,<sup>11</sup> in the Zionist AICs. (Of course, the so-called Mission Churches<sup>12</sup> have striven to address this as well but in a relatively less pronounced way, primarily because of the missionary legacy to deny the African worldview in question here.)

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Welbourn (1965, 34-42), Mullings (1996, 75-81), Gray (1990), and Schoffeleers (2002).

<sup>10</sup> For definitive studies on AICs, see Barret (1968) and Sundkler (1970).

<sup>11</sup> See Turner (1968) and Kailing (1988, 51-56) for more on typologies for AICs.

<sup>12</sup> As opposed to AICs, these are churches 'that have developed from modern missionary work, together with the churches of white settlers and administrators... They range through most of the

Ositelu II and Pobee (1998, 40-43) isolate the following as the characteristics of the Zionist AICs: experience of the Spirit, a penchant for healing and exorcism, personal testimonies, protest movements and rediscovery of the earliest Christian communities' self-understanding of 'the way'. A few comments here are in order. Of the enumerated characteristics, healing and exorcism, and the experience of the Spirit seem the most fundamental in AICs, so much so that all Zionist AICs share these characteristics.<sup>13</sup> This is the reason why Sundkler (1970), comparing the Zionist AICs to the Catholic and Protestant Churches, wrote: 'While the Roman Church is an institute of Grace through its sacraments, and the Protestant Church in Africa appears as an institute of the word through teaching and preaching, the Independent Church, the Zionist type, is an institute of healing' (220). It is in this form of Christianity in Africa, where it is expressed chiefly as a healing faith, that the mentioned African worldview is squarely tackled, and in so doing Christianity in Africa has met directly the felt needs of Africans (Loewen 1976, 409-419). This is because to the African, sickness is related to this 'enchanted'<sup>14</sup> world. So, one is sick because an ancestor is displeased, or some hostile spirit has invaded one's life, or because an evil spell has been cast on one, etc. In various ways, AICs deal with this by providing power and protection by means of the Christian faith against these causes of sickness, and also by the ability to isolate (through prophets and other charismatic figures) the particular source of a sickness, and subsequently provide a Christian solution to the same. This is what gives AICs great appeal among Africans as particular

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familiar names in the ecclesiastical spectrum of the West, Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, ...' (Turner 1968, 10).

<sup>13</sup> And for that reason Zionist AICs are also called 'spirit' or 'prophet-healing' churches.

<sup>14</sup> I am using the term 'enchanted' in this thesis in a rather loose way to signify the spiritual world. This world is composed of entities that cannot be measured or identified in an empirical or scientific way but no less real.



manifestations of Christianity, because they deal with their felt needs. (It is precisely for this reason that various forms of Pentecostalism, which have been in Africa for a while,<sup>15</sup> are fast taking root as forms of African Christianity [Gifford 1993 and Cox 1996, 243-262]). In regard to the Spirit, some AICs have substituted the Holy Spirit, angels and other servant-spirits as the ones through whom God's activity is mediated, for the myriad spirits populating African cosmology. This replacement has been effected either by the demonization of the various spirits in the African cosmos as opposed to God and the church, thus seeking to banish them (Hastings 1976, 55 and Malone 1987, 25), or by showing that compared to the Christian spirits that have replaced them, they are not as powerful or are simply surpassed by them, and thus should be abandoned. Other AICs have accommodated some of the spirits in the African cosmos, and African Christians have continued to relate to them alongside their Christian faith (Philip 1975, 185).<sup>16</sup>

The essential point of the foregoing is to see that the forms of Christianity in Africa have been dictated by the context in Africa and in particular by the enchanted world of this context. As a result, one would say that African Christianity is in a significant way the product of the interface between the Christian faith and the 'enchanted' world of Africa. This 'enchanted' world, as it were, shapes African Christianity considerably, for in the efforts to apply the Christian faith to this world, African Christianity has been, and is still being, fashioned. For this reason, it is in

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<sup>15</sup> Maxwell's (2002) comprehensive study on Pentecostalism in Southern Africa underlines this point.

<sup>16</sup> Walls (1996) argues that this is especially the case with second or later generations of African Christianity. He writes: 'In later, "Christian", generations, those who resort to old powers usually intend no apostasy, no abandonment of the Christian framework... Rather, they have run out of resources to face the difficulties of the contemporary world, and are looking for additional resources beyond the Christian framework' (192).

this interface that we need to ponder the implications of Hebrews' Christology for African Christianity. As discussed already, it is an important exercise, since we cannot take it for granted that all forms of Christianity resulting from this interface are authentic in the sense of being faithful to Christian tradition generally and founded in the Bible in particular.<sup>17</sup> It is this recognition in the first instance that makes African theology critical in contributing to sustainable and authentic African Christian communities. The question for us now is this: in efforts towards the forming of authentic African Christian communities, what might Hebrews' Christology, as part of the Bible, say to African Christians who inhabit the ancestral world of Africa as a part of their 'enchanted' world? We shall answer this question by considering the implications of Hebrews' Christology, i.e., Jesus as the greatest ancestor, for ancestral practice in Africa. In so doing we shall be helping in efforts to fashion authentic forms of African Christianity and in sustaining the same.

### ***6.2.2. Absorption of Ancestors in African Christianity***

Broadly speaking, the importance of Jesus as the greatest ancestor for African Christianity lies in this very conception of Jesus. In reconceiving Jesus as the greatest ancestor, we have him cast in an image appropriate to Africa, thereby having a Christology that is placed squarely within African cosmology. This would mean that we have a Christology that is African, and, crucially, one that interacts with an important sphere of its cosmology, viz., its 'enchanted' world of ancestors. The result

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed it is observed (Turner 1968, 6-10) that the encounter of Christianity and African traditional religion has brought some syntheses that are clearly not Christian in form but rather described as 'Neopagan' and 'Hebraist'. The former being new forms of African traditional religion that have come about in various ways by amalgamating selected elements of traditional religion and Christianity, and the latter African religious movements that 'have made a radical break-through from paganism, by the rejection of idolatry and all magical practices in favour of faith in the one God they find in the Old Testament...' (8).

have a Christology that is recognizable to Africans, and one that they can easily relate to. In other words, when Jesus is identified as the greatest ancestor, he is understood and signified within, and in reference to, African cosmology. This is crucial because it helps integrate Christianity into African cosmology and in consequence, as we shall see below, helps African Christians have an adequate Christian orientation to their ancestral world. It is in this way that Hebrews' Christology interpreted in Africa as part of African theology helps towards the realization of an authentic African Christianity. We will proceed now to consider in detail the implications for Christian practice and worship in Africa of the understanding and significance of Jesus when he is identified as the greatest ancestor in African cosmology.

We mentioned that the major factor determining the shape of Christianity in Africa is its interaction with Africa's 'enchanted' worldview. This is also where the challenge to forming an authentic African Christianity lies. African Christian communities must relate their faith to their 'enchanted' worldview, else there will be no African Christianity but a Christianity that runs parallel to African cosmology. Indeed, we may say, the degree to which this relating is done, without compromising Christianity altogether, is the degree to which authentic African Christianity would be realized. Now, the comprehension of Jesus as the greatest ancestor can profoundly influence the way African Christians perceive, and subsequently relate to, their ancestors, particularly with respect to their general mediatorial functions. According to our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology, ancestors are part of the work of God in Africa with the ultimate purpose of shedding

light on Jesus, i.e., ancestors are a 'type' of Christ. This means then that ancestors in Africa are no longer alienated from Christianity in Africa, nor are they seen as inimical to the faith. Rather, they are a part of *Heilsgeschichte*, in the sense that the story of the salvation of God wrought in Christ is understood now to extend as well to Africa's enchanted worldview, particularly in the mediatorial roles of the ancestors.

The implication of the above understanding for Christianity in Africa is at least twofold. The first implication would be that African Christianity absorbs or integrates ancestors into African Christian consciousness. This is derived from the significance and value for Christianity that can now be placed on ancestors in Africa by African Christians. In the past, Mission Churches have viewed ancestor-practice in Africa as diabolical. As well noted, Africa's pre-Christian religious heritage was considered evil, a sentiment which modern missionary movements brought with them when they brought Christianity to Africa. Anna Scott (1969) for example, in *Day Dawn in Africa* called the deity of the Grebos 'the grand devil', and its priest 'demon doctor' (89), while Bishop Tucker viewed the religion of the Baganda to be 'the Lubare superstition' and her priests 'Doctors of Satanity' (Wilson 1955, 8). More recently (if my experience is anything to go by) Mission Churches, especially the Protestant ones, have been mostly indifferent to ancestor-practice, if they have not ignored it, resulting, in practice, in a nebulous relationship between Christianity and ancestors in these churches (Walls 1996, 194). As for the AICs, in the more Pentecostal ones especially, ancestors seem to be rejected as evil or inconsistent with the worship of the true God (Hastings 1976, 55).

To be noted is that in both these cases, there is no value placed on ancestors as a part of African Christian consciousness, leading, in my opinion, to an unsatisfactory relationship between the Christian faith in Africa and ancestors. It is for this reason, I surmise, that despite this demonization of, or indifference to, ancestors, the ancestral cult in Africa, even amongst African Christians, still thrives. I submit, therefore, that placing significance on ancestors as representing part of God's work in African history aimed at leading Africans to recognize Jesus' ultimate and superior mediation, leads us out of this problem of the inability to absorb ancestral practice into African Christianity. This is because, if ancestors are looked upon as types of Christ, they will be valued as such and in consequence absorbed into African Christian consciousness while allowing for an authentic Christian belief in Jesus' unique and ultimate significance as the definitive mediator between God and human beings.

### ***6.2.3. Displacement of Ancestors by African Christianity***

Out of the first implication comes the second, viz., African Christian worship would displace ancestors, in their general mediatorial functions, with Jesus who is now seen as the one they have been pointing towards. The very fact that significance is placed upon the ancestor figure as a type of Christ leads to his displacement. If the type as the work of God functions to point forward to the antitype (which it is providentially meant to do), then when the antitype emerges, the type gives way to it. This is because, from the point of view of the theology of typology, a type is not an end in itself; its function and significance are inextricably related to the antitype, so that in the presence of the antitype, the type (together with the practices revolving

around it) ceases to function. The only function it would still hold is in its use to illuminate the antitype but not to function in real terms as it did prior to the arrival of the antitype. Here it is worthwhile to note that, before the arrival of an antitype, the type functions in a real way in the religious lives of the people without their knowledge of its replacement in the future because it is a part of a wider picture of God's work in history. The understanding of a personage, or institution, or event, to be a type comes only after the fact of the antitype is made known and not before. So, ancestors have played and continue to play an important role in the lives of Africans as mediatorial figures, but with Jesus' arrival in African cosmology, they cease to play their mediatorial roles, for they are now to be understood as types of Christ, who performs their functions in a more effective manner. Indeed, this is what takes place in Hebrews with Jewish mediatorial figures. Their mediatorial functions were real in the lives of the people involved with them, but after the advent of Jesus, Hebrews' argument shows that their proper function remained one only of pointing to Jesus' superior mediation, which had surpassed theirs and thus displaced them.

We need to make some noteworthy observations on the implications for African Christianity of absorbing ancestors, on the basis of Hebrews' Christology, into African Christian consciousness, and thereby displacing them with Jesus. The first is that we would have a form of African Christianity that displaces ancestors whilst at the same time not rejecting them as evil and inimical to the purposes of God, *contra* older Mission Churches practice and Pentecostal AICs, as mentioned. This is an important observation because displacement of ancestors in African Christianity has

been at the expense of disparaging the practice, which, I have contended, leads to an unsatisfactory relationship between Christian faith and the African belief.

This negative view of ancestors is not necessarily in terms of their being evil or inimical to the purposes of God, as has tended to happen in the aforementioned churches, but is also in terms of calling into question their actual reality and function. This latter displacement of ancestors is on the basis of the argument that they are illusory, a product of society's mythmaking. Bediako (1994, 96-104, 116-19) is an example of this view of ancestors. He has sought to articulate an African theology that displaces ancestors with Jesus on this very argument. He does so by denouncing ancestors in Africa as a presumption, having no demonstrable, actual function, and, he contends, that it is in fact Jesus Christ who is the only true and actual ancestor. This is because he perceives the cult of ancestor as the 'product of myth-making imagination of the community' (116). He asserts that the power of ancestors stems from, and is sustained by, the corporate belief of the community, and not from their intrinsic, real demonstrable power to act. Bediako feels that this is not the case with Jesus, who, coming into the world from the transcendent realm as the Son of God, took on human nature, underwent death and conquered it by his resurrection, showing and demonstrating his intrinsic powers. His argument, therefore, for the displacement of ancestors in Africa with Jesus casts aspersions on their concrete reality, thus pejorating them. And this, we are saying, leads to an unsatisfactory relationship between the Christian faith and African belief in ancestors. A better way, as we have argued on the basis of Hebrews' Christology, is to displace ancestors

with Christ in African Christianity while, at the same time, giving them subordinate value in African Christianity as a part of an African Christian consciousness.

The other observation is that the displacement of ancestors in Africa by Jesus on the basis of Hebrews' Christology in African Christianity is strictly to do with their mediatorial functions. That is, with the arrival of Jesus, their antitype, ancestors should not continue to perform their mediatorial functions amongst African Christians. In other words, our argument has not extended to include, or consider the possibility of, the displacement of ancestors by Jesus in their social role of communion with the living members of the community, nor have we considered how the displacement of ancestors by Jesus in their mediatorial function may affect African Christians' relations to ancestors in these other roles. Although this is important and merits consideration, it would be beyond the ambit of the interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa to prescribe the way African Christianity could interact with ancestors in Africa in their social functions. Of course there are forms of African Christianity, especially from Roman Catholic Churches and theologians, that are doing this already by incorporating them, on the basis of their social roles, into African Christianity as part of the communion of saints, the body of Christ in its widest sense. At issue in such incorporations is not so much the mediatorial role of ancestors as the view that they are members of the community and thus in a given relationship with it.<sup>18</sup> But for reasons just given, we shall not look at them here in the present study.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Fasholé-Luke (1974, 212-220), Nyamiti (1993, 29-30), and Triebel (2002). It is worthy to note here that I think Hebrews 11.1-12.1 is relevant to this discussion given its view that those who have died are somewhat still a part of the community of faith from whom that community ought to draw inspiration for their lives here on earth.



#### 6.2.4. *Abandonment of the Ancestral Cult by African Christianity*

As we showed in chapter three, the Christology of Hebrews is hammered out in the *synkrisis* between Jesus and Jewish mediatorial figures. In between these *synkrisis* lie the author's *paraenesis*, which, essentially, contains dire warnings from drifting away from God through a combination of disobedience and a crisis of faith. It is possible, as we pointed out earlier that a number Hebrews scholars argue, that the Christology of Hebrews and its *paraenesis* are not concretely or directly related. In other words, the labour of the author in explicating a Christology with reference to Jewish religious heritage may not be dictated by the real situation of the audience, which would be that of a Jewish audience faced with the threat of relapse into Judaism, but merely for a paraenetic purpose. However, in my opinion and that of a number of Hebrews scholars, the nature of the Christology of Hebrews means that it is in all probability shaped by a real issue of a relapse to Judaism. If this indeed is the case, then, we could understand Hebrews' Christology as a prophetic word to a Jewish Christian community, a prophetic word that is critical and apologetic of the community's religious heritage (to which they are tempted to fall back). It is an apologetic word in the sense that it affirms the religious heritage of this Jewish community through a positive definition of its relationship to Christ, and it is a critical word in the sense that it urges this Jewish Christian community, at the same time, to abandon (in the sense of redefining) its loyalty to its religious heritage in the greater light of the reality of Jesus (to whom its heritage has been pointing). So strong is the latter motif in Hebrews that a falling back to its previous practice is considered an apostasy that will not go unpunished. The significance of Jesus is such that he alone is to be looked to for mediation, without any recourse to mediatorial

figures in the audience's religious heritage. We could say, therefore, that the Christology of Hebrews is not only interested in explicating the identity and significance of Jesus within a Jewish religious context for the sake of pre-empting a falling away from Christianity, but more specifically, it is also engaged in an effort to sustain Christian belief and foster appropriate Christian *praxis* in the face of current Jewish religious beliefs and practices that threaten to compromise it. An implication of Hebrews' Christology in Africa would be to have African Christianity engage in the same effort, but with regard to ancestral belief and practice. To this we now turn.

We noted earlier that African peoples have traditionally had a thriving and elaborate ancestor cult. Shrines are built for them; there are special places designated for them; sacrifices, libations and offerings are offered to them; and they are consulted, appealed to and invoked in a variety of ways and in various circumstances. As we argued at length in Chapter 5, one of the prime reasons for the consultation of ancestors by Africans is their mediation. Because Hebrews' Christology in Africa leads to the absorption of ancestors into an African Christian consciousness and subsequently to their displacement in African Christian *praxis*, as we have shown, the need for the consultation of ancestors ceases on the part of the African Christian. But more than that, not only does the consultation of ancestors cease, it becomes a compromise of the Christian faith where it persists.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kabasale's (1991) argument, for example, that the mediation of Jesus does not abolish that of ancestors goes against this understanding. He writes: 'Just as Christ, the one priest, does not abolish human mediations but fulfils them in himself, so does he consummate in himself the mediation exercised by our ancestors, a mediation which he does not abolish but which, in him, is revealed to be henceforth a subordinate mediation' (126). We need to note here that such a position cannot be taken on the basis of Hebrews' Christology for it would imply that Christ's mediation is lacking and needs to be supplemented by that of ancestors, an interpretation that Hebrews' Christology cannot be reconciled with. Furthermore, it would go against the understanding, on which Hebrews' Christology is based, that a type gives way to the antitype and thus cannot continue to operate in its presence.

This is so because Jesus now as the greatest ancestor not only displaces them as such but is to be looked to solely as the greatest ancestor having surpassed their mediation and rendered them redundant. Consequently they are in the final analysis to be abandoned specifically as objects of religious cultic practice. This is an important implication for African Christianity because of the perpetual threat to African Christians of compromising their Christian faith on account of the ancestral cult as an alternative to Jesus' mediation. It has been noted that this is particularly the case in times of crisis wherein African Christians find themselves falling back to ancestral cult (Sawyers 1969, 80). Walls (1996), as cited earlier in the preceding section, explains this tendency thus: 'In later "Christian" generations, those who resort to old powers usually intend no apostasy, no abandonment of the Christian framework... Rather, they have run out of resources to face the difficulties of the contemporary world, and are looking for additional resources beyond the Christian framework' (192). From such a perspective, Hebrews' Christology then becomes, too, a prophetic word to African Christianity. So long as the Christian faith and the ancestral cult interact and in consequence contest their ground among African Christians, Hebrews' Christology would be needed to engage critically with ancestor-reverence in this way, in efforts to foster authentic embodiments of the Christian faith in its context.

From the foregoing implications of Hebrews' Christology for African Christianity, we see something of an African Christianity shaped by the interface between Jesus and the world of ancestors in Africa. More specifically, the relationship between Christianity and ancestors is defined by the absorption of ancestors into African

Christian consciousness, their displacement as mediators in African cosmology by Jesus in African Christianity, and, finally, their abandonment as mediators by African Christianity. It is important to note that, though distinct from each other, the absorption of ancestors into African Christian consciousness, their displacement by Jesus, and their abandonment as mediators as outlined here are inextricably related whereby displacement and subsequent abandonment of ancestors is based on their absorption. It is important to explain the significance of this point.

As pointed out already, absorption of ancestors in African Christian consciousness is a unique contribution of Hebrews' Christology to African Christianity. Indeed in all the literature of African Christianity and theology I have read in the course of this thesis, I have not come across any argument of such a relationship. No previous argument of the displacement of ancestors with Jesus in their mediatorial functions or their abandonment as mediators in African Christianity is based on their absorption in African Christian consciousness, a situation that makes the relationship of African Christianity with ancestors an unsatisfactory one in practice. It is unsatisfactory because we end up having a very important aspect of African cosmology, which Africans feel drawn to, considered by Christianity either as evil, illusory, or simply a neutral phenomenon that serves no purpose in African Christianity. The absorption of ancestors in African Christian consciousness that I advocate sees them as good and real, but now having served their purpose, giving way to Jesus. So, the unique contribution of Hebrews' Christology in Africa to the relationship of Christianity and ancestors is that such a relationship is not just defined by absorption, displacement and abandonment, but has absorption into African

Christian consciousness as its starting point, leading on to displacement and finally to abandonment of ancestors as mediators. This way, while ancestors in Africa are no longer to be looked to for mediation by African Christians, they are appreciated (and thus still useful) in African Christianity for their value of pointing to Jesus as his type.

Such a contribution is welcome, since the relationship of Christianity and ancestors in Africa, relative to other aspects of its enchanted world, as Walls (1996, 194-196) points out, is nascent, needing African theology to put in more effort in articulating and building authentic forms of African Christianity in this context. The interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa as a part of African theology helps in the said need. Also, in theological interpretative terms, such a contribution is a product of what it means for an African Christian to hear the word of God from Hebrews, saying to him or her that Jesus is the greatest ancestor. This is the significance of Hebrews' Christology to African Christian communities.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

If we may recapitulate what has preceded, this thesis has attempted to answer the question: What would be the meaning or significance of Hebrews' Christology for southern and mid-African Christian communities? The result has been the conception of Jesus as the greatest ancestor, arrived at through a typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. Typology-based theological interpretations, we observed, are characterized by the direct transfer of a New Testament typological text's meaning in its initial context onto a contemporary one. Such a transfer of the initial message is on the basis that when we have parallels between a New Testament typological text's contexts where significant portions of the text's initial context correspond to elements in its contemporary context, then - on the theological conviction that correspondences between the two are due to God's working in the histories of both contexts - we can have a direct transfer of the text's message from its initial audience onto its contemporary audience. Moreover, this is also possible because similarities between the initial and contemporary contexts of a New Testament's typological text bridge its cultural and historical distance, with the result that what can be determined to have been heard by the text's initial audience is, with few necessary qualifications, the same message being heard by the text's contemporary audience.

In consequence, we compared Hebrews' initial audience with its contemporary one in Africa and showed significant correspondences between the two. Specifically, we showed a correspondence between Jewish mediatorial figures, in the initial context of Hebrews, and ancestors, in a contemporary context of Hebrews, Africa. We argued that the initial Christology of Hebrews was that of Jesus as the definitive mediator: Jewish mediators known at the time are understood by Hebrews to be types of Christ whose function, therefore, is to point to him. Now in his wake, they are surpassed by him in their functions and being as mediators, and must give way to his mediation. This being the case, our direct transfer of Hebrews' initial Christology to Africa resulted in our re-conceiving Jesus as the greatest ancestor. Ancestors, like their counterparts, the Jewish mediatorial figures, are understood to be types of Christ, thus pointing to him. Now that he has been revealed, they give way to him and are surpassed in their functions and being as mediators by his mediation.

This concern to isolate the significance of Hebrews' Christology for African Christian communities, we pointed out, was tied to the concerns of African theology, viz., the building and sustenance of African Christian communities in their faith, life, and *cultus*. The result of this has been twofold. The first is that we have conducted a theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa that is indeed not only a contribution to African theology, but, more importantly, an African theology which is derived from the Bible. In other words, the conceptualization of Jesus as the greatest ancestor is both a theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in an African context and an African theology derived in a more primary way from the Bible. Since the Bible is central to the validation of any theology wishing to be

Christian, such an African theology rooted in the Bible is essentially Christian and, therefore, well placed for the task of African theology mentioned above.

The second result is that because the theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa is part of an African theology, we had to complete it with a consideration of its implications for African Christian communities. This exercise was for the purpose of helping to build and sustain African Christian communities, a crucial role of African theology. The result of this has been a defining, on the basis of our theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa, of the relationship between African Christianity and ancestors in Africa. This relationship is encapsulated in three interrelated components: 1. The absorption of ancestors into African Christian consciousness where ancestors are not divorced from Christianity but absorbed into it through being understood as having been used by God as types of Christ to point to him; as such they are part of God's *Heilsgeschichte*. 2. The displacement of ancestors as mediators by Jesus in African Christianity. Here, ancestors as types of Christ can no longer function as mediators in the face of Christ, and, having pointed forward to him, they must now give way to him. 3. The abandonment of ancestors as mediators by African Christianity. This is the logical conclusion of this definition. Since ancestors are types of Christ, and consequently point to him and are displaced by him, they can no longer be actively appealed to as mediators. They must be abandoned as such, else we have a compromise of Hebrews' Christology in Africa and, with it, of Christianity.



Since our thesis is a theological interpretation of Hebrews and an instance of an African theology, we conclude this thesis with a brief reflection on the relationship between our typology-based theological interpretations of the Bible and theological interpretations in general, and on the relationship of African theology and other theologies. The reflection is structured in terms of two questions: 1. What relationship might there be between *ad hoc* theological interpretations and the more general theological interpretations? 2. What contributions could African theology derived in the manner of this thesis give to other theologies in the world? The importance of these questions will be clear in the course of our discourse.

## **7.1 AD HOC THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS AND GENERAL THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

Our proposed typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa was subsequent to our discussion (in Ch. 2) on models of theological interpretations proposed by leading New Testament scholars of the 20th Century. This discussion showed that none of the proposed models of theological interpretations (we shall call them general approaches to interpretation) was adequate to the task of theologically interpreting Hebrews' Christology in Africa. More specifically, we pointed out the following. Fowl's emphasis on Church as definitive of theological interpretation, so that any reading of the Bible is a theological interpretation if it promotes faithful lives before God in the light of Christ, lacks consideration of the place and importance of the historical dimension of the Bible in its theological interpretations. Watson's insistence, depending on how we understand him, on concerns with theological issues raised by the final (canonical) text (in-

Church-and-in-world) as definitive of theological interpretation has a variety of insights, but which altogether make it quite nebulous for use in specific theological interpretations of the Bible. Also, his view sits lightly on the historical component of the Bible as in part definitive of theological interpretations. Morgan's proposal that theories of religion (or theological belief) could make possible theological interpretations conducted in conjunction with critical scholarship, as illustrated by Strauss, Baur and Bultmann, whilst honouring the historical imperative of the Bible, seems too open-ended to be used in specific theological interpretation of the Bible. And lastly, Barth's theological interpretation which is defined by certain key theological convictions brings about a certain understanding of the subject matter of the Bible (which is key in theological interpretation), but it seems ambivalent about the historical dimension of the Bible and also seems, for lack of hermeneutical instructions, hard to follow in practice unless one is Barth himself.

However, we noted that each of the proposed approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible has some vital element(s) integral to the enterprise of theological interpretations of the Bible. On account of this, we argued that there were three possible ways to proceed in using the general approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible in interpreting Hebrews' Christology in Africa. One would be to attempt a synthesis of the definitive elements in these approaches, which would result in a theological hermeneutic that is monolithic. This, we argued, would be permissible if 1. the writings of the Bible were a homogenous whole, i.e., composed of only one genre, a single subject matter, and originally written under similar historical and cultural circumstances, and 2. if the theological interpretations

themselves were to be carried out in the same cultural and historical situations.

Because of the heterogeneity of the biblical writings in genre, subject matter and cultural and historical circumstances and the contexts in which they are received, the case for theological interpretations that are sensitive to the same is obvious, making this approach undesirable.

The second possible procedure would be to choose from the general approaches to theological interpretations the one most suited for theologically interpreting Hebrews in Africa. But this, we said, is hardly an option for two reasons. Firstly, none of the approaches is particularly concerned to articulate a theological interpretation of the Bible that is sensitive to different genres or any particular genre of the Bible; some in fact see this (in ignoring or rejecting historical criticism) as inconsequential! Then, secondly, none is sensitive enough to the currently different cultural and historical contexts of the Bible (with the possible exception of Fowl who is concerned with a North American reception); they all assume a homogenous cultural and historical context. The third possible way to proceed would be to articulate an *ad hoc* approach to theological interpretation that would be specific to Hebrews and specific to its given context in Africa. This is the one we opted for, and ended up articulating a typology-based theological interpretation as an *ad hoc* theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa. Given this, the question now is whether there is a relationship between this theological interpretation of the Bible and the general approaches to the Bible discussed; i.e., is there a relationship between *ad hoc* and general theological interpretations of the Bible?

Essentially, the relationship lies in the existence in *ad hoc* theological interpretations of some of the vital elements in these general approaches to theological interpretations. In dialogue with the general approaches to theological interpretations, we isolated in our earlier discussion vital elements in theological interpretations. They were: 1. the biblical text is approached as being embedded in historical reality and related to the same, 2. the biblical text in its final canonical form is the subject of interpretation, 3. theological convictions have a place in informing interpretations of the Bible; and 4. the Church provides the contemporary context for the results, the goals, of interpretation.

These elements are present in our typology-based theological interpretation, either in the foreground or in the background. In the foreground of our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews, the vital element is the third of those enumerated above, i.e., a theological conviction, which is specific and highly defined. That is, our *ad hoc* theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa is informed by the theological conviction that God is involved in all human histories, with the purpose of leading them to Jesus, the goal of history. And in the background of our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews we have the first, second and fourth of the vital elements mentioned above. For example, the biblical text in its canonical form is the one in which we have interpreted Hebrews. Indeed, apart from such a final canonical text, the notion of *Heilsgeschichte* would not stand.<sup>1</sup> Another example is that our interpretation of Hebrews is for African

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of *Heilsgeschichte* cannot be sustained on the basis of a New Testament text alone. The Old Testament is needed for *Heilsgeschichte* to stand because it is the writings therein that precipitate, and illuminate, the belief of God's working in the history of Israel, pointing to Christ.

Christian communities who provide the context for the results and goal of our interpretation.

What this means is that our *ad hoc* theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology, although not appropriating simply any of the general approaches in theological interpretations discussed, is not divorced from some of their definitive elements, but rather, draws, where appropriate, from them. Indeed, we use a vital element in one of the general theological interpretation models in our typology-based theological interpretation but in a more narrowly defined way and in a highly specified manner. At the same time, we have other vital elements we presuppose in (i.e., in the background of) our typology-based interpretation. What this shows, I suggest, is that even though generalized forms of theological interpretation may not be of adequate service for the reading of specific texts of the Bible theologically in a given context, some of their definitive elements are absolutely vital to any *ad hoc* theological interpretation, either to act as an essential background to such interpretations, or to be in the foreground where they are used in a highly specific way. This, I contend, is precisely the relationship that exists between *ad hoc* theological interpretations of the Bible (in this case a typology-based theological interpretation of the Bible) and the more general approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible. Some important comments on this implication are in order.

*Ad hoc* theological interpretations are just that, they are *ad hoc*. By this I mean that they are by their very nature limited to the ends for which they are fashioned. In other words, they are specifically fashioned to show how a particular text can be theologically interpreted in a particular context. In consequence, the following may not be possible. First, it may not be possible to use the *ad hoc* theological interpretation fashioned to read a specific biblical text in a specific context to read a different kind of biblical text in a different context. Secondly, even if the same kind of biblical text is the one to be read, it may not be possible to read it with the *ad hoc* theological interpretation in question in a different context. Thirdly, even if we suppose that the context remains the same, it may not be possible to use the *ad hoc* theological interpretation in question in reading a different text in that same context.

So for example, our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews is fashioned for the reading of *Hebrews' Christology* in certain parts of *Africa* where ancestral traditions exist. It is difficult to imagine this theological interpretation simply applied to read other different texts of the Bible in the same African context, or the same text for different contexts in Africa or elsewhere. And whereas it is possible to imagine the use of this *ad hoc* theological interpretation in reading other New Testament typological texts, like I Cor. 10. 1-11, their content, being different from Hebrews, would require a different line of theological interpretation. This is not the case with general theological interpretations of the Bible. As suggested by our earlier discussion, they are, in principle, concerned generally with the articulation of a theory, or model, of theological interpretations with which we can interpret the Bible. This is to say, they are not specific to any text or genre of the Bible, nor are

they specific to any particular context in which the Bible is read. Consequently, when it comes to the reading of specific biblical texts in a specified context, they seem inadequate. This was the case in our desire to interpret theologically Hebrews' Christology in Africa where the general approaches to theological interpretations, on their own, did not suffice. But the various general approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible are important in giving vital elements integral to enabling specific approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible.

With this understanding, the relationship between *ad hoc* and general theological interpretations not only becomes clear, but their necessity is thrown into sharp relief. General approaches to theological interpretations are needed for the purposes of bringing out elements vital for the theological interpretation of the Bible, while *ad hoc* theological interpretations are needed in taking up relevant vital elements of general interpretation and using them in highly specific ways for the theological interpretations of particular texts of the Bible in specified contexts. In addition, *ad hoc* theological interpretations are conducted against the background of some relevant vital elements articulated in general approaches to theological interpretations, as our theological interpretation of Hebrews' Christology in Africa has demonstrated. One could almost think of this relationship in terms of pottery. General approaches to theological interpretations provide the clay, while *ad hoc* mould the clay accordingly since general approaches cannot fashion theological interpretations specific to certain texts and contexts but *ad hoc* theological interpretations do. Conversely, *ad hoc* theological interpretations cannot provide the vital elements that they draw from, and presuppose, in theological interpretations, but

general approaches to theological interpretations do. Thus the dual need for *ad hoc* and general theological interpretations, and for them to co-exist and complement each other in order to achieve the goal of theological interpretations, viz., actualizing the word of God as such for the church in specific settings.

In view of the preceding reflection, what our thesis illustrates in the academic enterprise of theological interpretations of the Bible is that there is a huge place, and need, for *ad hoc* theological interpretations. This is because, in the course of my research on discourse on theological interpretations, I found the notion of *ad hoc* theological interpretations lacking. There may be the odd reading of a text where one can detect the operation of an implicit *ad hoc* theological interpretation of the Bible,<sup>2</sup> but none is consciously sought for or articulated. Scholarship, then, on theological interpretations of the Bible may need to be sensitive to the different genres of the Bible and the variety of contexts in which the Bible is read, and this means the development, in biblical scholarship, of *ad hoc* theological interpretations in dialogue with general approaches to theological interpretations of the Bible.

## **6.2 AFRICAN THEOLOGY AND GLOBAL THEOLOGY: POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS**

African theology is tied to Christianity in Africa, yet Christianity is not just in Africa but in other parts of the world as well. Indeed, Christianity in Africa is inextricably linked with Christianity outside Africa in three crucial ways: historically, socio-politically and theologically. Historically, Christianity in Africa

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Yeo's (1994) interpretation of I Cor. 8 in a Chinese context.



emerged largely as a result of missionary efforts from Europe and is as such, even if not completely, a product of Christianity in Europe and with historic ties to the same. (In this regard, it shares with Christianity in the rest of the so-called 'Third World countries' in other continents.) Consequently, there are contemporary socio-political ties between Christianity in Africa and other parts of the world, that can be seen in all manner of exchanges between the two and in their coming together with common goals in mind. Lastly, because theologically the church has always been held as 'catholic', embracing Christians from all corners of the world because they share a common faith, it behoves Christians to relate to, and recognize, others who are not from within their locality. If we may put this more clearly, it means that African theology, to the degree that it is recognized that the African Christianity it is meant to serve is part of a wider Christianity, cannot estrange itself from other theologies that emanate from Christianity outside Africa. There are German theologies, British theologies, American theologies etc., that is Christian theologies written by inhabitants of these countries. These inhabitants, male and female, are themselves influenced by their socio-economic and political contexts, their particular scholarly tradition of theology, and often by their own confessional/denomination viewpoint and the various situations and circumstances of the churches they may wish to serve by their theological scholarship. Consequently, their forms of theology, having different roles to play in their particular contexts, are different from African theology. So, it follows, African theology must be related to these other Christian theologies, as part of a 'Global' theology we may say.

The *raison d'être* of African theology that we cited, viz., theological independence from Western theology and the desire to theologize in tandem with African cosmologies, may seem to undermine this thesis of the necessity of relationships between African theologies and other Christian, and especially Western, theologies. Indeed, way back in the 1980s, some scholars such as Hastings (1984, 362) apparently supported the need for an explicitly African theology divorced from other Christian theologies. However, to have a distinct African theology does not preclude a relationship to other Christian theologies; nor is the abandonment of theology in Africa required to enter the stream of Christian theologies in the world and relate to them accordingly. The latter again seemed to be the suggestion of Hastings (1984, 362-63), who argued for an African theology independent of other theologies but only for a while, after which (Hastings did not specify the criteria for identifying the lapse of time needed for this) African theology would have to be abandoned. There can, and ought to be, for the reasons cited, an African theology, which is related to other Christian theologies. What needs to be pointed out is the nature, or the goal of such a relationship. To this we turn now.

We must acknowledge that any Christian theology is always still in the making, still unfinished, given the ever-changing circumstances of Christianity. Wiles (2000) somewhat captures this, together with its ramifications, in stating, 'All forms of theology need to learn a greater humility, a greater readiness to acknowledge the partial and provisional character of even their most basic convictions. They need to learn to see styles of theology other than their own not simply as fools to be corrected or foes to be defeated but as dialogue partners in common search' (410).

For this reason, the desired outcome of the relationship of African theology to other Christian theologies, I propose, is that of partnerships whereby Christian theologies understand each other, enrich, complement and even correct each other, through dialogue, in their common search for authentic Christian theologies.<sup>3</sup> We may now, therefore, consider how African theology could enrich other Christian theologies in the world. More specifically, we want to consider what contributions African theology as articulated in this thesis, could offer other Christian theologies in the world. Of course, there are different sorts of relationships that could be considered, but we have limited ourselves to this one in order to bring out something of the value of African theology so conceived, and arrived at, to other Christian theologies.

We will consider three possible contributions. The first is a general one, in the sense that it is not tied exclusively to African theology as formulated in this thesis, but the second and third are specific to the procedure and product (or outcome), respectively, of our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews as part of an African theology. Let us turn to the first one.

It appears that different theologies in different parts of the world inevitably tend to have different agendas and try to answer different questions, which heavily influence the kinds of theologies that they articulate. So, to cite a few examples, Liberation theology (Gutiérrez 1973) has an agenda of service to, and justice towards, the poor; German theology in the figure of Jürgen Moltmann (Moltmann 1967) has had an

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<sup>3</sup> This outcome was the overriding one exhibited by theologians thinking about the place of different Christian theologies in the world in the book entitled, *Different Theologies, Common Responsibility: Babel or Pentecost?* (Elizondo and Gutiérrez 1984).

agenda of hope; and the various systematic theologies have an agenda for comprehensive and coherent theological awareness of Christian doctrine (Jenson 1997). The distinctive agenda of African theology is to maintain, enhance and perfect the life of the church in Africa. As mentioned in our introduction, the building and sustenance of African Christian communities is a chief motivation and goal in the desire of Africans to theologize within their African cosmologies. This agenda is an important contribution African theology could make to other Christian theologies on account of the importance of the church to Christian theology. This is because Christian theology without a Christian community to serve may have no meaningful purpose since it is the reality of men and women embracing the Christian faith that validates and gives significance to Christian theology. Thus, African theology through its overriding agenda of service to the building of African Christian communities could remind other Christian theologies to endeavour to articulate their theologies in light of the life and worship of the church; that is to be, for the sake of Christianity, first-order Christian theologies.<sup>4</sup>

We turn now to the second contribution of African theology to other Christian theologies. For a variety of reasons, not least the Bible's relationship to Christian communities,<sup>5</sup> there has been noticeable advocacy in New Testament scholarship for

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<sup>4</sup> 'First-order level of theology' is a term Maddox (1990) uses of theologies that contribute directly to 'forming Christian character and influencing Christian praxis' (664).

<sup>5</sup> As identified by Fiorenza (1990), there are two broad approaches to the Bible that make it requisite for theology in recent times. The first is the functional approach. Here the understanding of the necessity of the Bible in theology is primarily understood through its functions in the church (and society at large): because the Bible is used by the Christian community to understand its faith and order its life, theology must reckon with it. The second, which he calls the 'canonical approach', perceives the Bible's requirement in theology on the basis of it being the locus of the primal events and traditions that constitute the beginnings of the Christian community. Because these primal events and traditions are considered to be definitive of the identity and self-understanding of the Church (ever since), the Bible is required for a distinctive Christian theology and in forming authentic

the Bible to be related to theology.<sup>6</sup> But how this is to be done is not always spelt out, nor is it self-evident. As broached in our introduction to this thesis, we identified three possible ways that the Bible can be used in theology, that is, how it can be related to theology. These are: 1. when the Bible is used as the subject matter for theology; 2. when it is used as part of theological formulations or discourses; and 3. when it is used as a model for theology. In the first way, if we may reiterate, theology's principle task, is 'to study again and again the basic texts of the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures and to interpret them for successive generations of Christians' (Jeanrond 1984, 55). Theology here uses the Bible in a rather direct way as the primary source of study, and thus, can be regarded as biblical interpretation or biblical exegesis mixed with its, or ending in, appropriation. For this reason the quest for the meaning of the Bible (now and not just when it was written) is the fundamental rule in this usage. The content of the Bible here predominates and is the subject matter of the theology that uses it this way. Our typology-based theological interpretation of Hebrews as part of an African theology, therefore, is an African theology using the Bible in this sense. This granted, I submit that this way of formulating a Christian theology can be a contribution, by way of example to Christian theologies that may wish to have their theology informed and directed by primary interpretations of the Bible. It is worth pointing out that such genres of theologies seem to be in the province of the field of theological interpretations of the Bible. Of course, we may want to add to this, the field of

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Christian communities. In other words, Christian communities are not at liberty to map their faith and life as they choose but must orientate themselves to the events at the origins of the Christian community: to depart from, or deny them would be to break ranks with Christianity. This is why this approach views the Bible from the standpoint of its normativity, or criterion, for what is authentically Christian and is therefore prescriptive in approach (privileging the Bible), while in contradistinction, the other approach views the Bible from the standpoint of its function in Christian communities (more a question of the Bible's importance predicated on the church's *praxis* of it) and is thus descriptive.

biblical theology. Going by the writings of biblical scholars such as Johann Gabler (deemed *de facto* the founder of biblical theology),<sup>7</sup> William Wrede<sup>8</sup> (1897, in Morgan 1973) and most recently Heikki Räisänen (2000, 1-8, 151-87, 203-209), it seems that the concern of biblical theology is to make biblical readings serve the Church (or, for Räisänen, society at large), without in the process losing the distinction between critical biblical readings and biblical readings meant to serve the church or society. If this is a correct characterization of biblical theology then it means that the discipline's goal is to some degree the theological interpretation of the Bible.

The third contribution that African theology could make to other Christian theologies is in the outcome of our typology-based theological interpretation: Jesus, the greatest ancestor. *Prima facie* this Christology would certainly have a fruitful dialogue with Christian theologies in places that have notions of ancestors. One would think here of ancestral traditions in East and Southeast Asia with which Christianity has had to grapple and still does. Smith's (1989) summary of Christian responses to ancestral traditions in China,<sup>9</sup> for example, indicates that Jesus, as the greatest ancestor, has something of value to offer to Christian theologies in these parts of the world. It would be interesting to see what the outcome of a dialogue between Christian theologies from areas with ancestral tradition and our African ancestor-Christology would be if taken up. Certainly, there is a contribution that this African Christology would make to such Christologies.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Green (2002), Jeanrond (1993), and Hodgson (1998).

<sup>7</sup> See Eldredge and Sandys-Wunsch (1980) and Morgan's (1987).

<sup>8</sup> In his case negatively because he advocates the divorcing of New Testament theology from ecclesial concerns or orientation.

But what could this Christology offer to other Christian theologies in places that have no notions of ancestors in their contexts? It would seem that such a Christology, as part of an African theology, has no contribution to make to other Christian theologies because it is limited to its context in Africa. This is because Jesus as the greatest ancestor would make sense only amongst Christians who have traditions of ancestors. However, there is a possible contribution it can make. A variety of Christologies abound in different Christian theologies in many parts of the world,<sup>10</sup> in which we see different theologies, within different contexts, seeking to understand Jesus, largely through interpretations, or adaptations, of models in Christian tradition, especially the Bible. Jesus as the greatest ancestor would add to this family of Christologies. This in itself may not seem important but there is a practical value for this to Christian theologies when seen from the perspective of, we may say, 'comparative' Christology. This is because, having a family of Christologies means that a dialogue between the different Christologies is possible. Critical to such a dialogue would be understanding the re-conceptions of Jesus in different parts of the world and the factors responsible for such re-conceptions. This allows for the possibility of having theologies based on such studies of Christology, i.e., theologies that are generated after, and from, comparative Christology. The form of such a theology could be the generalization or systemization of Christologies in Christian theologies. In both cases, comparative awareness would be inevitable, leading to the enrichment and learning between different Christologies in Christian theologies. The importance of this cannot be overstated, given the special place that Christology occupies in Christian theology. So, having a Christology from African

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<sup>9</sup> See also Komuro's (2004) article on Christianity and ancestor worship in Japan.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Ford and Highton (2002), Pelikan (1985) and Suirtharajah (1993).

theology to add to the family of Christologies could help in the dialogue of Christologies and the potential of this for theology. Conversely, the absence, or dearth, of Christologies from African theology in the family of Christology would undermine such ends.

So, unless Christianity in Africa radically changes, African theology, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, will continue to be needed and it will, in turn, need to use the Bible in achieving its ends. But this need not be done in isolation from other Christian theologies. The challenge, then, to African theology is to use the Bible in a primary way in its theologizing, whilst at the same time pursuing dialogue with other Christian theologies.



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