

**The interpretation of the Last Supper Rite by the St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church
of Bapong: The case for an Afro- Biblical hermeneutics**

by

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ABSTRACT

The link between Africa and the Bible goes back several centuries before the birth of Christ. As most key African scholars such as Mbiti and Mulago once asserted, Africa is incurably religious. This assertion although sounding a bit generalised, somehow provides one with insightful perspectives about how Africa's religiosity evolved through time. The narrative of the Last Supper is biblically located and has assumed new character, form and function in various church settings. Interestingly (recently) a number of local African Initiated Church (AICs) have adopted the practice of Holy Communion as part of their worship services. In this case special times and sacred spaces are defined to demonstrate the significance of conducting this special part of the worship. Having interacted with a number of leaders and members of some of these local AICs one gets an impression that both the 'idea of Christ' is differently conceived and constructed as compared with other so called established or mainline churches. It was this idea or the constructed image of Christ that created the interest to look at how these local churches look or imagine Christ. Christ in this case becomes the owner of the buffet or feast and he epitomises unity, family, reconciliation, values of *botho* etc. The research site for this study was the St. John Apostolic Faith Mission of Bapong in the North West Province in South Africa. Grounded theory was used in both providing the theoretical framework and methodological foci of the research study. The study recommended that existing images of Christ should be recorded for the purpose of the church life history. These should be recorded from one generation to the next. Also African Christologies should penetrate every church in the community and be utilized.

KEY WORDS: African biblical hermeneutics, African Christology, African Initiated Churches, African Religion, African Theology.

DECLARATION

I, Herman kelebogile Mogale student number 16023601, hereby declare that this research proposal for the Master of Arts degree at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for degree at this or any other university and that is my own work in design execution and that all reference material contained therein has been acknowledged.

Signed (Student):Date:

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to God Almighty who has given strength to complete. This dissertation is also dedicated to all students throughout South African country.

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I wish to thank my wife Segametsi Mogale, my parents Elizabeth Mmama and Phistos Tuki Mogale for being there for me by encouraging me and supporting me throughout my educational journey.

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To God be the glory. Amen.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AC- African Christology

AICs-African Initiated Churches

AR- African Religion

AT- African Theology

LS-The Last Supper

NWP-North West Province

JAFM- St. John Apostolic Faith Mission

RCCG- The Redeemed Christian Church of God

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. The first chapter deals with the background of the study, provides the problem statement and considers the study's significance while defining various relevant concepts.

1.2. Background of the study

Mbiti remarked in 1967: "An African concept of Christology does not exist" (1972:51). He meant that, so far, Christological thought had in Sub-Saharan Africa not been harnessed in relation to the particular challenges faced by local people. Seven years later, at a consultation of African theologians in Accra, Ghana, Fashole-Luke (1976:159) offered a related observation. He stated that "there are no signs that Christological ideas are being wrestled with by African theologians". This viewpoint led to Mbiti's earlier remark becoming a propelling force for Africans in academia to act and take the affairs and destiny of the African church in their own hands. They took on the responsibility for researching notions of Jesus that correspond to African cultural categories and worldviews (Mbiti 1972:55).

Prior to airing his views on "*An African concept of Christology*", Mbiti had already focused in his studies on a perceived strong connection between the Christian faith and how differently it is translated in various human situations, epochs and contexts. He had been strongly preoccupied with the term Christian theology. He argued that "Christian theology is Christology" (Mbiti 1971:190). He saw Christology as a mediator that helps theology to engage with human realities and contexts. On the basis of his studies he concluded that Christian theology falls or stands depending on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ at any given time and place and in any human situation.

Bujo, motivated by Mbiti's findings, responded that,

"One cannot define Christology as such in Africa unless one describes it. One cannot define it as in classical philosophy, because I think African Christology is not yet shaped like that in Europe. We are trying to open many ways for African Christology of African understanding of Christ" (Stinton 2004:15).

On the other hand, Dickson, challenged by the issue of "An African concept of Christology", decided to scrutinize Mbiti's findings and Bujo's response in order to solve the perceived

problem of Christology in Africa. Dickson argued that modern African Christian theology needs to pay close attention to local theologies (Dickson 1984:108). In his view these are informal ways of theologizing that serve as the true expression of the mixture of theology and every day experience. Bediako extended the debate by asserting that ‘implicit theology’ and ‘vital Christian experience in various African communities’ needed to be studied because this will lead to theology becoming responsive to the situations of theologians in Africa (1995:53).

Subsequently, in 1977, Kofi (1997:56) despairingly observes that very little literature on African Christology was available. A group of Third World theologians, meeting in 1977 in Accra, Ghana, supports the striving for an African Christian theology. The participating theologians reflect on how “to rescue theology from the shelves of the universities and the sanctuaries of the churches and make it a living, dynamic, active, and creative reality in our society” (Kofi 1979:viii). The discussions at this conference were published in the book titled “African Theology En Route”. A communiqué that was issued thereafter built on the intention of these theologians. It stated among other things:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African peoples to shape a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present. The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject, therefore, the prefabricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.

(Final Communique” Pan-African Conference of Third World

Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, in *African Theology En Route*)

The conference corroborated the debate on the sources for an African Christian theology and added other criteria that should be considered in its development. These include the liturgical elements of the African Initiated Churches (AICs), African anthropology and general African realities. Mbiti, at the same conference, identified three main areas in which an African Christian theology should be expressed, namely written theology, oral theology and symbolic theology

(Final Communique Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, in African Theology En Route).

In 1979 Setiloane, cited in Kofi (1997:56), challenged African theologians to work hard and to thoroughly explore the image and idea of Jesus or Christ in an African context. The 1980s marked a new beginning in this field of concern when different studies on African Christianity, theology and Christology began to appear. The majority of these works dealt with the articulation of the basics of African theologies.

By 1989 the writings on Christology were flourishing to such an extent that Nyamiti (1994:70) called Christology the most developed theme in African Christian theology. However, Nyamiti correctly observed that existing written African Christologies had exercised little appreciable influence on the life of African churches. They remained mainly systematic academic reflections on the mystery of Christ in the midst of African realities and they needed to be complemented with Christologies that could really apply in the African church.

In the early stages of the debate on the concept and content of an African Christian theology, most theologians in Africa shared the perceptions of Idowu (cited in Dickson 1984) and Mbiti concerning the relationship of Christian theology and African religious traditions. They agreed that theological reflection must be conscious of contexts. However, they did not hesitate to differ on the degree to which the theology should take account of the cultural and traditional-religious nature of the African past. For instance, Dickson states: "African theologians who are searching for an African theology can [...] hardly afford to base their exercise solely on African religion and culture and Western theology" (Dickson 1984:115).

Mugambi, cited in Molodi (2013:496), drew interest with his reflections on Setiloane's viewpoint that African theologians need to work hard and thoroughly explore the image and the idea of Jesus or Christ in an African context. His observations are that Africa, from early on, suffered from a kind of 'faith schizophrenia', not in the conception of God, but in the interpretation and understanding of Jesus Christ. Mugambi argues that Christ has been presented as the answer to the question a white man might ask, or as a solution to the needs of Western man. Christ was presented as the Saviour of the realm of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom (Molodi 2013:496).

Udoh (1988) supports Mugambi's observations by stating that Christ was presented to African people as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant. As a result, many African peoples have

experienced Jesus as an alien, as a stranger who arrives from elsewhere or, at best, as a 'guest', but one who has no home in Africa. Udoh's continued studies led to an indication that Jesus can eventually find a home within the specifically African experience of family, but only after "a responsible review of the foundation of African faith in Christ" (Udoh 1988: 263).

African scholars have blamed white missionaries for turning a blind eye to the context in which they brought their message. Ayandele (1966) for example is of the opinion that missionaries didn't understand their new surroundings and failed to synthesize the core of the Christian gospel with the African worldview and spirituality. The theology and worldview of the missionaries could not accommodate the essential aspects of the African worldview. Ayandele decries this situation by submitting that;

...missionaries' activity was a disruptive force, rocking traditional society to its very foundation, producing disrespectful presumptions and detribalized children through mission schools, destroying the high principles and orderliness of indigenous society through denunciation of traditional religion without adequate substitute and transforming the mental outlook of Nigerians in a way that made them imitate European values slavishly whilst holding irrational features of traditional religion (Ayandele 1966: 326).

Furthermore, according to Ayandele, cited in Imasogie (1983:13), the missionaries assumed that coming to faith in Christ was a necessary condition to strip an African Christian of his or her African-ness. This resulted in tension between African Christians and their religious past on the one hand and missionary Christianity on the other. Christ, in other words, was presented as a 'saviour' who would free Africans from their traditional false beliefs.

The other response of theologians in Africa to missionary theology was to converge and articulate their thoughts in pursuit of distinct Christological notions. Hereto various academic conferences were held by African theologians with the collaboration of clergy and laity. Such academic and ecumenical avenues played an active role in the development of an African Christian theology (Stinton 2010:5). Their aim was to come to an African Christian theology, as they stated:

We seek, in effect, to discover in what way the Christian faith could best be presented, interpreted, and inculcated in Africa so that

Africans will hear God in Jesus Christ addressing Himself immediately to them in their own native situation and particular circumstances. (Stinton 2010: 10).

Stinton (2010) indicates that these efforts are among the first indigenous theologians' attempts to detail an agenda for an African Christian theology. The historical records of many African nations make clear that this was an era of struggle for independence. Stinton concludes: "Those that had attained self-government were still emerging. The Christian faith was struggling for relevance in Africa. The relevance of Christianity in that context was perceived from the question of how much it would contribute to the emancipation of the people via proper Christological articulation. This presupposition was accepted by many theologians as charting a direction for theology and the church in Africa".

The quest for an African Christian theology was the background for Christological development in Africa. This view is grounded on the conviction that, since Christology is central to theology, Christological reflection cannot be undertaken in isolation from the human situation. This view is evident in the writing of Waruta:

"I contend that Africans have every right to formulate their own Christology, their own response to who this Messiah really is. I also contend that Africans understand Jesus Christ in the context of their own religious consciousness". (Waruta 1991: 53).

The situation began to change as several African theologians were now seeking to apply Christological categories to the Christian faith and life situations in Africa. The involvement of a number of theologians working on this project touched directly on the development of Christian theology in Africa (Waruta 1991:57). It is against the above described background that early Christian theologians in Africa sought to reconstruct a distinct notion of Jesus Christ from which African Christians can derive their new identity.

With time a fierce debate ensued between scholars who pioneered Black theology and those who strongly supported the cause of African theology (Masoga 2014). At the core of this debate was the search for a theological enterprise that would address the socio-economic and political challenges facing Africa, in particular South Africa. One of the leading Black theology proponents was Buthelezi (Masoga 2014, Buthelezi 1973, Tutu 1978, and Maimela 1991).

African theology in essence is grappling with issues of cultural identity and African spirituality. Its theoretical basis includes an attempt to reestablish a context for an African theology, taking into account the situation of faith communities in both past and present as a starting point. In this way of doing theology cultural and heritage idiomatic expressions are expected to find a place. Setiloane, in a conclusion of findings by African theologians who he himself had challenged to explore the image and idea of Jesus or Christ in an African context, states:

“This is exactly what African theology attempts to do. It seeks to observe and express (teach and preach) the Christian message out of the reality of African being and experience over the ages. For this reason it is contextual theology. Its context is African-ness. It is also a ‘cultural’ theology because it holds and thrives on the assumption that every people understand Reality, and therefore Divinity, and interpret it culturally” (Masoga, 2014:40).

The case of the African Independent or Initiated Churches (AICs) should be squarely located within the cause for African theology. The discourse on the AICs has been lively and much related studies have been done across the continent (Masoga 2014). Their theology seeks, in effect, to discover in what way the Christian faith could best be presented, interpreted, and inculcated in Africa so that Africans will hear God in Jesus Christ addressing Himself immediately to them in their own native situation and particular circumstances (Bediako 2004: 22). These are the liturgical elements of the African Independent Churches (AICs).

AICs have a large following and are easily recognizable in terms of their character, structure, polity and culture of worship as compared to the so-called mainline churches (Masoga 2014). The position of the AICs in the context of this study is that they attempt to understand and practise the relation of God in Jesus Christ through the experience of the African world-view (Masoga 2014:40). It is against this background that the present research is conducted for the sake of understanding specifically how a branch of AICs constructs the theology of Christ (Christology) by making use of the Last Supper rite. The Bapong’s St. John Apostolic Faith Mission has been chosen to investigate this expression of Christology.

1.3. Problem statement

The AICs have always constructed their understanding of Christology as different from that of the so-called mainline churches. In the case of introducing the Last Supper rite by, among other

AIC's, St. John Apostolic Faith Mission in Bapong, definite times and sacred spaces have been indicated to underline the significance of conducting this part of worship. Interaction with leaders and members of some local AICs leaves one with the impression that they both conceive of and construct the 'idea of Christ' differently from so-called established or mainline churches. It is this 'idea' or constructed image of Christ that aroused the interest in studying how these local churches and their followers look at, or imagine, Christ. Here Christ becomes the owner of the buffet or the feast and epitomizes unity, family, reconciliation, values of *botho* etc. The question is whether such constructed images have been mainstreamed and articulated in the current theological discourse, especially the biblical interpretation. The discussion on the rite of the Last Supper, given its biblical and central location in the worship services of most AICs, is the focal area for this study. I present the following points as pivotal: the image of Christology constructed by AICs through introducing the rite of the Last Supper, the metaphors AICs use in the rite of the Last Supper, the biblical motifs and expressions employed in the construction of the worship and liturgy of the rite of the Last Supper.

1.4. Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to reflect on how the Bapong's St. John Apostolic Faith Mission looks at Christ in the rite of the Last Supper which is conducted during the service. The study will focus on phenomena used in the church and interpret these in the context of African biblical hermeneutics.

1.5. Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of the study:

- 1.5.1. To probe the interpretation of the Last Supper as understood by the Bapong's St. John Apostolic Faith Mission.
- 1.5.2. To explore how the Bapong's St. John Apostolic Faith Mission constructs the image of Christ by making use of the Last Supper rite.
- 1.5.3. To reflect on the biblical hermeneutics of the Bapong St John's Apostolic Church.

1.6. Research questions

The following are the research questions

- 1.6.1. How does Bapong's St. John Apostolic Faith Mission interpret the rite of the Last Supper biblically?
- 1.6.2. How does Bapong's St. John Apostolic Faith Mission construct the image of Christ by making use of the Last Supper rite?
- 1.6.3. What biblical hermeneutics is used during the Bapong St. John Apostolic Faith Mission?

1.7. Significance of the study

The study will offer some insights into the experiences of AICs' theology of interpretation. Ideas will emerge from the study that clarifies African Christology for AIC members equipping them with a tool that in essence represents liberation theology. The study uses African theology as its approach because it is based on the confirmation of black awareness and black identity. The study will add new knowledge on how African churches view rituals that are found in several biblical texts such as the Last Supper and the meaning of Jesus in the African context. The government and several Non-Governmental Organizations that employ spirituality in their day-to-day functioning will also be empowered in the drafting of policies and laws that govern worship in Africa and South Africa in particular.

1.8. Definition of key terms

1.8.1. African Christology

Pobee remarks that African Christology emanates from the encounter between Christianity and African culture (2014:125). African Christology is thus always influenced by the place where it happens to be formulated. This approach may help researchers to determine how AICs can contribute towards an African theology and African Christology whereby also ideas regarding an Inculturation Christology and a Liberation Christology will emerge (Schreier 1992, Mbiti 1998,

Masoga 2014). In the context of this research study African Christology will be enriched by the addition of an image of Christ as developed by the community of Bapong under the influence of their own cultural realities.

1.8.2. African biblical hermeneutics

African biblical hermeneutics provides us with a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African world-views, cultures and life experiences, with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural, ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the process of biblical interpretation (Pobee 2014: 130). It involves the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective. African biblical hermeneutics is contextual since interpretation is always done in a particular context. Specifically, this means that the analysis of the biblical text is done from the perspective of an African world-view and culture. It is therefore clear that African biblical hermeneutics is vital to the wellbeing of African society. It is a methodological resource that makes African social-cultural contexts the subject of interpretation (Pobee 2014:130).

African biblical hermeneutics in this study will imply the application of biblical hermeneutics in the context of the Bapong Community Church.

1.8.3. African Initiated Churches

The concept 'Independent Churches' (preferably called 'African Initiated Churches' or 'Indigenous Churches') refers to those African Christian movements which do not owe their existence to the missionary activities of the so-called mainline churches (Müller 2013:5). AICs are mainly founded by Africans in Africa to suit an African context and are described as 'a place to feel at home' churches. Therefore, they are not directly influenced by mainline churches (Müller 2013:7).

AICs are referred to as Separatist, Ethiopian, Zionist, Spiritual, Prophetic and Syncretistic movements, as Nativistic churches, as Messianic movements or as Praying churches (Molobi 2013:498). African Independent Churches have also been divided into two broad categories, namely the spirit-type churches (due to the central position of the work and experience of the Holy Spirit in them) and the Ethiopian type church (which are non-prophetic and which often claim ideological and religious links with Ethiopia). Nevertheless, the generally accepted term indicating these churches is 'African Initiated'. The present study is concerned with African

Initiated Churches that, as indigenous institutions, are characterized by a blend of African religiosity and Christianity in their ways of worship.

1.8.4. African religion

Chitando (2016) asserts that African religion is part of the religious heritage of humankind. Born out of the experience and deep reflection of African forebears, it provides answers to the stirrings of the human spirit and it elaborates on the profundity of the experience of the divine-human encounter based on the resources of Africa's own cultural heritage and insights. Furthermore, African religion is based on oral traditions, which means that the basic values and way of life are passed on from elders to younger generations. These traditions are not religious principles but they belong to a cultural identity that is kept alive in stories, myths and tales (Ekeke 2011). In the context of the present study, African religion entails the ways of worship as presented by the Bapong's John Apostolic Faith Mission Church.

1.8.5. African theology

African theology could be the articulation of the Christian faith by the African Christians, both professional and organic theologians (the latter consisting of lay people). There is nothing mystical about the use of the term. It involves Christians asking themselves what their faith means and trying to explain it, or simply living it in the context of their history, culture and contemporary issues (Mbiti 1998:145, Pobee 2014:125). They reflect at their faith through reading, hearing and understanding the bible. They sing their faith in liturgies or express it in literature, art, drama, song and dance. Christians articulate their theological reflections, some of them critiquing missionary theological and ecclesiastical traditions and others trying to express the gospel in terms that are more relevant to, and meaningful in, the contemporary African cultural context (Pobee 2014:127). In the context of the present study African theology will offer a faith that is simply lived within the prevailing context, history and culture of Bapong's St John Apostolic Faith Mission.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This section deals with literature concerned with African theology which is juxtaposed with the interpretation of the Last Supper by African churches. Without any doubt, Christology is the most developed aspect of African theology. There already is a variety of African Christologies in the making. These various Christologies correspond to the different schools of contemporary African theology, such as those focusing on inculturation and liberation theology. Mbiti (1998) however stresses those Christological elements that have no parallels in African tradition but that are nevertheless of importance for Christ life, for example the Last Supper. This section will take the historical missionary Christology in Africa into account in order to clarify why African theology was initiated. The section will further explore how AICs have interpreted the Last Supper rite in a way that supported the construction of an African Christology. Developments in African Christology and a discussion of potential future directions for new African Christology form the conclusion of this chapter.

2.2. African theology

African theology is essentially liberation theology (Vellem 2015). Several schools of thought can be distinguished. Theologians such as John Mbiti, Fashole-Luke, Setiloane and others, are concerned with religio-cultural liberation (Masoga 2014). They attempt to overcome the foreignness of imported theologies and to develop a truly contextualized, existentially relevant theology in Africa. As Vellem (2015:120) puts it, African theology in its core “involves liberating the Gospel from its Western wrappings in order that the truths which Jesus reveals about God

may encounter the spiritual, cultural and intellectual worlds of the African personality". In this field the African Independent Churches, with their spontaneous, celebratory church life, make a unique contribution. Freeing themselves through organizational emancipation from Western missionary control, they achieve a new religious identity in dramatic religious practice, experiencing spiritual truth in the spontaneous atmosphere of song, dance and situation-oriented sermons (Vellem 2015). African theologians come from widely varying backgrounds as they belong to one particular ethnic group. They are part of a particular time in history and live in a certain place. In addition they are Christians, members of one of the hundreds of imported church groups, of one of the thousands of African Initiated (Independent) Churches that have arisen since the beginning of the 19th century, or they are members of the ancient churches of Egypt or Ethiopia.

The cultural approach to theology - African theology in Tutu's (1978) terminology - has a different emphasis. Its main concern is the relationship between the Christian faith and African culture and tradition. Tutu argues that African theology begins with the conviction that all cultures are God-given and part of the natural revelation of God to mankind. African culture, far from being 'pagan' or satanic, therefore provides a genuine, if limited, knowledge of God. In addition Tutu asserts that "It may be regarded as being a preparation for the gospel, or as having a real saving value" (1978:56). This view was well set out at the important conference of African theologians held in 1966 at Ibadan:

"We believe that God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of Heaven and earth, Lord of History, has been dealing with mankind at all times and in all parts of the world. It is with this conviction that we study the rich African heritage of our African peoples, and we have evidence that they know of Him and worship Him. We recognize the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and yet it is because of this revelation we can discern what is truly of God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of Him".

(Ellingworth and Dickson 1969: 16)

On this basis it is argued that there are areas of African culture that may throw a clarifying light on aspects of the Christian faith and deepen an appreciation of such aspects. For example, the profound importance of the community in African life could illuminate the meaning of solidarity of the people of God in the Old Testament and the Church as the Body of Christ in the New

Testament (Dickson 1984). Similarly, the concept of divine 'life-force', found among many African peoples, may be seen as corresponding to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. Even the all-important role of the ancestors in African religion could throw some light on the doctrine of the communion of saints. The aim of African theology (cultural theology, in Tutu's terminology) then, has been to examine traditional concepts sympathetically and to use the insights gained from them to make biblical ideas more real to the African experience. This type of approach has commonly been referred to as 'adaptionism' or 'adaptationism' because it seeks to adapt traditional ideas so that they may prove helpful in illuminating the Christian faith. Adaptionism has made a number of very valuable contributions to African theology (Masoga 2014).

However, Nyamiti (1994) stresses that in doing cultural theology the African theologian is primarily faced with the need to look deeply into the real significance of religious ideas within his or her own culture and, on the basis of his/her findings, to honestly determine whether or not these can be related to the Christian faith. An extract from a book by Pobee (2014) describes the urgency of taking African culture into account when formulating a relevant theology in Africa, alongside the more usual sources of the bible and Christian tradition. Contributions by Nyamiti (1994) and Dickson (1984) indicate how this task might be fruitfully carried through. According to these scholars, liturgical theology must be regarded as the practical outcome of cultural theology in the worship of the church. It is concerned with the way in which traditional elements may be introduced into the Christian events and practices of a particular people.

Bujo (1992: 35) explains African theology as the articulation of the Christian faith by African Christians, both theologians and lay people. According to Bujo there is nothing mystical about the use of the term African theology.

“Here Christians ask themselves what their faith means and try to explain or simply live it within the context of their history, culture and contemporary issues. They look at it through their reading, hearing and understanding of the bible. They try to bring into it their rich cultural heritage which has evolved over many generations. They sing their faith through liturgies or express it through literature, art, drama, song and dance. Wherever the gospel comes, theological activity begins to take place. People respond to the Gospel, they reflect on it, some accept it and others reject it.

By so doing, Theology begins to take shape, to be formulated, and that is exactly what has happened in Africa” (Bujo 1992).

Mbiti (1998) describes African theology as beginning to germinate when the gospel arrived and spread in Africa through missionary preaching and the work of African converts, evangelists, pastors, teachers and lay persons. Throughout his research, Mbiti stipulates that theology is done orally before it gets written down. He found that historical factors play a role in this process. For example, through missionary work schools were established in many parts of Africa. More and more African Christians were able to read and write where previously there had been illiteracy. Some began to write down their theological reflections. Concurrently with missionary expansion in Africa, colonial rule was established or strengthened its grip on Africa. In the course of the 20th century, Africans began to agitate and fight for political freedom. Although there always had been resistance to colonial domination it was often silenced or driven underground by the brutal power of guns (Mbiti 1998). In a parallel development, in church circles the feeling increasingly grew that the church and its theology needed to be liberated from missionary domination and be made more relevant to the African setting. Christians began to articulate their theological insights, some of which criticized missionary theological and ecclesiastical traditions while others attempted to express the gospel in terms that were more relevant and meaningful in the African cultural and contemporary context. At the same time, the bible was, fully or in part, translated into more and more Africans languages (Mbiti 1998).

A major factor in the development of African theology is the sense that the African cultural context is rich in values that do not conflict with the Gospel. On the contrary, these values have the potential to enhance people’s understanding and application of the Gospel. Therefore, according to Dickson (1984), such values need to be seen positively, and be retained and integrated into the life of the church. Theological reflection and articulation in Africa has risen out of people’s joy in receiving the Gospel. At the same time, the injustices wrought by the colonial presence or produced by Africans themselves, and the resultant cultural injuries, created a spirit of ‘fighting, not only for political but also ‘for ecclesiastical independence and justice. This was associated with a desire to be Christians on one’s own African continent, using African values and re-interpreting the Gospel in the light of the African context. Dickson (1984) writes that African theology wanted the African voice to be heard on what Christianity and its mission should mean in an Africa that was free from colonial and ecclesiastical domination.

2.3. The introduction of African theology

Mugambi, cited in Molobi (2013:496), tackles this issue by showing where “the problem started”. He argues that, in the first place, Christ had been presented in Africa as the answer to the question a white man would ask, or as the solution to the needs Western man might feel: the Saviour of the realm of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. Mugambi then asked: “But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?” (Molobi 2013:496). He suggested that Africa was suffering from a kind of “faith schizophrenia,” not in its conception of God but in its interpretation and understanding of Jesus Christ. And this is why African scholars began to see a need for an African theology.

“The problem of faith in Africa is fundamentally Christological,” remarked Udoh (cited in Molobi 2013:497). He writes that:

“Christ entered the African scene as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant. He (Jesus) was presented as invalidating the history and institutions of a people in order to impose his rule upon them. Many have experienced Jesus as an alien, a stranger who comes from elsewhere or, at best, a guest but one who has no home in Africa” (Udoh 1988:264, Molobi 2013:497).

Udoh expresses his conviction that Jesus can eventually find a home within the specifically African experience of family, but only after there has been a responsible review of the foundation of African faith in Christ. Thereby it was necessary to consider how Africans have experienced Christ during the missionary presence, in relation to the bible and in the context of independence and the crucial question that needs to be answered is, whether and how in the African mind Christ has moved from being a stranger or guest to becoming kin and finally host (Molobi 2013:497). Udoh emphasizes that how Jesus has experienced Africa is a matter of the “paschal imagination” perceived as the re-creation and transformation of human life, the esthetic celebration of life and the need for a socially responsible church. African scholars have taken into account that the continent of Africa is huge and that its diversity of histories and experiences is wide-ranging. In defining an African Christology it is important to emphasize that the continent had a complex history and culture long before either the Europeans or the Arabs arrived (Molobi 2013:497).

At the conference of African theologians held in December 1977 in Accra, Ghana, a list of sources or tools for doing theology was drawn up. Most theologians agreed that these are basic and accept or use them accordingly, with minor modifications or additions. The list covers the following.

- the Bible
- Christian heritage
- African culture and
- African history.

2.3.1. The Bible

In 1996 there were about 650 translations of the Bible in African languages. These were read and taken seriously by many African theologians. The Accra conference called it “the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ”. There was agreement that no theology can retain its Christian identity apart from scripture (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:192). The Bible is not simply a historical book about the people of Israel. Through a re-reading of scripture in the social context of the Africans’ struggle for their humanity, God spoke to them in the midst of troublesome situations. The divine Word is not just an abstract proposition but an event in African lives, empowering people to continue the fight for full humanity (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:193).

2.3.2. Christian heritage

The Christian heritage originated in Hebrew (Jewish) culture but soon entered Greek, then Roman, and later European and American cultures. In modern times, when it reached Africa, it came as it had grown and developed over the centuries in different European cultures. But, as it was rich in spirituality, theological concepts, expressions in art, music, liturgies, symbols, etc., African religiosity has been enriched by this Christian heritage (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:193).

2.3.3. African culture

African culture is a source for African lives in a broad sense as it includes African religion, worldviews and values. In particular, African religion has been most influential in the shaping of

African worldviews. It was a strong factor even at the time when Christianity reached the continent. Although it played its role often in the background or just beneath the surface of daily existence, It would certainly surface in times of crisis (Bahekuma 1989). Since African religion is based on the belief in the existence of one God who is creator of all things, the missionaries who came from Europe and America did not actually bring God to Africa but rather it is God who brought them there. In many respects African religion resembles the religion of the Jewish Bible (the Christian Old Testament). Some theologians have spoken of African religion as the Old Testament of Africa, an assertion which is however, in the view of other theologians not justifiable (Bahekuma 1989). The presence of African religion on the continent means that the main new element in the teaching of the missionaries consisted in the naming of Jesus Christ. Mbiti (1992) mentioned in this context that “a few of us are even saying that some aspects about Jesus Christ can be assembled from or detected in African religion, which means that He was not hundred percent absent from traditional African religious insights and practices”. According to Mbiti, we cannot simply brush aside African religion. The vocabulary used in the churches, the spirituality of the people, the translations of the Bible, pastoral problems, health questions and awareness of major life stations (like birth, marriage and death) are all strongly colored by African religion. We could, in this sense, speak of African religion as a preparation for the Gospel, even if it stands on its own as a viable religion (Mbiti 1992).

2.3.4. African history

Appiah- Kubi & Torres (1979:193) are of the opinion that pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories have to be taken seriously as each of these phases had an impact on the lives and thinking of people. Contemporary history is characterized by rapid social, economic and political changes, for better or for worse, and by the presence of mass-media, modern technology and contacts with other nations. As African theology, taking place in today’s world, is impacted by the changing historical context, so are its theological reflection and output.

2.4. South African Black theology

South African Black theology (as the outcome of African theology) posits itself as a liberating tool from political oppression. This theology, represented by such theologians as Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak and Frank Chikane, draws inspiration from the Gospel for the struggle against apartheid (Daneel 2001:436, Molobi 2013:498). Unlike the African

theology mentioned above, which was concerned with translation and Africanization, Black theology is based on the assertion of black consciousness and black identity as an essential first phase in the process of the rediscovery of black humanity. Here salvation is equated with liberation from socio-political degradation, poverty and powerlessness. Its realization requires humanization, political empowerment, improved living conditions and the like. In other words, a concrete manifestation of Christian justice across the spectrum, in all the socio-economic and political dimensions of existence (Molobi, 2013:498).

Molodi demonstrates that it is out of a painful context of oppression, dehumanization and destruction of black personhood that Black theology was born as a theological protest against racial domination and human beings' inhumanity to fellow human beings (Molobi 2013:498). In Molodi's view, Black theology can thus be defined as a conscious, systematic, theological reflection on black experience characterized by oppression, humiliation and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa. But the history of the black struggle against the forces of white racism, domination and oppression stretches back further in history to when black church leaders broke away from white churches for racial, political and theological reasons, thereby laying the foundations for later explicit Black theology (Boesak, cited in Nthintile 1992). Boesak argues that in racially mixed societies where the Christian faith was co-opted for the justification of the enslavement and colonisation of one racial group by another, it was only natural that oppressed Blacks, reflecting on their situation in the light of the Gospel, would reject current Christianity and wish to affirm their humanity, turning the Gospel into an instrument of resistance against racial oppression (Nthintile 1992). Doing so, the oppressed Blacks gave birth to Black theology which seeks to interpret their oppressive living conditions in the light of the biblical God whose justice demands that the downtrodden are set free (Molobi 2013:498). Black theology, as a response to White theology which sanctifies racist social institutions, is thus a passionate call to freedom. It invites all people of colour to participate in authentic human existence and freedom in God's name, as Molodi emphasizes.

Put somewhat differently, Black theology owes its origin to a painful racial situation in which one's fate was determined by the color of one's skin. Skin color was of enormous socio-political significance in this context and on skin color depended the quality of life you might attain to. This implies that one's possibilities in life depended on whether one was black or white (Daneel 2001:439). Boesak, cited in Nthintile (1992), mentions that Black theology derives its name from

the unique black experience in racist societies upon which it reflects and whereby human identity is determined by the whiteness or blackness of one's skin. In order to appreciate what is at stake here, it has to be noted that the concept 'black' in Western cultural and religious contexts has always had a negative connotation, in addition to the fact that whites tend to adopt dominant and oppressive attitudes toward blacks (Nthintile 1992). "In these societies", as Molobi (2013:504) states, adding to Boesak's remarks on the origins of South African Black theology, the concept of 'white' was always understood as positive and good whereas 'black' was associated with negative and bad. Scriptures tended to reinforce that outlook by teaching that Jesus would wash our hearts whiter than snow while sin does blacken us. Black clothes thus were symbols of mourning and white clothes signify joy.

In situations in which skin color plays a decisive role and people are divided into white and black, the very blackness of people is often spontaneously understood as referring to something inferior, dirty, shameful, even bad, in short something to be rejected. Indeed, because racism has called into question, and even undermined, the perception of people of color as human beings, it has led to black people despising themselves and feeling ashamed of their God-given black humanity. Molobi (2013) concludes that this is so because they find it hard to understand why their blackness should call forth contempt, hatred and wanton violence from white people.

In this context clear that, for Black theology to hold any positive message for black people, enabling them to claim and seek to realize their God-given true humanity, it could not identify itself with a White theology that tends to reinforce whiteness as the norm for authentic humanness. Rather, Black theology had to positively present blackness as a legitimate form of human existence, authorized as such by God the Creator (Daneel 2001: 445). Daneel asserts that Black theology had to unequivocally declare that humanity includes black humanity and that, if God became truly human in Jesus to liberate humanity, Jesus Christ was a black liberator from white racist oppression. In order words, to talk about blackness is to make both theological and philosophical statements. It involves declaring, on the one hand, that blackness is a gift from God for which blacks need not feel ashamed or apologize and on the other hand, that being black does not make one into a non-person, a nothing, a person without a past worth knowing about. Black is beautiful and something to be valued and to feel good about (Daneel 2001).

Boesak states that, in order to avoid misunderstandings about the name Black theology, one needs to bear in mind that (aside from the fact that in a society where identity is determined by

color the logical consequence of the incarnation is that also Christ or theology is labelled white or black) the concept of blackness has twofold meaning in the black theological rhetoric: First, blackness is a physiological trait, referring to particular people who happen to have a black skin and who are historically the victims of white racism. Second, blackness is an ontological symbol which refers to a situation of oppression as well as to an attitude, a state of mind that is determined to work with and alongside God and who always sides with the oppressed and the underdogs in order to liberate humans into the freedom for which they were created. The latter aspect of blackness is the universal note of Black theology, pointing to human solidarity in suffering and struggle, on behalf of and together with oppressed peoples. When Jesus is called the black liberator, it is these latter meanings of blackness that are referred to (Boesak, cited in Nthintile 1992).

This type of Black theology, covering the period 1970-1980, emerged in South Africa during the first phase of its development and is represented by Black Solidarity theologians such as Ntwasa. Ntwasa who was a director of the Black Theology Project under the auspices of the University Christian Movement, played a major role in the project's early stages. After he had been banned, Motlhabi carried forward the major thrust of the Black Solidarity trend as the project's director and was involved in editing the first book on Black theology, entitled *Essays on Black Theology* (Johannesburg 1972). Buthelezi, as a young professionally trained theologian, made an important contribution to Black theology, leaving an indelible mark on it. Not surprisingly, Motlhabi refers to him as "the leading black theologian at the time of the inception of Black theology" (Mosala & Tlhagale 1986: 47). The formative contributions of Tutu and Bartman, through sermons and writings, were also of significance. Around the middle of the 1970s also Boesak played a part in this early Black theology through his published doctoral thesis entitled *Farewell to Innocence* (1976). Goba, another early proponent of Black theology, has become the standard-bearer for the solidarity focused type of Black theology. Even though he appreciates the new insights that have emerged in other trends of Black theology, Goba could not be persuaded to move away significantly from Black Solidarity as a central concern of Black theology (Mosala & Tlhagale 1986).

2.5. The historical Missionary Christology in Africa

Clarke (2011:130) reasons that missionaries from foreign lands arrived in Africa, along with the European colonial powers, with the sincere but culturally misguided wish to save what they saw

as primitive, idolatrous natives from their ignorance of true religion and from their lack of “civilization’. Of course, for many missionaries it was inconceivable that there could be a future for Christianity outside European culture and history. Therefore, Clarke argues, saving the native peoples meant removing them from the nefarious influences of their own cultural and religious practices that were deeply embedded in their sense of ancestral continuity and influence.

According to Clarke (2011), Christianity was brought to Africa by Western missionaries who mostly took a very negative view of African culture. In many cases they did not just reject those elements of African culture that contradicted biblical principles but they turned against African culture as a whole. In practice this meant that Africans, when becoming Christians, had not only to adhere to biblical principles but to embrace Western culture as well. The process of acculturation was intensified by the effects of colonial rule in Africa. Western colonial rule and Western missions were by many Africans experienced as a form of aggression which bereaved them from their cultural inheritance. No wonder that, when in the sixties independence dawned for African nations, a strong sense of Black consciousness and African nationalism emerged. The catch phrases of the time were "African personality", "negritude" and "black is beautiful" (Clarke 2011). Clarke noticed a powerful revival of pride in African cultures. This resulted in a more positive evaluation of traditional African religions. Among Christians the search for more authentic African expressions of cultural practice and theology was stimulated. Many black theologians began to reflect on the relationship between faith and culture and the Black Independent Churches as centers of inculturation saw their membership numbers increase dramatically.

Mbiti (1998) posits that the interaction between Gospel and culture produces a particular brand of Christianity. He is of the opinion that this has happened throughout the history of the expansion of Christianity and it must also be ongoing in Africa. The only lasting form of Christianity on this continent is that faith which results from a serious encounter of the Gospel with indigenous African culture. “An imported Christianity will never quench the spiritual thirst of African peoples” (Mbiti 1998). Molobi (2013:456) on the other side argues that there is a need for a Christianity that is truly "made in Africa". According to Molobi, it is only within the cultural framework of Africa that Christianity can thrive, that the demands of the Gospel can be interpreted and the message of Christ fruitfully propagated. Most African theologians agree that a church can only be regarded as truly incarnated in Africa if it has practices, doctrines and symbols that are comprehensible to African people (Gathogo 2015:67). Even an evangelical

theologian such as Kato (in Gathogo 2015) emphasizes the importance of contextualisation in liturgy, dress, language, music, symbols, et cetera. He warns however that contextualisation must never result in the acceptance of syncretism or universalism. Kato strongly opposes those African theologians who want to make traditional religion the most important source for African theology and who then end up with a syncretistic form of Christianity (Gathogo 2015). The ultimate challenge facing the African Christian is to make Christianity culturally relevant while holding fast to its ever-abiding message. For Kato this means that African culture must be tested, judged and purified by scripture and that the unique Lordship of Christ as presented in the scriptures must never be denied (cited in Gathogo 2015).

2.6. How AICs interpreted the Last Supper rite in the service of constructing an African Christology

Mbamalu (2015) has researched the Assemblies of God and selected other Pentecostal churches in Nigeria such as the Living Faith Tabernacle (also known as Winner's Chapel) and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). He concludes that these are three strands of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria that emanated from the mainstream churches, the African Initiated Churches (AICs), and from African tradition and culture.

The Last Supper rite is by these churches considered as uniting people because in the rite they are commanded to eat and drink together. The traditional African has a profound belief that through a shared meal the individual as a person, or the family, clan or tribe as a whole, enters into fellowship with the deity. Mbamalu (2015:34) states that therefore it is no surprise whatsoever that "many African Pentecostals could interpret the Last Supper as a supernatural meal". Bishop Oyedepo, the Charismatic founder and leader of Winner's Chapel interprets the Last Supper in a way that aligns with ancient religious ceremonies involving a meal in a sacred place where God attends as an unseen guest in all his divine life and strength (Mbamalu 2015).

Oyedepo interprets the Last Supper as a diet that offers ultimate nutritional value like manna. The understanding of Oyedepo and of other African Pentecostals is that the quality of the manna is superseded by the flesh and blood of Jesus. The manna varied in itself according to the need wish and condition of the eater. Whatever the eater needs, is exactly what the manna provides. And the claim of Christ is that, whatever is considered to be a human need, can be satisfied by Bishop Oyedepo (Mbamalu 2015). The African Pentecostal churches in Nigeria

which are AICs interpret the Last Supper rite in various ways as are: an 'African meal', a 'meal of Covenant', a 'meal of Unity and Peace' or a 'meal of Mystical Power'.

2.6.1. African meal

In the philosophy of these Nigerian AICs, the Last Supper rite is reinterpreted as an African meal. The reasoning is that a meal is perhaps the most basic and the most ancient symbol of friendship, love and unity. Food and drink taken together are signs of shared life. Oyedepo is quoted as stating:

“In Africa therefore it is rare for people to eat alone; meals are communal activities. Hands are washed before the meal begins, usually by a child who pours water over the cupped hands of the adults in the group. Everyone sits around a common dish of cassava, maize, or plantain. Each person takes a portion, shapes it into a ball, and then dips it into a single dish of relish, soup, or greens. If there is meat, the best portions are first offered to visitors or elders in the group. Drink, also, is often served from a common bowl or cup, which is passed from one to another. The meal concludes with another hand washing (Mbalula 2015:45).

The Last Supper rite in the AICs then stand for a meal that is eaten together and represents the most basic way of sharing life. It restores what has been lost and it gives strength for what lies ahead (Mbamalu 2015).

2.6.2. A meal of Covenant

AICs in Nigeria have claimed that the desired unity among Christians has become an illusion. By sharing in a final meal with his disciples, Jesus united them in a covenant relationship with himself and with one another (Mbamalu 2015). Sharing in the sacred meal establishes unity and communion with the one Lord. Nlenanya Onwu cited in Mbamalu 2015 argues that Africans think of relationship in covenantal terms. He cites the Nigerian people's use of a common meal to cement relationships. Nigerians believe that when two or more persons eat or drink together from the same bowl they have entered into a covenant. They have linked their saliva which has

in Igbo culture a spiritual quality. With saliva one may bless or curse, express friendship or enmity (Mbalula 2015).

Sharing a meal affirms the holy value attached to life and to unity in relationship. The covenantal dimension of the communal meal in African culture of which the belief of the Nigerian people is but one example, speaks directly to contemporary ecumenical conversations on Eucharistic sharing. Onwu, cited in Mbalula 2015 says:

“The Last Supper rite reminds Christians everywhere that we share in a communal meal at the Lord’s holy table, not the table of any particular church. In the Last Supper rite, we affirm our covenant with Jesus Christ and with others. Practices that exclude Christian members of other denominations from partaking in the Last Supper are a serious hindrance to establishing authentic Christian community” (Mbamalu 2015).

2.6.3. A meal of unity and peace

The AICs in Nigeria most often insist that faith must be framed in a communal context (Mbamalu 2015). According to Bishop Ukpo of the Nigerian Pentecostal Church, the Last Supper rite has to be understood as a communal rite and not just in terms of Christ and the individual. He remarks that:

“By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Last Supper rite at once actualizes, symbolizes and anticipates the unity of all things in Christ. Furthermore, the Last Supper reminds us of our interdependence and unity as children of God” (Mbalula 2015:17).

Ukpo underlines here that, African Christianity offers a unique perspective, informed by traditional African values and experience that can enrich the world’s understanding of unity. In his address to the Second Nigerian National Eucharistic Congress, he said that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper rite in the context of a community meal. In his view the love that is manifested in the traditional breaking of Kola nuts may enrich the Christian understanding of the Last Supper rite as a communion, as *agape* (Mbalula 2015).

The significance of the Last Supper rite in the AICs offers the world a Christianity that is operational among Africans as a communitarian family where unity and peace reign supreme in justice and love. More than that, the rite reflects the African understanding of mutuality and dialogue where every individual is challenged not simply to justify but to actually deliver the best and most profound communitarian values, among these the world's authentic sense of the sacredness of human life and concerns for purification and the adoption of cultural values of kindness (Mbamalu 2015).

According to the AICs in Nigeria, the Last Supper rite has the potential to develop into a blessing for participants, thus heightening its gravity and significance. Onwu, cited in Mbalula 2015, observes that participation in the Eucharist does not only strengthen believers' commitment to their Lord but it also makes them feel more responsible for each other in mutual service, love and unity.

2.6.4. A meal of Mystical Power (experiencing the real presence of Christ)

The African tradition offers a sense of the real presence of Christ as mystical power which is confirmed by Okoye when announcing that:

“Africans inhabit the universe with spirits; invisible mystical forces, powers and spirits of ancestors. The universe is imbued with a powerful energy, which may be tapped by spirits, medicine men, witches, priests, and rainmakers” (cited in Mbalula 2015).

Africans espouse a worldview in which communities can be brought into a relationship with invisible forces and powers. Okoye argues that Africans tend to find spiritual forces actively at work in the world for good and ill. As a result, African traditional religion and culture combine and open outward to the mighty presence of the risen Lord in the Eucharistic assembly (Mbalula 2015). “The Last Supper rite however, should not be considered as endowed with mystical power on its own. Instead, its significance lies in the action of an assembly suffused with the presence of Jesus” Okoye in Mbalula 2015). What the assembly does with the elements that represent Christ's body and blood conveys the deepest meaning of the Last Supper rite. This is so because, in the African consciousness, a strong sense of mystical power is attached to the human action of sharing a meal together (Okoye cited in Mbalula 2015).

AICs in Nigeria make therefore sure that the Last Supper rite is a communal meal in which Christ is celebrated and gives himself in the form of food and drink. According to the AICs, this is about the “self-emptying, kenotic power of the New Testament amplified by the African worldview that reverberates through the African churches structuring celebrations of the Last Supper rite that make clear that here is no mere meal. The Last Supper rite is taken as a communal act, joyfully celebrating the Risen Christ in their midst and giving thanks to God the Father (Mbamalu 2015).

2.7. Developments in the field of African Christology

Stinton (2011) describes African scholars as encouraging and empowering African Christians to exercise their freedom of expression, pertaining to the images of African Christology. There is no doubt that Christology is the subject that has been most developed in today’s African theology. There is actually already a variety of African Christologies in the making. This variety corresponds to the schools of contemporary African theology, namely those focusing on inculturation and liberation theology. Inculturation is the current that makes an effort to incarnate the Gospel message in African cultures on the theological level (Stinton 2011).

Pobee (2014), shows that this current represents the by far most common and best developed theological school in Africa. Most of the existing African Christologies belong this school. A careful examination of the procedures followed by African Christologists reveals two ways of approaching the subject. There are those who attempt to construct an African Christology by taking the biblical teaching about Christ as a starting point for their striving to extract from the African cultural situation relevant Christological themes (Pobee 2014). On the other hand there are Christologists who take African culture as their point of departure for Christological elaboration. Recent research shows that African Christians are approaching a point where Christ is portrayed as an intimate family member and friend. For example, conceptions of Christ as brother, mother, father, Elder and uncle are starting to prevail in believers’ consciousness of the companionship and personal presence of Christ as friend, lover, guide, counsellor, comforter and visitor (Stiton 2011).

African Christologies in African churches

With the exception, perhaps, of Black Christology in South Africa, none of the existing African Christologies has had any appreciable influence in the life of African churches. Nyamiti, cited in Molobi 2013, mentions various possible reasons for this. In his opinion many Christologies are

still unknown to the majority of churches and, even where they are known, they are seldom taken seriously. White theology still dominates in Africa. In most seminaries and other theological institutes African Christologies are either unknown or simply ignored, according to Nyamiti. If known, they are at best treated as an appendix to Christologies from abroad. This may also be because many African Christologies are still rudimentary in form. None of them is sufficiently profound and comprehensive to fulfill the needs for Christological teaching in seminaries. But the same could be said about many of the Christologies from abroad and these are, nonetheless, usually taken more seriously.

The channels through which African Christologies could penetrate the religious reflection in churches have not yet been utilized. This is especially true with regard to catechesis, liturgy, theological institutes, and bishops' conferences (Molobi 2013).

Stinton (2011) further comments on this issue by positing that all the Christologies described above can be considered systematic or academic. They are, in other words, the result of a critical and systematic reflection on the mystery of Christ in the light of African realities. Stinton (2011) argues that there are other ways of looking at African theology and that, most probably, there are more African Christologies in churches than is generally acknowledged. Indeed, if African theology is the understanding and presentation of the Christ-event in accordance with African needs and African mentality, then African Christologies must have existed since the beginning of evangelization on the Black continent, although mainly in a latent, oral, and unsystematic form (Stinton 2011). Despite their predominantly Western ways of theologizing, missionaries were often induced to present Christ's mystery in such a way as to connect with ways of thinking of African people and answer to their problems. Thus, people would receive the missionary message delivered in its Western form but in accordance with their African experience. This implies that relevant scholarly research in African Christian communities would be likely to reveal various authentically African Christologies that could be profitable in many ways. Molobi (2013) reasons that the existence of similar Christologies in today's African Independent Churches confirms this hypothesis.

Reddie (2015) agrees that African Christologies can be gathered from African Christian communities by researchers living in such communities, in close and sympathetic collaboration with them, so as to discover their understanding of Christ and his relevance to their current problems and aspirations. This method is often employed by Latin American and other scholars with whom the African theologian could have empowering and enriching dialogue. At the same

time it would be shortsighted to single out these theological insights from the grassroots as the only valuable Christology and to exclude systematic or academic theological discourse (Reddi 2015). Both have their specific strengths and limitations and, as such, need to be complemented by each other. Nonetheless, as Stinton (2011) agrees, there are various channels for introducing existing African Christologies into African churches. Among these channels, catechesis, liturgy, theological institutes and Bishops' conferences or synods are most appropriate. In this respect, therefore, there is an urgent need for new African catechisms and liturgies into which the theology of African Christologies can be inserted. These Christologies have to be taken more seriously and be regularly taught in seminaries and other theological colleges. This is all the more urgent because students in seminaries and other theological institutions are the future propagators of the Christian faith in African communities. In order to better achieve this goal African Christologies should be developed to become more comprehensive and attain a higher level (Stinton 2011). The most decisive step towards the acceptance of these Christologies in churches will be when they are allowed to enter into magisterial teaching of the church. Hence, efforts should be made to allow them to influence, as far as possible, the doctrinal formulations of African Bishops' conferences and synods. In this regard, the prospective African synod is of unique importance (Nyamiti, cited in Molobi 2013).

In this context the AICs' model, or models, of Christ belong in the realm of cultural relevance. Stinton concludes that Christ, as far as AICs are concerned, has indeed found "a place to feel at home" in Africa, and that AICs are embracing Christ as a family member and close friend (Stinton 2011). Molobi (2013:499) writes that developments in the AICs indicate that Christ has entered the homes of their members as an intimate member of the local community. And recently scholars have found that Christ is seen as a human being who has moved into the neighborhood. It is argued that, thus, AICs are able to magnify the profile of Christ as a loved one within the global community.

2.8. Potential future directions for African Christology

In African theology the best-known model of contextual theological methodology remains inculturation. Many definitions have been proposed for this model and much has been written about it. Inculturation does not presuppose the existence of a kind of *tabula rasa*, a blank slate waiting to be filled with imported religious elements (Molobi 2013). When Christianity meets a new culture several elements come into play. The first task of contextual theology is to

recognize the validity of the host culture's way of understanding Christ, its religious world view and its moral codes and principles all of which have a long history. Rather than sweeping these aside, the methodology of inculturation is to enter into dialogue with them. Such a dialogue is based on a set of clear presuppositions (Molobi 2013). It is difficult to predict which Christological models will remain and for how long they will endure in the future. It depends on unforeseeable circumstances and reasoning, and any attempt to make predictions in this respect is likely to be based on wishful thinking. The existing Christological models in Africa are far from exhaustive. In fact, the number of potential models is practically indefinite and more are expected to be identified in the future (Molobi 2013).

Mbiti (1998:15) says that African Christianity has put Jesus at both the centre and the periphery of life. According to him, it has embraced classical and traditional Christology and given African color to the interpretation of Christological titles such as King, Priest, Lord, Savior, and so on. But in addition African Christianity is also generating peculiar Christological aspects of its own, thereby enriching and increasing the relevance of Christology to African Christianity. As well as interpreting traditional Christological concepts afresh, Africans are offering new concepts by which they endeavor to better understand Jesus so as to be able to embrace him more firmly and adore him more devoutly (Mbiti 1998). Thus, we get a Christology that combines historical titles with local or contextual ones, as Mbiti asserts. According to Mbiti these titles will be strongly colored by African religion for it is in the context of African religiosity that the name of Jesus Christ has been pronounced and it is in that same context that people respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Africans embrace the Christian faith because of Jesus Christ who is the new element that has come become part of their religious experience. It is the message about Jesus Christ that has captured their attention (Mbiti 1998). It is precisely the person Jesus Christ in that message who has won their allegiance and devotion to become the ultimate point of hope in their lives. Vellem (2015) adds that most of what Africans say and think about Jesus Christ is not written down or publicly proclaimed. It is expressed orally. Some of it is found in Christian (and popular secular) songs and hymns. A lot is articulated in sermons, catechumen teaching and free prayers, especially in families, and pastoral ministry. Some African theologians research, write, and publish on Christology. More recently, Christology has become one of the most popular subjects of theological publications.

Taking this further, Vellem (2015) argues for the need to consider a list of Christological titles that are in use by people who are interested in the study of African Christianity. One could say that these Christologies are a response to the question put by Jesus to His disciples: "Who do

you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15, Mark 8:27, Luke 9:20). Some titles have more universal concerns, but others are typically oriented towards Africa. Many are still 'raw' in that they have not been theologically scrutinized and used widely (Vellem 2015). Vellem asserts that people use these Christological titles and the answers they provide as a support in their efforts to identify and relate to Jesus Christ. They apply them in conversations and prayers, in sermons and counselling, in hymns and songs, in writing and the mass media. There are metaphorical, symbolic and figurative titles reflecting the strong features of oral tradition in Africa. Some are suggested by biblical stories and passages. Others arise out of the experiences of African daily lives. For the most part it is lay people who articulate them when they talk about the faith. These individuals are also the ones who produce oral theology. Therefore this type of theologizing may be described or considered as mass Christology oral Christology, a Christology in the field, a Christology in songs and hymns, a Christology of people in church services, prayer meetings, Christian camps for young people, meetings of Mothers' Unions, travelling in buses, or walking (Vellem 2015).

Molobi (2013) describes it as a Christology for the people by the people, who encounter or experience Jesus in the circumstances of their lives. So they respond to him in ways that are meaningful to them personally. They 'name' Jesus, and through any or several of the Christological titles they establish a personal relationship with him. The titles are personal (private) confessions of faith; they are like creeds spontaneously articulated without theological controversies of the Early church. These titles attach Jesus to the people, and the people to Jesus. They are oral emblems of endearment to Jesus. Jesus has many faces and titles in African Christianity, the number of faces is endless as people continue to encounter him, relate to him, get new visions of him and verbalize new titles (Molobi 2013). These are the fruits of quiet dialogue, of encounters between the Christian faith and African religiosity.

The titles come from the Bible, the early church, historical Christology, missionary teaching, evangelism and the experiences and reflections of Christians in Africa. Thus, some are both locally and globally meaningful, others are ecumenical and contemporary (Molobi 2013:68). According to Molobi, the Bible is, in full and in parts, translated into nearly 800 African languages. Therefore, Africa is cultivating biblical Christianity in close to one thousand languages – its own African languages. The beautiful proliferation of Christological titles of Jesus amounts therefore to the naming of Jesus Christ in Africa's own languages that are related to the traditional and contemporary lives of Africans. The titles place Jesus squarely and absolutely in the African setting in its widest sense: communication (media and transport),

culture, education, health care, family, geography, history, languages, political institutions, social institutions, religions, and spirituality.

2.9. Theoretical framework

This study was based on the theory of contextual theology. Molobi (2013) applies “contextual theory as a relevant framework for studies such as the present one. He states that “contextualization is a theory and a practice of faith within a living community” (2013:497). He sees a real life situation and people who are consciously experiencing that life as necessary conditions for effectively applying a contextual praxis. The methodology of contextualization encourages the full involvement of all participants in all the areas requiring contextualization.

According to Gehman (ICT brochure 1987), “Contextualization is the capacity to respond meaningfully on the Gospel within the framework of one’s own situation”. In this definition the interaction is between the Gospel, the situation and the respondent who finds him- or herself in the situation. The encounter with the Gospel happens in the context of the respondent. The Gospel represents an outside context that intrudes into the living space and time situation of the respondent. The prerogative is for the respondent to react and respond meaningfully. How meaningful a response is depends on the criterion used by the observer. In all cases where a criterion is set the respondent must be part of it. Otherwise, the criterion will inevitably tend to be condescending and arbitrary (Gehman ICT brochure 1987). The method of contextualization tells people that all are experts in their own right. Every person has something unique to teach and contribute to a group. That makes every person important especially when his or her uniqueness is deliberately acknowledged.

To contextualize is to analyze for the purpose of transformative and developmental activities. Contextual analysis therefore is done inside the community. Applying contextual theory to a study among the members of Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission was an important contribution to the body of knowledge on African Christology and its outcomes. The researcher agrees with Masoga that the issue of African Christology is of profound significance and open to a “must-be-conducted study” (2014). Masoga mentions Setiloane’s statement that “the task of the African theology is to grapple with the question of Christology—Who is Jesus? What does Messiah-ship or Christos become in the African context?” (Masoga 2014).

2.10. Conclusion

Thus far, the present chapter discusses the notion of the Last Supper that was administered by Jesus, placing it in the context of African theology. It also seeks to understand how the Bapong St. John Apostolic Faith Mission interprets, and constructs the image of Christ by making use of the Last Supper rite.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology that was used in this study. It indicates how participants were selected and it explains the ethics that are followed in the process of collecting data.

3.2 Research design

A research design is a “plan or outline of how the researcher intends conducting the research” or, as one could put it, “it is the researcher’s plan of how to proceed” (Babbie and Mouton 2011). The present study will apply a qualitative research design. Such a design is defined by Creswell (2013 and Denzin and Lincoln (2011:16) as a situated activity that relates the observer to the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible and then transform it. In addition, these practices turn the world into a series of representations which include field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This implies that researchers look at the subjects of study in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

Furthermore, qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organization or phenomena. It strives to provide an explicit rendering of the structure, order and broad patterns found among a group of participants. It is also called ethno-methodology or field research (Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 17). It generates data about human groups in social settings. Qualitative research does not introduce treatments or manipulate variables, nor does it impose the researcher's operational definitions of variables on the participants. Rather, it lets the meaning emerge from the participants. It is thus flexible in the sense that it can adjust to the setting. Concepts, data collection tools, and data collection methods can be adjusted as the research progresses (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

According to Schurink (2011), establishing an agreed-upon meaning for qualitative research has been far from simple, if at all feasible. Qualitative research involves the use and collection of a variety of empirical tools. These include case studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories, interviews, arte-facts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers display a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, always striving to better understand the subject matter at hand. For them, each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, they use more than one interpretive practice in any study (Schurink 2011).

Accordingly, field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos were used by the researcher in his study of Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission, its members and

its use of the Last Supper rite. This method allowed the researcher to ask the members open-ended questions that allow them to answer in their own words and to elaborate on their experiences and images of Christ at the rite of the Last Supper. Qualitative approach helps the researcher to obtain first-hand information. In this manner the voices of the church members were heard. In addition, the method allowed AICs to express their unique contribution of the image of Christ, producing knowledge of the phenomenon.

3.3 Location of the study

3.3.1. Bapong village

The study was conducted in a rural community called Bapong village. It is situated 65 km North of Rustenburg city in North West Province of South Africa. The overall statistics concerning residents in this village estimates the number at 5000. This study was conducted at St John's Apostolic Faith Mission.

3.3.2. St John's Apostolic Faith Mission

St John's Apostolic Faith Mission is founded by an African woman called Christinah Nku. Born into a congregation of South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church in 1894, Christinah Nku experienced numerous visions as a young girl (Linda 1997:65). Plagued with illness while still a young woman she was told by God that she would not die. A decade later, she received a vision of a large church with twelve doors, followed in 1939 by a vision telling her to build it, not far from Johannesburg. In her dreams, Christinah recalled the healing of the crippled bystander in John's Gospel which led her to focus on the healing ministry in her own religious life (Linda 1997: 65-66). Christinah and her husband Lazarus had in 1924 been baptized into the Apostolic Faith Mission, a large Transvaal indigenous church, but after a personal and doctrinal conflict with its leader the young woman struck out on her own as a healer (Quinn 2002). She named her church the St. John Apostolic Faith Mission and while it started out as a Pentecostal church, her powers and interest in the healing ministry soon gave it a distinctive character of its own. AFM became one of the largest indigenous churches in South Africa, attracting over fifty thousand members. Its founder was known as "a mother with a thousand spiritual gifts" feeding millions (Linda 1997: 66).

In many respects the Apostolic Faith Mission service resembled the rites of other Pentecostal churches. Scripture readings, hymns, preaching and offerings were part of the liturgy. People were encouraged to talk directly to God and to deliver their testimony and petitions after which

those in attendance knelt and loudly uttered their own prayers of the heart. The use of water was a distinctive attribute of the church and Christinah was given to praying over buckets and bottles of water for the Adherents of her church. The healing service began with persons drinking water that had been blessed. Thereafter the ministers, having washed in the holy water, laid hands on each person. Sometimes in relation to a few participants smaller services, ritual bathing and the controlled use of enemas and vomiting took place (Linda 1997:66).

3.4 Population of the study

The population of a study is defined as a group of elements or cases whether individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria and to which one intends to generalize the results of the research (Mudau 2013). Population for the present study is members of, and those holding positions of influence in the church of the St. John Apostolic Faith Mission of Bapong, North West Province, South Africa.

3.5 Sampling

“A sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole” (Webster 1985, Creswell 2013). When dealing with people, a sample can be defined as a set of respondents (namely the people) selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey. A population is a group of individual persons, objects, or items from which samples are taken for measurement, for example a population of presidents or professors, books or students. Webster remarks that sampling is the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population.

The present study will embark on purposive sampling as a point of procedure (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling involves a group of different non-probability sampling techniques. Also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units (people, cases/organisations, events, pieces or data) that are to be studied. Usually, the sample investigated was quite small, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest and which will best enable the researcher to answer a research question. A sample of a small number of key church members of St. John Apostolic Faith Mission of Bapong was selected as participants and used in the collection of data.

3.6 Data collection method and analysis

3.6.1. Data collection method

Data collection is the gathering of information from the participants. It includes the conducting of interviews, making observations and having discussions, usually one-on-one between an interviewer and an individual with the aim to gather information on a specific set of topics (Cresswell 2013). Interviews can be conducted in person or by phone. Interviews differ from surveys by the level of structure applied to the interaction. The researcher attempts to be as informal as possible so as to allow a free spirited participation in face to face interviews. As already indicated, various techniques for data collection were used, namely tape recorders, observations, videotaping the whole church service of the St John Apostolic Faith Mission and interviewing participants face to face by asking questions and by asking them to complete printed questionnaires.

3.6.2. Data analysis

Rossmann & Rallis (2012) define data analysis as the categorizing, ordering, manipulating and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions. Data analysis takes place in different forms depending on the nature of the research questions, of the research design and of the study as a whole.

After conducting interviews and observing the church services of St. John' Apostolic Faith Mission, the transcription and organization of data was the first step towards data analysis. This was followed by the systematical analyzing of the transcripts, grouping together comments that refer to similar themes in the imaging of new African Christology, and attempts to interpret these and draw conclusions.

3.6.3. Ethical considerations

The research process tends to create tension between, on the one hand, the aims of research to produce generalizations providing useful insights for others and, on the other hand, the rights of participants to maintain privacy. Rossmann & Rallis (2012) articulate that potential harm should be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles. Thus, the protection of human subjects or participants in any research study is imperative.

The researcher intends to firstly get an approval procedure from the supervisor in order to seek permission from the authorities to carry out the study. Identified church (St. John Apostolic Faith Mission of Bapong) members were to participate in the study and only those who volunteer would be considered for participation. The researcher was respectful and sensitive to the faith of church members chosen to take part in the study.

The participants were assured that the information from the study was going to be used for academic purposes. Personal details such as names would not be asked for so that participants remained anonymous.

Ethical considerations are the main principles guiding this study in its scientific endeavors (Creswell 2013). In view of the rights of participants and their willingness to participate, the researcher informed them about the purpose of the study and the methods used. The research proposal was presented at the School Higher Degrees Committee and University Higher Degrees Committee for purposes of quality control. The University of Venda, Health, Safety and Research Ethics Committee thereafter gave ethical clearance to collect data. The following aspects will be applied to ensure adherence to ethical considerations.

(a). Informed consent

A formal written letter of consent was issued to research participants before the commencement of any individual in-depth interview. The researcher ensured that the respondents are aware of the information to be discussed and why the researcher asks for this information. After thoroughly and truthfully informing them, in their preferred language for better understanding, the researcher allowed the participants to sign consent forms.

(b). Anonymity and confidentiality

Confidentiality is related to the researcher's management of private information shared by the participant. The researcher refrained from sharing the information, without the authorization of the participants. No one had the access to study data, except for the researcher and research supervisors and the participants. The use of pseudonyms on consent forms was adhered to for anonymity purposes.

(c) . No harm to participants

The researcher ensured that no physical, psychological or emotional harm is inflicted on the participants. The researcher guided the interviews in an appropriate and nonjudgmental manner

so as to avoid inflicting anxiety and psychological discomfort during in-depth interviews. The researcher also guarded against other possible dangers.

(d). Limitations

These are noted at the end of the research.

(e). Data analysis

(f). Recommendation and conclusion

These have been carefully dealt with at the end of this study.

3.4. Conclusion

The present section discusses the research design and the methodology used in the study as well as to the manner of its application for research purposes. It explains how participants (members) of the St John Apostolic Faith Mission of Bapong were selected. It also goes over the process of data collection and mentions the ethical considerations that had been adhered to while conducting the study.

3.5. Organization of chapters

The study consists of the following five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study. This chapter presents an introduction to, and the background of, the study. It provides the problem statement, the aim of the study, its specific objectives, the critical research questions and hypotheses. It describes the significance of the study, its limitations, research design and methodology, the ethical considerations and the organization of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review. In chapter 2 the researcher reviews the literature on the historical and recent images of African Christology including recent ones in the AICs.

Chapter 3: Research designs and methodology. The researcher discusses the research design and the methodology that can be used while conducting the study. Data collection, analysis and ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and interpretation. Chapter 4 is devoted to the presentation of data collected through interviews at St John Faith Mission of Bapong. The data

will be grouped to discover the “image of Jesus” that emerges from this church as one of the AICs.

Chapter 5: Findings, conclusions and recommendation. This chapter forms the conclusion of the study report and presents the major findings of the study and their relation to the study objectives. Recommendations for future research on the topic will be made.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected for the purpose of investigating the interpretation of the Last Supper rite by the St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church of Bapong:

the case for an Afro-Biblical hermeneutics. The data was recorded from the service of this Church and through interviews with nine participants. Thematic data analysis was used as the overall approach to data analysis. The data presented were in line with the research aim, objectives and research questions outlined in chapter one. The data analysis commenced with the presentation of biographical data and the record of their service in a nutshell. The latter is followed by the presentation and analysis of Bapong's St. John Apostolic Faith Mission interpreting the rite of the Last Supper biblically, their construction on the image of Christ by making use of the Last Supper rite, type of biblical hermeneutics used during their service.

4.2. Biographical information

This section presents biographical data pertaining to employment, age and educational level of the respondents who were interviewed.

4.2.1. Age groups of the respondents

From the table below (Table 4.2), the majority of the respondents were in the older group of 41-60 years and 61-80 years. Adults form a large percentage of this church's membership. Young people are under-represented and the reason given is that most work elsewhere.

Table 1: The age groups of the respondents

Age	18-25 ----- none interviewed
	26-30 ----- 2 members interviewed
	31-40----- 1 member interviewed
	41-60----- 3 members interviewed
	61-70----- 2 members interviewed
Total of members interviewed=9	71-80----- 1 member interviewed

4.2.2. Table below shows how many (from those interviewed) are employed and unemployed

Table 2: Employment

<u>Employed</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>
Five (5) members	Four (4) members

4.2.3 Table below shows the level of education for participants

Table 3: Level of education

No formal schooling	1 Member interviewed
Grade 0-12	Two (0) members interviewed
Undergraduate degree	Three (2) members interviewed
Graduate degree/Diploma	Two (3) members interviewed
Other	Two (3) pensioners interviewed

4.3. Recorded service of the Last Supper rite performed at Bapong St John Apostolic Mission in short.

Order of service was recorded in this order:

The service of the Last Supper started with a hymn by the overseeing priest announced as hymn Sione 329

<i>Kenang bohle baka se sa le teng</i>	Come in all of you, there is still space
<i>Teng le memilwe, kenang Mocketeng</i>	Come you are invited, come in to the feast
<i>Kena, Kena Baka se sa le teng</i>	Come in, Come in, there is still space

The service started at about nine o'clock in the evening on a Saturday. They called it "Mokete wa Selemo" (The annual feast). The Bishop told the researcher how many times the St Apostolic Faith Mission conducts services of the Last Supper which is only three times per annum, namely in March, August and November. The research for this particular part of the present study took place during the last celebration of the year on the Saturday night of 12th November. The service was fully observed, recorded and orderly detailed.

Before the service, the congregation put on their uniforms. Women's uniforms consist in a white dress, a blue garment and a white hat. Men put on blue regalia/garments with white stripes. This particular AI church uses drums, music bells and trumpets as church musical instruments. Other than that, they prefer clapping hands as they sing each hymn producing a so called "African beat" or African rhythm. Vellem (2015:120) notes that such AICs try to achieve a new religious

identity through dramatic religious practice, the experiencing of spiritual truths in a spontaneous atmosphere of song, dance and socio-oriented sermons. The Bishop of St John Apostolic Faith Mission agrees with what Velleem (2015) said during an interview:

“Our Church services allow every member to feel at home. This Church accommodates and relates with our cultural identity to praise, sing, dance and perform other cultural rituals without any Church critic”.

According to Müller (2013:5), AICs are African Christian movements which are mainly fabricated in Africa by Africans to suit the African context and that are described as ‘a place to feel at home’ churches. Pobee (2014:127) on the other hand states that AICs attempt to express the Gospel in terms that are relevant and meaningful in the African cultural and contemporary context. The Bishop proved Pobee right as he said:

“We believe our Church forefathers and mothers and all our ancestors will be present and in union with us throughout on this night of our Church celebration”.

Hymn 329 was sung to confirm the Bishop’s declaration

<p><i>Ba teng mona, le ba lehodimo, ba o emetse ngwana Modimo. Kena, kena! Baka se sa le teng</i></p>	<p>Those who are in heaven are also here. They are waiting for you the child of God. Come in, come in! The space is still available</p>
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The overseeing Priest thereafter said the first prayer called ‘thuso’ (help).

<p>Ho ya re ratileng ya re hlatswitseng dibe tsa rona Mading a Konyana a ba a re bea Morena Le baprista pele Modimo Ntate, Ho iswe hlompho le poko jwale le ka hosafeleng. Amen</p>	<p>He who has loved us and who has washed our sins With the blood of the lamb Who has made us kings and priests before God the Father. Let there be honor and glory now and forever</p>
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	more. Amen.
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Hymn Sione 329 were sung again

<p>O, ngwaneso, se ke wa dieha! Kapele-pele, jo, ho ya kwala! Kena, kena! Baka se sa leteng. Ha ho kwetse, mme o setse kantle O kopa o lla, Jo ho fedile! Ruri, ruri baka se fedile</p>	<p>O my brother/sister, don't delay! Quickly, oh, they are closing! Come in, come in The space is still available. When it is closed. When you are left outside. Pleading and crying, oh it is finished. Truly, truly, the chance has passed.</p>
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Then followed Mass Prayer

The Lord's Prayer was led by the priest and the congregation followed. The repetition is in three languages, Sesotho, IsiXhosa and Setswana.

<u>Sesotho:</u>	<u>Xhosa:</u>	<u>Tswana:</u>
<p>Ntata rona ya mahodimong Lebitso la hao a le ke le kgethehe; Ho tle mmuso wa hao, Thato ya hao e tswe lefatsheng, Jwalokaha e tswa lehodimong, O re fe kajeno bohobe ba rona ba tsatsi le leng le le leng O re tshwarele melato ya rona, jwalokaha re tshwarela a nang le melato ho rona, o se ke wa re isa molekong</p>	<p>Bawo wethu osezulwini! Maliphathwe ngcwele igama lakho, Ubukumkani bakho ma bufike. Intando yakho ma Yenziwe emhlabeni, Nje ngokuba isenziwa ezulwini. Ma usiphe namhla nje isonka sethu semihla ngemihla. Usixolele izono zethu, Nje ngokuba nathi sixolela aabo basonayo thina. Ungasingenisi ekuhendweni, Sisindise enkoahlakalweni,</p>	<p>Rara wa rona yo O kwa legodimong, Leina ja gago a le itshepisiwe Bogosi jwa gago a bo tle. Thato ya gago a e dirwe mono lefatsheng Jaka e dirwa kwa legodimong. Re fe gompieno bogobe jwa rona jwa malatsi. Mme O re itshwarele melato ya rona jaaka le rona re itshwarela b aba melato le rona. O se ke Wa re gogela mo thaelong Mme O re golole mo bosuleng: gonne bogosi e le jwa gago</p>

<p>o mphe o re lwele ho e mobe hobane mmuso ke wa hao, le matla le kganya ka hose feleng. Amen.</p>	<p>Ngokuba ubukumkani bubobakho, Namandla engawakho, Nobungewalisa, bubobakho Kude kube ngunaphakade. Amen.</p>	<p>Le thata le kgalalelo, ka go se na bokhutlo. Amen</p>
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Translation:

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your Kingdom come
Your will be done on earth
As it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For Yours is the Kingdom,
The Power and the Glory
For ever and ever. Amen.

Next hymn Sione 11 was announced by the leading priest.

<p><i>Bokang Modimo wa kganya Modimo o re entseng Ketso tsa Oona di benya Di kganya lefatsheng.</i></p> <p><i>Ho iswe hlomphe le poko Ho Ntate le Mora Le ho Moya e be thoko Jwale le kamehla.</i></p>	<p>Praise the Lord of Glory The Lord who created us His deeds are glittering, And shine on earth.</p> <p>May honor and praise be conveyed To the Father and the Son To the Spirit let there be a Hymn Now and forever (after). Amen.</p>
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Scripture reading: The Bishop read from the Apostles 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34

Jwalo seo ke se bolelang, ke mpang ke sa le boke, ke hoba ha le phutheha, hase ho eketsa molemo, empa e le bobbe.

Hobane taba ya ho qala, ke hore, ha le phuthehela kerekeng, ke utlwa bobba diphaphang di teng ho lona, mme ka nqa e nngwe ke kgolwa hoba ho jwalo

Hobane dikgaohano le tsona e ka kgona di teng hara lona, hore ho tle ho bonahale bao e leng ba sebele hara lona.

Hape, ka mokgatlo wa lona hammoho, hase ho ja sellalo sa Morena.

Hobane ha ho jewa, e mong le e mong o inkela sellalo sa hae pele, mme jwale e mong a lape, athe e mong yena a tahwe.

Aana ha le na matlo a ho jela le ho nwela teng na? Kapa a le nyedisa kereke ya Modimo, mme le swabisa ba se nang letho na? Ke tla reng ho lona? A ke tla le boka na? Tshe, ho tseo ha ke le boke.

Hobane nna ke amohetse ho Morena seo ke le neileng sona, ke hoba Morena Jesu, ka bosiu boo a ekilweng ka bona, o ne a nke bohobe.

Mme hobane a lebohe, a bo ngwathata, a re : Nkang, le je, hona ke mmele w aka o robelwang lona, le etse hoo, letle le nkgopole ka hona.

Ka mokgwa o jwalo, a nka senwelo, hobane ho lallwe, a re : Senwelo sena ke selekane se setjha mading a ka, etsang hoo, kamehla yohle ha le enwa, le tle le nkgopole ka hona.

Efela kamehla yohle, ha le eja bohobe boo, mme le nwela senwelong seo, etlaba le bolela lefu la Morena, a tle a be a fihle.

Ka baka leo, mang le mang ya jang bohobe boo, kappa ya nwelang senwelolong sa Morena ka mokgwa o sa tshwanelang, o tla ba le molato wa mmele le wa madi a Morena.

Motho ka mong a ke a itekole ke hona, mme jwale e be hona a jang bohobe bona, a nwelang senwelong sena.

Hobane ya jang, le ya nwang ka mokgwa o sa tshwanelang, o itjella, o inwella tsuo, hobane a sa lemohe mmele wa Morena.

Ke ka baka leo ho nang le ba bangata ba fokolang, le ba kulang hara lona, mme ba bangata ba se ba bile ba shwele.

Hobane hoja re a ikahlola, ke moo re ka beng re sa ahlolwe.

Empa ha re ahlolwa, re lauwa ke Morena, re tle re se ke ra tsuwa le lefatshe.

Ha ho le jwalo, banabeso, ha le phuthehela ho ja, le ke le letane.

Mme ekare ha e mong a lapile, a no ja hae, le tle le se ke la phuthehela tsuo. Ha e le ka tse ding, tsona ke tla di lokisa ha ke se ke fitlhile.

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,

For as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this?

Certainly not!

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

A human being ought to examine him/herself before s/he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgment on himself/herself.

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

Mass prayer was followed by the congregation as a means of confessing privately to God. Hymn 211 was thereafter pronounced.

<i>Jesu ha o ile</i>	Jesus you left the command,
<i>Wa siya taelo</i>	You said we should remember you,
<i>O itse re o hopole</i>	When we take/eat the Eucharist.
<i>Ha re ja selallo.</i>	
<i>Re ka labala jwang</i>	How can we forget
<i>Madi a konyana</i>	The blood of the lamb
<i>A tsholotsweng sefapanong</i>	Which is shed from the cross
<i>A tsholletsweng rona</i>	And shed for us?

The pastors prepare the table which is covered with white cloth. The elements on it are wafers and wine (red Multana as preferred).

The washing of hands: The priests washed their hands in the basin. The Bishop commented: When troubles befall you, as you did not confess to us, we are not responsible because we have been cleansed.

The actual celebration followed: Men came first, the women and youths thereafter. After each person has celebrated the Eucharist, they went to the senior Bishop for blessing. Then Bishop laid hands on them saying:

<i>Morena o mo ekeletse dineo</i>	Lord, increase the spiritual gifts
<i>tsa moya</i>	Protect her/him from perils and
<i>Mo namolele ditsietsing</i>	dangers
<i>Mo phaphamise tumelong</i>	Uplift her/him in faith.

A money offering was made by members who did celebrate the Eucharist followed by an exhortation by the senior Bishop.

You have celebrated the Eucharist. It is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. May this Eucharist heal the ailments which are in your bodies, may it strengthen you when you face problems. May it increase faith, that you will overcome depravities. May the weak ones gain power to pray, Amen.

4.4. THEME ONE: BAPONG'S JOHN APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION INTERPRETING THE RITE OF THE LAST SUPPER BIBLICALLY

4.4.1. Sub-theme: Biblical text customarily used to interpret the rite

The church of Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission customarily recites the biblical text of 1 Corinthians 11: 24 (“.....do this to remember me”) to consecrate the Last Supper rite. This text is reserved as Christ’s real mission to the life of this church today. Two issues (out of this text) are taken out as major by the church in relation to their biblical interpretation of the Last Supper rite. These are:

“The words used by Christ to consecrate the rite” and which he said, namely: “do this to remember me” and

“Time of the day which the rite was Biblically initiated”.

During the interview, the pastor clarified:

“The mission our church urges to apply should always relate and be interpreted according to the bible. We choose to celebrate the Last Supper rite only at the time of night in order to imitate what Christ and his disciplines initially did”.

The issue of consecrating the Last Supper rite at night at Bapong St John Apostolic Mission also has cultural influence. This meal is namely also related as a cultural ritual. Another church member was recorded as saying:

“To celebrate the Last Supper rite at night is appropriate in the sense that the There is no specific hour of the night to celebrate this rite, but that should not be after twelve o’clock midnight or any time of the morning or during the day. Celebrating the Last Supper at night it is proper because that is the time for the dead to visit the homes of the families and when they arrive, they must be able to find food. It is improper for us to celebrate this rite in the morning hours because that is departure time for the dead to rest”.

African religion interprets this rite as a doctrine of communion of saints (Masoga 2014). Nyamiti (1994) and Dickson (1984) on the other hand reason that liturgical theology in AICs is viewed as the practical outcome of cultural theology in the worship of the church. Pobee (2014) also mentions that this is how AICs try to formulate a relevant theology in Africa, alongside using the more usual sources of the Bible and Christian tradition.

4.4.2. Sub-theme: The Last Supper rite emanating in different forms

The AIC Bapong St John Apostolic Mission, among other theological views, interprets this Last Supper rite as “A sacrificial meal, a gift from God” and “A meal for human purification”. Mbamalu (2015) found that selected African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Nigeria similarly see the Last Supper rite as a meal whereby Christ himself becomes whatever is considered “a human need”. Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission responds to the meal in that way:

4.4.2.1. A sacrificial meal, a gift from God

All interviewed members of the church agreed that in this rite Christ embodies himself in different forms. For that reason it is thought that Christ at this meal desires to address the challenges and needs of everyone in the church at all levels. One leader said:

“During the service of this rite Christ becomes “sejo sa moya mo maphelong arona” (a sacrificial meal in our lives). Furthermore I confirm that Kresete ke setlhabelo (Christ is a sacrifice)”.

Another church leader quoted John 3:16 (“For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life”). A church member indicated that:

“The Last Supper is a gift from God. Therefore Christ at this rite becomes a gift of unconditional love which is a grace from Lord”.

4.4.2.2. A human medicine and purification

Several members expressed to see the rite as a spiritual medicine that heals them spiritually, physically and emotionally. One member said:

“This is a meal of its own kind. I individually sense this meal as a remedy to my physical pains of the body which keeps bothering the body at all time. This meal purifies the body and soul”.

Another aged church member indicated in an interview that the meal freed people from their spiritual challenges. He stated:

“This meal cleans the entire human body, and it makes us to be better people. By parting in this meal also gives us the assurance of protection from bad spirits”.

Mbamalu (2015) similarly argues that, in this rite, Christ himself as an unseen guest enters in all his divine life and strength with the food and meat of the sacrifice.

4.5. THEME TWO: BAPONG’S ST JOHN APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION CONSTRUCTING THE IMAGE OF CHRIST BY MAKING USE OF THE LAST SUPPER RITE

The interviewed AICs members did not document the image/s of Christ they have prophesied or experienced every day. They have never seen any need to do this or thought that it was important. Moreover, they do not have a static image of Christ. Instead they explore new and different images from one generation to the next in the church. One church member said:

“Recording our prophesied images of Christ has never been taken in to consideration. Explored images of Christ are orally spoken and preached and the rest is history”.

The researcher observed that the issue of Christ’s imaginary skin color is taken as a sensitive matter in this church. In fact, it is taken as a taboo to be frank and speak out about how one imagines the image of Christ. Molobi (2013) mentions that the image of Christ as white has dominated the discussions in AICs and in most seminaries and other theological institutes for a long time. African Christologies are either unknown or simply ignored. Udoh (1988) affirms that Christ was presented to African people in the first place as a forceful, impatient, unfriendly tyrant, as a stranger who came from elsewhere, a “guest” perhaps, but one who has “no home” among Africans. One older interviewed church member commented in this regard:

“Many of us have images of a white Christ in our households and in the church walls. There has been a full believe to look at Christ through a white skin color, and it is taken as unpleasant by the Christian community to express publicly against this issue”.

Mugambi (cited in Molobi 2013: 496) says that Christ has been presented as the answer to the question a white man might ask, the solution to needs a Western man might feel, the Savior of

the realm of the European worldview. However, Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church as one of the AICs believes and encourages that its members should explore and express their own Christ images as they experience him on daily basis. According to the Bishop, this does not mean that the church is against existing images of a white Christ. The Bishop said:

“Without destroying the existing images of Christ, we believe that everyone can see, explore; prophecy; imagine, and experience Christ in different ways. More to that, our church members have seen him in different ways but kept that undisclosed”.

In line with this, Udoh (1988) has presented findings that African theologians have witnessed to Christ finding a home within the specific African experiences of family but only after “a responsible review of the foundation of African faith” has been implemented. Thus far, fortune telling, symbolic healing, prayer, spirituality, ancestral ropes, visions, culture and prophecy have been applied as tools of constructing images of Christ and presented in the Christian community of the AIC in Bapong, St. John Apostolic Faith Mission.

The following are images of Christ that emerged during an interview conducted as part of this study with members of St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church in Bapong.

4.5.1. Sub-theme: Images constructed during the Last Supper rite

Members interviewed responded that:

- Christ comes as a visitor in the midst.
- A messenger who comes to cleanse our sins, problems, and life challenges in general.
- Christ becomes a holy spirit at the night of the Last Supper.
- He becomes “sediba sa madi” (a purifying river of blood).
- He comes as owner of the buffet.

***(a visitor, messenger, Spirit, a cleansing blood, the owner of the buffet)**

Bishop Oyedepo (Mbamalu 2015) alike interprets the Last Supper rite as the presence of an unseen guest entering in the life of human beings through the flesh and blood of Jesus. According to the Bishop, whatever the eater needs from this meal, the Last Supper will provide just that. And the claim of Christ is that, whatever is considered as a human need, Bishop Oyedepo can provide it. The interviewed church members agreed all about “the real presence of Christ at the Last Supper rite”. One of them indicated that:

“This is not just bread and wine on the table. It is Christ himself present; he comes in forms of body and blood from the cross. Christ here is tangible and we feel him covering all of us with the Holy Spirit. Christ at this rite opens our spiritual eyes to feel him and touch him as one with us”.

Mbamalu (2015) on the same perception, mentions the “real presence” of Christ surrounding the Christian community and in the entire church made present, remembered, experienced, and awaited in ways that are readily accessible to the senses. At this meal Christ gives himself in the form of food and drink.

4.5.2. Sub-theme: Images presented from day to day life experiences

Most participants in this rite agree that Christ is always present to assist them in their daily challenges. Molobi (2013) mentions that African Christology enables AIC members to respond to Christ in ways that are personally meaningful to them. Interviewed participants in the present research reflected on a daily Christ in the following ways

- One said: “Christ is a major Ancestor in my life. He protects me daily with his wings”.
- Some stated: Christ is a spirit.
- And others: Christ is an angel that protects us, and is invisible to the eyesight but spiritually tangible.
- Also: Christ is a daily light.

***(Major Ancestor, spirit, angel, light)**

The researcher found that contextual theory has as a model been applied by Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission members when responding to the question of images of Christ experienced in daily life. According to Gehman (ICT brochure 1987), contextualization is the capacity to respond meaningfully the Gospel within the framework of one’s own situation and experiences. Molobi (2013) relates to the contextual theory” as reflected in the perceptions of these members of an AIC by showing that Jesus has and will always have many faces and titles in African Christianity. The number of these is limitless and people continue to encounter him, relate to him, get new visions of him and verbalize new titles.

4.5.3. Sub-theme: Concepts emerged

Interviewed members of the Bapong church looked upon Christ as one of the residents in their community. Most based their image construction on the story of “Christ growing up in Egypt” (Africa). They tell of an African Christ, associated with a Black skin, recognizing African languages, culture and food. One member argued that Christ was in the first place for Africans and he was unfortunate in being taken away and thereafter owned by foreigners who did not belong in Africa.

In relation to the same concept, Molobi (2013) posits that Christ is seen by contemporary scholars as a human being who has come into the neighborhood and that, clearly, AICs are able to magnify the profile of Christ as a loved one in the global community (Molobi 2013). The result is, as Waruta (1991:53) argues that Africans have every right to formulate their own Christology and their own response to who this Messiah really is. Another church member reflected:

“Christ is our African brother who grew in our clan and learns our African culture. Christ grew in Egypt, which is part of Africa, our continent/our piece of land; he knows our atmosphere, soil, culture, food, and language”.

Other members interviewed responded that:

- Christ is a great angel above all.
- He is an African mother who cares with an unconditional love.
- Christ “ke lenyoloi le legolo la kereke” (is a great ancestor of the church).
- Black grandfather.
- A prophet
- A traditional African doctor
- Christ is black African parent.

***Angel, African mother, lenyoloi le legolo (a great ancestor), Black grandfather, prophet, traditional African doctor, a black African parent**

Tutu (1978: 56) assures that all cultures are God-given. For Tutu (1978), biblical ideas should be made more real to African experience and this is what Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission wants to achieve. Masoga (2014:40) states that this is exactly what African theology is striving to do. In his view, African theology teaches and preaches the reality of African being and experiences over the ages.

4.5.4. Sub-theme: Christ's skin color emerged

According to the findings of the researcher, the Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church has treated the issue of Christ's imaginary skin color as a sensitive issue over the years. There have been no platforms for dialogue and engagement and there have been no freedom of expression regarding this theological issue. Christ in this AIC church had been imagined as white and this was assumed to have been his true skin color. A few members, but not all felt uncomfortable about taking part in discussing the issue of Jesus' imaginary skin color. They showed a sense of a guilty conscience and of embarrassment.

Molobi (2013: 504) gives a clear picture of what might cause church members to respond in this way. Molobi stipulates that the concept of white has always been understood as positive and good whereas black was negative and bad so that Blacks had come to despise themselves and feel ashamed of their God-given black humanity. In addition, Christ has in the first place been presented as the answer to questions a white man might ask (Mugambi, cited in Molodi 2013). As a result Black humanity came to feel as if it were nonexistent.

Only three out of nine participants took part in this question after a short discussion and after the researcher had clarified the issue as a way of creating space and comfort for those interviewed. The three participants concluded:

- "Christ is a black African brother.

4.5.5. Sub-theme: Other reflections on Christ

Despite theological platforms and engagement on various theological issues such as the skin color of Christ in the Bapong St John Apostolic Mission Church, more and more personal/individual images of Christ were explored and expressed by church members. Stinton (2011), in line with this, says that there are more African Christologies in churches than is generally acknowledged. Furthermore, African Christologies have existed since the beginning of evangelization on the Black continent (although mainly in a latent, oral, and unsystematic form). Therefore, "there are no doubts that there is already a variety of images in the making on a daily

basis". This is what the members of AICs reflected on in interviews with the present researcher. They stated that:

- Christ “ke Mopryste yo mogolo” (he is a great Priest)
- Some repeatedly so indicated Christ as “ngaka ya Segarona” (our own traditional healer).
- Christ is a traditional healer.

***Mopryste yo mogolo” (a great priest), “ngaka ya Segarona” (traditional healer)**

Stinton (2011) considers the actions and reflections in AICs as a sign that Christ has indeed found “a place to feel at home” in Africa. According to him, AICs are embracing Christ as a family member and a close friend and as one who has entered the homes of church members as an intimate member of the local community (Stinton 2011).

4.6. THEME: What biblical hermeneutics is used during the Bapong St. John Apostolic Faith Mission service?

Bapong St John Apostolic Mission church had its origins in theological/missionary influences and in the foundations of its mother body which is the African Initiated Churches (AICs). Muller (2013:5) describes the AICs as movements which do not owe their existence to the missionary activities of the so-called mainline churches. One member expressed the same idea saying that:

“This is our African church of which we as Africans want at all time to celebrate and praise our God in our African way”.

The following sub-themes, lined up for this section, may clarify how the Bapong church of St John Apostolic Mission has interpreted the Bible by trying to relate it to their culture, cultural identity and context. Pobee (2014:130) explains the position of AICs as based on a rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditated Afrocentric perspective.

4.6.1. Sub-theme: Contextualizing the Bible

During the interviews with members of the Bapong AI church, the researcher could see how Christ had come to be labeled and interpreted as one belonging to the African community.

Christ has been biblically interpreted by this community of believers as one who moves with them every day. Such contextual interpretation made Christ to be considered as a neighbor and as a community traditional healer among other images. In other words, Molobi (2013:497) says that, traditional church members respond to Christ in ways that are personally meaningful to them. Therefore, contextualising the Bible is a practice of faith within a living community which is what happens in AICs. This relates to a remark by another interviewed church member:

“We believe God created our tradition, culture and our heritage the same as He (God) created heaven and earth”.

Molobi (2013) argues that, in order to contextualize the Bible, there has to be a life situation and there have to be people who are conscious that they are experiencing that life, so that a contextual praxis can consciously be done. In accordance with this, the Bible has in the African Independent Church of St John Apostolic Mission in Bapong been interpreted, understood and applied as a direct cultural communication/prophecy from God to the community of African Christians. As a church member commented:

“The Bible relates and addresses our African tradition”.

Molobi (2013) says that the best-known model for contextual theological methodology remains inculturation. Expressing a similar sentiment one interviewee said:

“Christ is our African brother who lives in the neighborhood. He is our traditional prophet, doctor and our brother and major ancestor. He is always present and practical in our daily challenges”.

These titles attach Jesus to the people and the people to Jesus. The titles are personal (private) confessions of faith without theological controversy or interference. According to Molobi (2013), Jesus has many faces and titles in African Christianity. The number of them is unlimited as people continue to encounter him, relate to him, get new visions of him, and verbalize new titles. This model presents us with a Christology for the people by the people, who encounter Jesus or experience him in the different circumstances of their lives (Molobi 2013).

4.6.2. Sub-theme: Freedom of expression

According to one member of Bapong St John Apostolic Faith Mission, the church (which is an AIC) focuses its ministry mostly on fortune telling, symbolic healing, prayer, spirituality, the ancestral ropes and visions using the Bible. The prophecy, as they explain, may come from someone who may be possessed by the spirit and be in a trance while the congregation is singing. The Bishop said:

“Our Church does not suppress members to express what they believe in. We believe that the spirit works according to the direction of God and Ancestors. Therefore, we do not have any problems when someone in the church allows the spirit to use them addressing us.

Stinton (2011) says that we are in an era where African scholars encourages and empowers African Christians to exercise their freedom of expression pertaining to theological issues including the images of African Christology. One member who joined the Bapong AIC coming from a mainline church commented:

“This is a different church. It is not a church where you will be only told what to believe, here in this AICs church you are encouraged to bring forth your prophecies and beliefs from your day to day life experiences with Christ”.

Stinton (2011) explains freedom of expression as a matter of liberation theology. Considering the case of the AICs, freedom of expression is applied in reading, hearing and understanding the Bible in a cultural way. Stinton (2011) says that AICs want to sing their faith through liturgies or express it through literature, art, drama, song and dance. Their freedom articulates their theological reflections, and they attempt to express the Gospel in terms that are more relevant and meaningful in the African cultural and contemporary context (Pobee 2014:127). This aspect of liberation theology therefore, namely freedom of expression in the church, leads to “Inculturation” in an effort to incarnate the Gospel message in the African culture on the theological level. Another interviewee could relate to this:

“Our ancestors are always present with us in our church service, which is why we always recognize their presence during our preaching; at the rite of the Last Supper and other church rituals such as burning sacrificial rituals”.

4.6.3. Sub-theme: Cultural Identity

Most of the church members interviewed identified themselves as actual Africans. They use their skin color, language and culture as tools of cultural identity in their church services. They identify themselves as one family and with the origins and existence of the AICs. Therefore, they read and interpret the Bible in a way that will address them through their culture. One of them said:

“Our church dignifies us as critical Africans. Therefore, we do not feel shame to be part of our church services as our cultures are a concern in church worships”.

Vellem (2015: 120) argues that AICs attempt to overcome the foreignness of imported Biblical interpretations and other theologies and to develop a truly contextualized, existential relevant theology in Africa. Tutu on the same note articulates that African culture (as expressed in AICs) consider all cultures as God-given and as a preparation for the Gospel. The aim of AICs is to make the Bible seen as more relevant to African experiences. This view is supported by another church member who said:

“Our culture (in the church) impacts us to interpret the Last Meal rite as an African meal prepared for everyone including our ancestors. That is why we celebrate this meal only at night during the presence of the dead joining us in the church services”.

Nyamiti (1994) and Dickson (1984) say that from the perspective of AICs, liturgical theology has to be regarded as the practical outcome of cultural theology in the worship of the church. Masoga (2014) sees this cultural identity as a type of approach commonly called ‘adaptionism’ or ‘adaptationism’. In his view, this approach seeks to adapt traditional ideas in such a way that they may be helpful in illuminating the Christian faith. This is what the Bapong AICs are doing.

CHAPTER FIVE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The major aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study, to present the findings and make recommendations based on those findings. The recommendations will assist in providing some enlightening insights into experiences resulting from the theology of interpretation practised in the Bapong St John Apostolic Mission as an AIC. These insights will equip members of AICs with knowledge about African Christology as a liberation theology. The government and several Non-Governmental Organizations who employ spirituality in their day – to-day functioning will be empowered in the drafting of policies and laws that govern worship in Africa and in South Africa in particular.

5.2. Overview of the study

The researcher intended to reflect on how the Bapong St. John Apostolic Faith Mission looks at Christ in the rite of the Last Supper which is conducted during the service. The study also aimed to consider phenomena used in the church and to interpret these in the context of an African biblical hermeneutics.

Chapter 1: This chapter gives an introduction to, and provides the background of, the study. It states the problem and aim of the study, its specific objectives, the critical research questions, hypotheses. The significance and limitations of the study are considered as well as the research design and the methodology used. Ethical considerations and the organization of the study are discussed.

Chapter 2: The chapter critically reviews some of the studies carried out by different scholars on the historical and recent images of African Christology including the recent AICs images.

Chapter 3: This chapter dealt with the research methodology, the design of the study, population of the study, sampling, data collection methods and analysis and also with the research ethics. Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse the data. The study is conducted in a rural community called Bapong village. It is situated 65 km North of Rustenburg City in North West Province of South Africa. The population is estimated at 5000. The study was conducted at St John's Apostolic Faith Mission. The church is part of the movement of so-called African Initiated Churches (AICs). The AICs have constructed their own understanding of Christology which differs from that of the so called mainline churches. The research is particularly concerned with the introduction by AICs of Last Supper rites in their service. Thereto special times and sacred spaces were defined to accentuate the significance of conducting this special part of the worship. Before the study began it was assumed that the members of

Bapong St John Apostolic local AICs conceive and construct the 'idea of Christ' different from the conceptions current in other so called established or mainline churches. The researcher was interested in discovering how AIC local churches look at or imagine Christ. The study also looked at the image of Christology constructed by AICs who make use of the rite of the Last Supper as well as at the metaphors they use in the Last Supper rite, the biblical motifs and expressions employed in the construction of the worship and liturgy of the rite of the Last Supper. The respondents in this study were Bapong St John Apostolic Church members. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. The data was recorded from the service of the Last Supper rite and from interviews with nine participants that have taken place after the Sunday service. Thematic data analysis was used as an overall approach to data analysis. Face to face interviews were conducted and paper questionnaires employed to collect the data. Ethical considerations were taken into account in all the procedures related to this study.

Chapter 4: This chapter entails the presentation and analysis of the data collected for the purpose of studying the interpretation of the Last Supper rite by the St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church of Bapong and, thereby presenting the case for an Afro-Biblical hermeneutics. The data were gathered through interviews with nine participants. Thematic coding was used for analyzing data. The study shows that members from this AI church daily explore many different images of Christ. These images of Christ result from personal day to day experiences. Christ in this way has become a member of the Bapong community. He is seen as a neighbor, a friend, a savior a brother. The members of Bapong AICs have come to interpret Christ's image through cultural influence in their church. For example, the Last Supper rite has been interpreted and celebrated as an African meal from God through Christ. Therefore Christ becomes, through this African meal whatever the African eater needs him to be. In addition this African meal can be eaten by all church members the living as well as the dead. The meal is only eaten during the night so that the ancestors may be present. The study highlights the importance of African theology which is grounded on the confirmation of black awareness, black identity and black culture. On the other hand, African Christology, which is in essence liberation theology, has been pointed out as a climactic perspective of the study.

Chapter 5: This chapter contains the overview and findings of the study as well as recommendations and conclusions.

5.3. Findings of the study

The following are major findings of this study:

- The Last Supper rite has been treated by members of St. John Apostolic Faith Mission Church in Bapong as part of an African cultural meal. The order is that men are supposed to be the first to partake of the Last Supper, followed by the women and youths. This is the same order as usual in family homes where a man as head of the household is also the first to be given food.
- The recording of images of Christ as these emerged among church members on a daily basis has not been taken seriously so that, as a result, the images of Christ that have surfaced over many years, from one generation to the next, have been lost and forgotten.
- Engagement on theological issues has been limited. Issues such as the image of Christ as having a white skin were treated as being too sensitive for a discussion. The church leadership subjected such themes as what the original skin color of Christ would have been more or less to a taboo.
- African biblical hermeneutics has been used during the Bapong St. John Apostolic Faith Mission services.
- Images of Christ that are personal conceptions are not publicly pronounced. They are treated as a private prophecy for the life of a church member and this is why they were not recorded. It shows that images of Christ have been produced by members of this church since a long time ago but that they were not talked about or presented publicly.
- Freedom of expression on cultural identity is still performed as a private matter. Few members of the Bapong AIC feel uncomfortable expressing their cultural views of faith to the public.

5.4. Recommendations of the study

The following are recommendations based on the findings of the study:

5.4.1. Emerging images of Christ in Bapong St John Apostolic Church

- Existing images of Christ should be recorded for the purpose of the church life history. These should be recorded from one generation to the next.
- Images of Christ that result from personal experiences should be treated as a public confession prophecy matter. This will grow African Christology.

5.4.2. Freedom of expression for the public/community of Bapong

- Church members should feel free to teach the Bapong community of believers how to express their culture as a God created matter.
- African Christologies should penetrate every church in the community and be utilized.
- Images of Christ should not be taken as an issue of doubt

5.4.3. Cultural identity and contextualising the biblical

- The theology of African Christologies should be inserted when reading the Bible in churches.
- Inculturation should be taken as an effort to incarnate the Gospel message in the African church.

5.4.4. Theological platforms for engagements

- Bible studies should be a life of mission in the church.
- Church catechesis, liturgy, theological institutes and conferences should be held.
- Church members should be empowered and encouraged to conduct research about Bible contexts, church history, African theologies, African Christologies.

5.4.5. Future research

Findings show that Christ has many faces and titles in African communities. Images that have emerged in past and present are countless. Therefore more research needs to be conducted to document and continue the African Christian journey, the encounters with Christ and ways of relating to him, thereby getting new visions of Christ and verbalize new titles.

5.5. Limitations of the study

The study focused on the interpretation of the Last Supper rite by the St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church of Bapong, presented as a case for an Afro-biblical hermeneutics. The size of the sample of the study is so small that its findings cannot be generalized to the rest of the Bapong community and other AICs.

5.5. Conclusion

The findings of this study include the existence of countless different images of Christ that have emerged from Bapong St John Apostolic Mission as part of African Initiated Churches (AICs).

African theology, freedom of expression, contextualizing the Bible and inculturation have been considered as tools that point the way forward for the application of African Christology for example in the context of members of AICs such as the Bapong church. Christ has in the present study by culturally influenced members of AICs been described as someone who resides in a neighborhood of the Bapong community. This makes the case for an Afro-biblical hermeneutics.

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APPENDICES

ANNEXURE A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

1. How long have you been a member in this church (St John Apostolic Faith Mission Church of Bapong)?

2. How do you view/imagine Christ from your day to day life experiences? e.g. do you think that Christ is present and always assist you through your daily challenges. If yes, how does that happen?

3. Do you have any picture/idol reflecting the image of Christ and/or with other Biblical people (e.g. his disciples or St Mary, and others) in your household? How do these reflectors uplift you spiritually on daily basis?

4. From your own African view, influenced by your culture (e.g. Tswana Culture), which skin colour would you associated with when looking at Christ himself? (let's assume you were given that task)

5. How do you respond to the following quote of Christ?

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was your thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you invited me into your home truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters , you were doing it to me”
(Matthews 25:35,40 NIV)

e.g. will you say that Christ is saying this to you today? If yes, where do you think Christ stay from your community at present?

6. How is the Last Supper being consecrated (blessed) during the church service?

7. How do you interpret the rite of the Last Supper biblically?

8. How do you construct the image of Christ by making use of the Last Supper rite in your church?

9. What makes your church (as AICs) differ from Mainline Churches concerning the “freedom of expression” on the understanding of whom and how Christ is in your lives?

10. After reflection from all these questions, how do you now present your own concept of Christ (e.g. do you see him as brother, Mother, Father, Parent, Elder, and Uncle, neighbor or which concept you have?)

11. How would you further reflect about Christ personally? Would you see him as friend, lover, guider, counselor, comforter and visitor?

ANNEXURE B

CONSENT FORM

My name is Kelebogile Herman Mogale a student at the University of Venda, Institute for Human and Social Sciences. I am conducting a research on the interpretation of the Last Supper Rite in St John Faith Apostolic Mission Church of Bapong.

I would like you to participate in this study. Any information obtained from you will be treated as confidential and your names will remain anonymous. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may discontinue participation in this project at any time. Your decision to participate in this study will have no negative impact on your life or health or faith.

Researcher signature_____ Date_____

Participant

I_____ have read through the content of this form and hereby voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Participant signature_____ Date_____

EDITOR DECLARATION

I, Johanna Zaverdinos of the Heritage Academy in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, declare that I edited and proofread the Master of Arts (Department for African Studies) dissertation titled "The interpretation of the last supper rite by the St John Faith Mission Church of Bapong: The case for an African Afro-Biblical Hermeneutics", written by H.K. Mogale (Student Number: 16023601).

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