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The Christology of the Ancestor Scheme and Deliverance Ministry in African Pentecostalism

By

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Abstract

The spiritual universe is deeply interwoven in the everyday life of the African people, with the ancestor cult as a centre of their religion. It has considerably shaped the Gospel as the West spread it, producing a contextual Christianity. The tension between the sending and receiving contexts catalyzed the emergence of pneumatic expressions of Christianity in search of answers to the religious aspirations of the people. Interaction between Western Christianity and its concept of evil spirits impinged on the ancestral scheme of African Traditional Religion. This saw a metamorphosis of the living dead into demonic spirits. Consequently, pneumatic Christianity has been characterized by a ministry of exorcism in answering the new questions that the connection of Christians to ancestors raises. Against this backdrop, this study implores interviews of practicing

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Pentecostals selected by maximum variation sampling from a major Pentecostal church in Ghana to analyze how the Pentecostal faith with its emphasis on the reality of the power in the name of Jesus and the activities of the Holy Spirit negotiates the belief in ancestors seeking deliverance from the ills of this life. It recommends that Jesus Christ be given a niche in the spiritual universe of Africa to shape the ministry of exorcism in Pentecostalism.

Key words: Ancestor cult, Pentecostalism, Exorcism, Demon, Idol worship, Supremacy of Christ, Spiritual warfare

Introduction

This paper draws on a center of African traditional religion to demonstrate how Christian encounters with indigenous religion raise important questions of faith. It recognizes Pentecostal exorcism as a repercussion of the engagement of the Christian gospel with the ancestor cult. Somehow, the ancestors that African societies have revered for a long time have transformed into demonic spirits as they ventured into the spirit world. Yesterday, they were evoked to act in favor of the living. Today, Pentecostal belief in the African context, as it were, creates enmity between African societies and the ancestors by delivering people from their (ancestors') influence. The paper uses examples from Ghana and engages with selected members of the Church of Pentecost who have been recruited based on varied characteristics, including mainly age and educational level. Indeed, Pentecostals today are not oblivious of the ancestor cult. Its discontinuity with the Pentecostal faith is understood in terms of its connection with idol worship that renders ancestors as demonic spirits. It is presented that the Bible does not distance itself from the idea of ancestors. It

argues that a proper Pentecostal engagement with the ancestor concept in terms of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his appointment as the son of God in power and his cosmic supremacy will shape the Pentecostal faith and its mission in Africa, lest Pentecostals spend more time in the ministry of exorcism, and compromise its broader impact in African societies.

Dancing to the Music of the Ancestors

Religion is essential to African life.² The African conception of the universe intimately relies on religious ideas and practices. Spirits are important and revered. Some are beneficent, while others are malevolent. There is the Supreme Being and other divinities, including the ancestors. The interactions between people, the spirits, and the environment determine the course of individuals' lives and the life of the whole society. To the African, life is spiritual. This spirituality follows a specific scheme, allowing one to depict the African spirit world. Despite minor variations, the morphology of the spiritual world can be appreciated.

Meanwhile, the rhythm of the African universe, with its underlying religiosity, resonates with the ministry of the ancestors. One will live a good life if he or she follows where the wind of the ancestors directs. The term “ancestor” is not limited to its mere usage as a forebear of a family or group of people. More importantly, it is utilized in the sense of a people who are carved in a religious scheme as holding a special place among the living. They are the living-dead.

² John S. Mbiti, *Africa Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

The ancestors play a vital role in the everyday life of the African people. Already, though they were once humans, because they have become spirit beings after death, they wield power. This power may be used for the good of society. Concerning this power, Sarpong observes that “while God’s power surpasses all others, the ancestors would appear to tilt the scale in their favor if their power could be weighed against that of the lesser gods.”³ This suggests the vital role of the ancestors in the life of the people. In Africa, one means of dealing with evil is to appease the ancestors, who will act on behalf of the living.⁴ Keith Ferdinando discovers that “For most people, the single most important category of spirits is that of the ancestors. As forebears of the present generation, they might be expected to act beneficently.”⁵ Ancestors are integral to deliverance from evil in the traditional religion of Africa.

In Africa, ancestors are closely experienced in the everyday life of Africans and revered or “even worshipped”.⁶ For this reason, African traditional religion has been described as “ancestral worship.”⁷ This characterization, arguing from an Akan perspective, was rejected by Peter Kwasi Sarpong by suggesting that the ancestors are rather venerated and not worshipped.⁸

³ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 43.

⁴ Keith Ferdinando, *The Triumph of Christ in the African Perspective: A Study of Demonology and Redemption in the African Context* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1999), 3.

⁵ Ferdinando, *The Triumph of Christ in the African Perspective*, 48.

⁶ John S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology* (Nashville: Abington, 1979), 48.

⁷ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 161.

⁸ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 33.

This remark of Jean-Marc Ela, the Cameroonian theologian is important for Christian theological reflections in the African context. He writes that “the cult of the dead is perhaps that aspect of culture to which the African is most attached—the heritage clung to above all else . . . the cult of the ancestors is so widespread throughout Africa that it is impossible to avoid the questions this practice raises for Christian life and reflection.”⁹ John S. Pobee, the reverend Ghanaian African theologian, saw this need and became one of the first to advocate for reflecting on Jesus as an ancestor in the African context.¹⁰

Ancestors in a Broader Context Today

Civilizations have revered people of great repute who have passed on. They desire to live by their precepts and transmit their life and teachings to their children. It may seem from a distance that such great persons never died. This is prominent even in the secular space. It may not be far-fetched to think that the world, to a significant extent, thrives on the ideologies of dead men and women. Nations are driven by their thoughts and actions that have been conceptualized in the building of society. In another important light, some people excel to the point of earning the status of deity with a vital role in an organized religious system. Despite the Enlightenment of yesterday and the globalized world we live in today, ancestors as deified beings remain essential in many cultures, not only in the Majority World, including Africa, but in the West as well. Kirsteen Kim, the British scholar of Theology and World Christianity, argues that the West is

⁹ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 14.

¹⁰ Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*.

“impacted by different spirits, even if we don’t name them that. Our ancestors are now figures in history books, but selected ancestors remain influential and may even be revered in semi-religious ways”.¹¹

Contemporary Pentecostal Thoughts on Ancestors: From the Field

To Odame, aged 48, a university graduate who is a tutor at a high school in Koforidua, Ghana, and also a lay Pentecostal leader, revealed that an ancestor is “a member of the family who is dead but whilst alive, lived a good life that can be emulated by his descendants. Ancestors are dead physically, but metaphysically, they are alive. Traditionally, it is believed that they have traveled to another world.”¹² Concerning how a Christian should relate to the ancestors, he continued that: “Christians can emulate their good works, but praying to them for direction must be disapproved because they are dead, I do not think that they can appear to us. Approaching them would be like consulting the dead . . . It is a form of witchcraft.”¹³ As a Christian, Odame was of the view that ancestors appear to the living in the form of evil spirits. He stated that, “they [ancestors] are dead and gone. Anybody who appears to me [Odame] as an ancestor is a demon. Evoking them is to evoke demons.”¹⁴

Opoku, a 16-year-old high school student, understood ancestors as “dead clan heads who have passed on our cultural

¹¹ Kirsteen Kim, ‘Pneumatological Impact of Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission on the World Church’ (Lecture Note, James McKeown Memorial Lectures, Pentecost University, Gomoa-Fetteh, Ghana, November 10, 2023), 5.

¹² Odame, Interview by author, Koforidua, March 30, 2025.

¹³ Odame, Interview.

¹⁴ Odame Interview.

values and norms to us. We live up to them. They live in *asamando*, that is, the world of the dead. They are contacted through sacrifices. Some claim that ancestors speak to them through dreams.”¹⁵ Opoku was of the view that Christians do not have to break links with the ancestors since some of the practices they inherited from them, such as festivals, teach a lot about the history of their people. However, he mentioned that the aspect that involves idol worship must be avoided by Christians.¹⁶ He opined that though ancestors and demons are all spirits, they are different.

A Pentecostal scholar with a PhD, aged 53, spoke about ancestors as “people who are believed to live a very good life on earth, have lived to old age, and did not die an accidental death. They proceed to another world where they become the living-dead. In that world, the Africans believed that they were part of the living world. They see us [humans] but we do not see them.”¹⁷ He added from a Pentecostal perspective that Christians do not relate to the ancestral cult in practice. However, he referred to the ongoing attempts by theologians to present Jesus as an ancestor *par excellence*.¹⁸ Concerning the relationship between ancestors and demonic spirits, he intimated that from the traditional religious perspective, ancestors are not considered to be demonic but Pentecostals think that if ancestral spirits exist, then, they are evil thus Pentecostals demonize the belief in the ancestors.¹⁹ He drove home the issue that the ancestral system is associated with idol worship and witchcraft, consequently the issue of deliverance

¹⁵ Opoku, Interview by author, Accra April 15, 2025.

¹⁶ Opoku, Interview.

¹⁷ Dela, Interview by author, Accra, April 16, 2025.

¹⁸ Dela, Interview. See also

¹⁹ Dela, Interview.

does not differentiate between ancestors, demons and witchcraft since all of them are considered as the works of the Devil.²⁰

Kofi, a 9-year-old basic school student responded that “an ancestor is someone who died long ago who is part of our community.”²¹ He saw the ancestors as people of power in the spirit world but they are lesser gods as such Christians should not be led by the ancestors since they (Christians) are led by God.²²

It becomes obvious from the above testimonies that ancestors actualize a centre of the religious imagination of African Pentecostals. This idea of ancestors is prominent in Africa and other parts of the world.²³ The ancestors define the personality of the indigenous Africans.²⁴ The reality of the ancestor cult to the African is strong even for the one who converts to Christianity. It is the connection with idol worship from the perspective of Pentecostalism that degrades the ancestor cult and advances exorcism. It echoes the sense of community of Africans. Evidence from biblical narratives bears witness to the fact that the dead are not just brushed under the carpet. They are seen as a vital part of the community, partly in dialogue with the Christian idea of the resurrection from death.

²⁰ Dela, Interview.

²¹ Kofi, Interview by author, Accra, March 15, 2025.

²² Kofi, Interview.

²³ David Burnett, *World of the Spirits: A Christian Perspective on Traditional and Folk Religions* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2000), 62.

²⁴ Gabriel Setiloane, ‘How the Traditional World-view Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana’, in Edward Fasholé-Luke et al (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 406.

Concerning the Bible and Ancestors

In one of his debates with a section of the religious leaders of the day, Jesus was asked a question that bothered the resurrection from death. The people evoke a provision in the Mosaic Law that allows a brother of a dead husband to marry the widow and bear children for the deceased. Their concern was that seven brothers, in turn, had a particular woman as a wife, and they all died without having a child with her, so at the resurrection, who really would be regarded as the legitimate husband of the woman (Luke 20:27-33). The response that Jesus gave points out the cessation of the institution of marriage, as we know it presently, at the resurrection. He proceeded to address the core motive behind their question, which is, a denial of the resurrection of the dead. He also appeals to Moses in Exodus 3:6 thus: “But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’” (Luke 20:37, NKJV). Jesus’ conclusion in his exegesis of the statement “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” is that “For He [the Lord] is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him” (Luke 20:38, NKJV). To think of the concept of the living-dead as seen in cultures is not alien to the Bible which is “more than an account of history and religion of Israel and the early church. Scripture is the record, the fruit, and the outcome of the engagement of gospel and culture, both as account and interpretation”.²⁵

Prior to this burning bush revelation by God to Moses, reference to the Lord as the God of Abraham was used by Jacob (Exodus 31:42). He heard this from God first (Genesis 28:13).

²⁵ Kwame Bediako, ‘Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition,’ *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol 4, No. 1 (June 2001), 2.

Laban, his father-in-law also used the term “The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father” (Exodus 31:53). Abraham and this Nahor are biological brothers who are sons of Terah (Genesis 11:26). The terms, as used by Jacob and Nahor carry the sense of God who is present. By this, they reckon that God is a living God. This nature of God forms a bridge between the dead and the living.

However, some people have been used as shining examples of those who, though dead, are alive. Jesus’ statement “But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead” (Luke 20:35) shows that some people stand out in their faith towards God and qualify to belong to the fold of those who can attain that age and the resurrection. The idea of an ancestor, as seen in Africa, holds that people who led a certain life qualify to become ancestors. This definition also links the biblical concept of ancestor to that in the African perspective. Furthermore, the reference to such people as “sons of God” (Luke 20:36) as per their resurrection, exposes a possible characterization of the ancestors as children of the Supreme Being in the African traditional religious sense. By this, they can receive favors from the Supreme Being.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be appreciated that following the special light in which the biblical patriarchs and other biblical figures are seen, their veneration or even worship became integral to their relation to God well into the New Testament period. Today, the modern church holds in high esteem the Fathers of the Church and others who demonstrated great faith in championing the course of Christ. It is unsurprising to hear a prayer that goes along this line: “I evoke upon you the spirit of Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Wesley, James McKeown, and the like.”

As an example, during an encounter with a Samaritan woman, Jesus revealed that he had living water to offer. This water, which is better compared to the one from the well of Jacob provoked the woman to ask this instructive question in John 4: 12, NIV: “Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” These figures of faith are considered with great reverence in the faith of the people towards God.

The Concept of Ancestor as a Figure of the Resurrection

For the dead to be regarded as alive and transformed into spirit beings endowed with power, whose help can be sought, is a testament to the close link between the realm of the spirits and the physical world in Africa. That it is possible for one who is dead to be alive points to a central theme of the Gospel of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, the idea of the resurrection is there, though it is vague, like looking through a tainted glass; some interpreters of the Old Testament, like the Pharisees, could conceive such an idea of the resurrection of the dead. Jesus Christ came to demonstrate through his life and teaching that indeed in the structure of God’s work in the life of humanity, there is such a phenomenon. He shows that the idea of coming back to life is central to the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ himself.

The teachings of Jesus Christ, his death, and his resurrection created a paradigm shift in the understanding of people. The disciples of Jesus could now boldly proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and of those who put their faith in him as their Lord and personal savior.

Someone like Apostle Paul took a particular interest in the message of the resurrection in a context where even Christians

held an ambivalent view of the doctrine of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12). Paul developed the integral connection between the resurrection and the good news of Jesus Christ. He uses the resurrection of Jesus Christ to show that the core of the Christian faith, which is built on the message that is being preached about Jesus Christ, is that those who believe in him will rise from the dead into eternal life. He opines, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is empty” (1 Corinthians 15:13-15, NKJV). This indicates that without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no Gospel. Such a turn of events would mean that the Christian faith is groundless. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the bedrock of the Christian faith. Paul exhorts the Christians further that when the resurrection of Jesus Christ is denied, “Then those who have fallen asleep [the dead] in Christ have perished” (1 Corinthians 15:18, NKJV).

Ancestorhood is one way by which the Africans can be made to come to terms with the Christian evangel that preaches resurrection from death and eternal life. The Africans who are aware of the concept of the living-dead, more so in the religious sense, may not struggle to accept the message of the resurrection, which message is key to the Christian Gospel. This is integral to the contextualization of the Gospel for Christians in Africa, especially those who have a deep connection with the traditional religion in light of the globalized world in which we live today. This is not a mere analogy; in fact, “through his [Jesus’] death, Jesus Christ is the Ancestor not by analogy, but by his matchless

obedience to the Father and the necessary reality of death as a prerequisite for ancestorhood.”²⁶

Those from the ancestral background can identify with the description that the glorified Christ gives of himself, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:18, NIV). Jesus Christ made this statement to Apostle John in the Revelation. In his pursuit of spirituality, John encountered an enigmatic figure in a vision. This is Jesus Christ in his glorified state, since there was a divine manifestation.²⁷ His depiction of the one he saw paints a picture of someone who can evoke fear and awe. Consequently, John could not stand on his feet. He was overwhelmed by the glory of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ becomes for us, therefore, the epitome of our spiritual pursuit. Our encounter with Christ must provide the full answer to the questions that lie at the heart of our religion. He is the full realization of any essential ideas that we may hold concerning our knowledge of God. For Africa, the belief in the ancestors that has spawned various religious practices would bring home the message about Christ, who died but is now alive forever and ever; the Christ whose appearance in glory evokes fear and wonder, and hence one who should be revered and worshipped indeed.

Ancestorship is a glorified state of a person who died but is being held alive. Glory-Christology can draw from the African concept of ancestors. The Christ story will not be out of place for

²⁶ Rudolf K. Gaisie, *Jesus Christ as Logos Incarnate and Resurrected Nana (Ancestor): An African Perspective on Conversion and Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 198.

²⁷ David K. Bernard, *The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: Deification of Jesus in Early Christian Discourse* (Dorset: Deo, 2016), 98.

the Africans. He is not only dead and now alive; he has conquered death, the troubler of humanity. Since he has dealt with death, what misfortune can't he deal with? He is all-powerful. The Africans must consult Christ and look upon his gentle heart.

Jesus Christ, Son of God in Power

Writing to a group of Christians who, by and large, do not belong to the original Jewish stock, Apostle Paul gives a description of Jesus Christ that is apt and instructive. Right from the outset, in his letter to the church in Rome, he endeavors to connect the Christian to Christ. Concerning Jesus, he writes, "as to his earthly life was a descendant of David" (Romans 1:3, NIV). Whilst those Christians, because they are Gentiles, may find no association with one who is a descendant of David, the second part of the description Paul gives him here demonstrates otherwise. He continues that "through the Spirit of holiness [Jesus] was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

There is a more excellent sonship to desire, that is, to be a son of God. Jesus did not receive this position because of his lineage, but what has been granted by the Spirit. This provision of God would make it possible for people from any religio-cultural context to become sons of God. Consequently, he adds that "through him [Jesus] we received grace and apostleship to call the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake" (Romans 1:5, NIV). He assures the Gentile Christians that they "are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:6, NIV).

This appointment came with power by the resurrection. One who becomes an ancestor wields power because the person undergoes a metamorphosis in which the person becomes a

spiritual being. Here also, we see the resemblance Jesus has to the ancestors. Meanwhile, for Jesus Christ, his resurrection is a bodily one. It is not even a case of the spirit of an ancestor possessing a body, as may be seen among some Africans, but rather, the body that died was resurrected incorruptible. The Spirit of holiness that makes this possible shows that it is not by chance that Jesus rose from the dead. There is a cause that brought about that effect; just as a certain way of life that one lives by would qualify that person as an ancestor, which would, in turn, crown the person with power.

Implications for African Pentecostal Perception of the Ancestors

The ancestors of the African traditional religion are powerful. Pentecostal Christians also claim the power to enable them to deal with certain issues of life. Here, an important dichotomy emerges. The effect of this gap is the heightening of spiritual warfare in African Pentecostalism with its accompanying deliverance ministry.

In the Ghanaian context, there is a craving for power that would fortify one in life. The worldview is replete with power struggles. Those who can amass more power stand tall in society. People, therefore, make every effort to align themselves with beings within the spirit world who can bestow power on them. It is here that the role of the ancestors becomes critical. Largely, the ancestors are good spirits who come to the aid of people to enable them to deal with evil.

Pentecostalism, in the various waves it came in Africa, claims to empower its adherents to prevail over all ills in life. This will prove to earn the attention of the Africans who wanted to overcome evil spirits. The claim of power in Pentecostalism due to the active presence and activity of the Holy Spirit has generated

a doctrinal stance that wages war on the traditional source of power for good living in an African indigenous society.

From one angle, it is the perception with which the Western missionaries approached African culture that led to the demonization of the culture. The churches that emerged, therefore, sought to break any links they had with their traditions. Indeed, culture is dynamic, but an attempt to run away from it is like trying to evade your own shadow. Interestingly, whilst converts to Christianity from African traditional religious backgrounds resolve to come from among their people, they betray this resolution when evil strikes. In addition, it becomes difficult for these converts to do away with key rites of their community, even if they claim they abstain from them. Busia, in a socio-anthropological study he did among a Ghanaian community, makes this observation:

Taken together, the activities of the Christian Churches and Associations pervade in a significant way the life of the community. But as one watches the daily lives and activities of the people, and takes account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvests, or installations to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lie outside their Christian activities, and that for all their influence, the Christian Churches are still alien institutions, intruding upon, but not integrated with indigenous social institutions.²⁸

This realization attests to the fact that the converts cannot deny those things that give them an identity. Why must the

²⁸ K. A. Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies for the Gold Coast Government, 1950), 79.

Christian Church not engage these indigenous religio-cultural structures? Is this not better than making losses due to the consequences of their attempted alienation from the traditional religious thought and practice?

In the first wave of Pentecostals, the African Initiated Churches (AICs) attempted to provide answers to some of the questions the African converts to Christianity were asking. The display of spiritual power by the AICs appeals more to the Africans, as is also seen among the traditional religious folk. This “power ministry” brought home the Gospel to them.²⁹

Prophet William Wade Harris, the pioneer of the AICs in West Africa, exemplifies this very well.³⁰ In the year (1910) when missionaries from around the world sat down in Edinburgh at a conference and saw no hope for the rise of Christianity in Africa, Prophet Harris received a vision whilst in prison for alleged civil disobedience.³¹ This divine encounter was to prepare him to begin a movement that would blaze the trail for a great harvest of souls in West Africa. His ministry was accompanied by victory in spiritual power contests, healings, exorcisms, baptism of converts, and even social transformation. Many who encountered the Gospel surrendered their fetishes to be burnt. One thing that is remarkable about his ministry was his predisposition to the use of indigenous elements for worship, including the mother tongue.³² Kwame Bediako described Harris as “a paradigm of ‘the primal

²⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2015), 6.

³⁰ David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris: The ‘Black Elijah’ of West Africa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 6

³¹ Shank, *Prophet Harris*, 4

³² Shank, *Prophet Harris*, 6-11.

imagination.”³³ This appeal to the primal religious belief and praxis found a deep connection with their understanding of salvation. Essentially, the power ministry of the Prophet Harris and eventually the AICs satisfy their religious aspirations. This demonstration of power affords the African Christians the resources needed to live meaningfully in their world. This presentation of the Gospel by the AICs provided answers to the insecurities the converts had per their spiritual cosmology.

From another angle, the Pentecostal churches in Africa, which to a significant extent are born from indigenous actions, have also grown to develop a theology that is in enmity with important aspects of African traditions. The fact that there may be remnants of the Western conception of African culture among the African indigenous Christian movements cannot be denied. A war was declared on aspects of the African traditions. The ancestors who wield certain power in the spirit world and are called upon in times of crises are today classified among the sources of the misfortunes of people. Consequently, there is a clash of power between the community of Pentecostals and the traditional African community. Meanwhile, the way many Pentecostal leaders minister in Africa is deeply patterned after what pertains to the traditional religion.

The rightful place must necessarily be given to Christ in the African scheme of understanding the world, which scheme is deeply religious. If the Pentecostal churches in Africa fail to utilize the gracious revelation of Jesus in their culture but associate the beings in the African spirit world with the misfortunes that befall them, then, people who are shrewd enough to take note of

³³ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2013), 86.

this weakness in the African Pentecostal way of appropriating the Christian faith will continue to rise on the continent. They will continue to deceive the masses in the name of delivering them from evil. Deliverance will grow and have negative implications on Christian discipleship. Jesus Christ has gone ahead of all cultures. His shadow is embedded in the religio-cultural ideologies and practices. The cultures of the world must look after Christ and catch up with him so that Jesus Christ will be fully realized in the diverse contexts people dwell.

We must take a cue from the fact that Jesus Christ became a priest to save the Jews and the rest of the world, though he belongs to the tribe of Judah, which is not heir to the priesthood ministry. Drawing attention to the universal effect of the ministry of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, and the mythology of the ancestral cult, Jesus Christ comes out as the true ancestor to look upon. Jesus has been presented as belonging to a unique category of ancestorship; an ancestor after a different order. Bediako is of the view that Jesus Christ is “the only real true Ancestor.”³⁴

Considering the incidence of evil also proceeding from the realm of the spirit, Bediako points out that Jesus “has gone there [realm of the spirits] as Lord over the living and the dead, and the living-dead [ancestors] . . . he is supreme over all gods and authorities in the realm of the spirit” and to cancel threats that may come from the spiritual universe.³⁵ Though B. Y. Quarshie suggests that Bediako’s call for finding a place for Jesus Christ in the spiritual universe in connection with religious needs and aspirations “is rather narrow and must be enlarged to include the

³⁴ Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 27.

³⁵ Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 31.

totality of life as inclusive of the spiritual and the physical,”³⁶ it is contended here that the totality of life in Africa is perceived as spiritual with a telling impact on the physical world. Conversely, when the spiritual realm is dealt with, it trickles down to the realm of the physical. This vindicates Bediako. To this end, if Christ is presented as the ancestor of a higher order, African Pentecostals on a quest to establish a link between their traditional religion and Christianity will be able to put Jesus Christ into a more recognizable category within the African realm of the spirits. From this point of great Christological emphasis, which is now to be seen in the light of ancestor Christology, the supremacy of Christ in the spiritual warfare of the Pentecostals can be pursued.

The Holy Spirit, who is poured on Pentecostals in power for them to demonstrate charismata, must not be detached from the event which led to this great outpouring that is seriously appropriated in Pentecostalism. This happened for the Holy Spirit to be poured: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you see” (Acts 2:33, NKJV). This exaltation must be emphasized. There must be an appreciation of the foreshadowing of this in the African context. When Jesus Christ died, came back to life, and was glorified, he was exalted on high above all else. We look upon him for grace. The pointer to the heart of the Christian gospel in the African Traditional

³⁶ J. Benhardt Y. Quarshie, “‘Jesus, Pioneer and Perfector of Faith’ (Heb. 12:2): Kwame Bediako’s Hebrews-based Ancestor Christology Revisited’ in Gillian Mary Bediako, Benhardt Y. Quarshie & J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (eds.), *Seeing New Facets of the Diamond: Christianity as a Universal Faith* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2014), 25.

religion, which is also the center of this indigenous religion, must not be taken for granted.

Conclusion

In the theology and practice of deliverance ministry, the supremacy of Christ must be the focus. Christ is the Supreme Being who is the all-powerful being in the African spirit world. Colossians 2:9-10, 15 bears witness to this when it tells of the cosmic supremacy of Christ thus: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority . . . And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” This understanding must be built up in the minds of African Pentecostals. A pastoral guidance of this nature will lead to Christian maturity in which the Christian will find rest in Christ and not roam about seeking after oracles and miracles from people who claim to have the antidote to evil.

The demonization of the ancestral cult³⁷ must be discouraged. Drawing on the mythology argument of Bediako as a case for Jesus Christ as the only real and true ancestor functionally, why demonize myths that God has significantly utilized in revealing himself throughout generations and across cultures? Meanwhile, whilst an outsider to a culture may claim that beliefs in the ancestors are superstitions, to the people who

³⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Worship or Reverence? Kwame Bediako’s Ancestor Christology Revisited,’ *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (December 2018), 47.

dwell in that context, such beliefs are real.³⁸ The key point to consider here is that these beliefs about the spiritual universe are flickers of truth. In the words of the Psalmist, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:23, KJV).

Imposing deliverance or exorcism³⁹ on persons from ancestral backgrounds by some Pentecostals, who make deliverance a specialized ministry, undermines the power of salvation in Christ. Opoku Onyinah observes that some Pentecostals, from their understanding that the ancestor cult connotes idolatry, take people who have been involved in practices linked with ancestor veneration through deliverance.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, he shows that taking a person who presents him or herself for exorcism due to the life condition he or she is involved in can make the condition worse if the exorcism is unsuccessful.⁴¹

The Gospel of Christ is indeed powerful for the salvation of everyone, notwithstanding his or her cultural extractions. Christ must rather be given his place of supremacy within the African spirit world. Considering the nature of Christ, what he accomplishes by his death and resurrection, empowerment and glorification, and the nature and special role of the ancestors in the

³⁸ E. A. Asamoah, ‘The Christian Church and African Heritage’, in Ram Desai (eds.), *Christianity in Africa as Seen by African* (Denver: A. Swallow, 1962), 135.

³⁹ The term “exorcism” is usually used by Roman Catholics, and “deliverance” is used by Protestants. See Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession & Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 82.

⁴⁰ Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2012), 47.

⁴¹ Opoku Onyinah, *Spiritual Warfare: A Centre for Pentecostal Theology* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 158.

world of the spirits, he must be seen as the Supreme Ancestor, the *Christus Victor* in the African spirit world.