

JESUS AS PROTO-ANCESTOR

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Abstract

Within the framework of Yoruba trado-religious understanding, this essay seeks to evaluate the reasoning behind the possibility of describing Jesus as an ancestor—a *Proto-Ancestor*—and the theological implications of such a description. The essay appraises specifically, the African ancestral Christology within the Yoruba trado-religious understanding. The essay ends with the author's response to the theologically controversial practice.

Introduction

To be African is, generically speaking, to be religious *and* communally minded. As John Mbiti rightly stated, '[t]he African is notoriously religious.'¹ The common thread of a belief in a Supreme Being who creates, oversees and influences all of life runs through the tapestry of Africa's diverse cultures—albeit, with differing nuances and emphases.

The compartmentalisation of and distinction between the spiritual and the physical—as in post-Enlightenment Western thought—is foreign to African reasoning, hence Olupona’s assertion that ‘African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life.’² Furthermore, African identity is forged in the fires of communal relationships.³ This communal mindedness informs the religiosity of Africans such that the communal relationships between Africans transcend the relationships between living members of one’s family, tribe and society, to also include relationships with the *living dead*—the deceased members of one’s people group—generally referred to as *ancestors* and believed to participate actively in the religious and social life of the people.

Given the prevalence of belief in ancestors in the African culture,⁴ different African theologians and/or Afro-Christologians had advocated for a Christology that resonates with this belief. Asante, for example, argues for African modes of conceptualisation to be the crux of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour.⁵ In other words, to Africans who do not need to divorce their African culture in order to become Christian, effectively communicating theological truths in African thought becomes imperative.⁶ Hence, Bujo asks, ‘In which way can Jesus Christ be an African among the Africans according to their own religious experience?’⁷ He argues that one way to do this is by exploring the religious significance of ancestors among Africans and thus proposes Christ as a *Proto-Ancestor*—following the submission of some forerunners in the discourse including Pobee,⁸ Mutiso-Mbinda,⁹ Nyamiti,¹⁰ Milingo,¹¹ Dickson¹² and Kabasele.¹³ This position did not end with Bujo as other Afro-Christologians continued unpacking and building upon this premise including Kwame Bediako who argues further that

Christ, by virtue of his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension into the realm of spirit power, can rightly be designated, in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed Supreme Ancestor.¹⁴

However, while the aforementioned and other prominent African theologians have favoured this position in their writings,¹⁵ the position remains a controversial debate. Sawyerr,¹⁶ Appiah-Kubi¹⁷ and Stinton¹⁸ among others have argued against the conclusion of Jesus being an ancestor. This essay intends to add to this discourse, beginning by unpacking an African understanding of ancestors, followed by a critical examination of how Jesus fits—or does not—this African ancestral understanding (specifically within the Yoruba Traditional Religion¹⁹). The essay concludes with a personal submission on the ‘Jesus as Proto-Ancestor’ controversy.

Ancestors: An African Understanding

It needs to be said from the outset that the African understanding of ancestral belief is as varied as there are ethnic groups in Africa. However, there are similar features across the ethnicities as articulated in Nyamiti’s 5-point description of ancestors.²⁰ First, he notes that the relationship between ancestors and those who venerate them as such is generally of **natural or biological descent**. In this sense, children will naturally consider their deceased parents and grandparents as their direct ancestors while also considering other deceased members of their lineage in a more distant past as their ancestors, too. This backward-looking relationship between the living (present) and the dead (past) is based on an African conceptualisation of time.²¹ The African concept of time places emphasis on two dimensions of time, *past* and *present*, which both contributes to what happens in the potential future. Moreover, contrary to Western conceptualisation of time (linear and forward moving), as Mbiti argues, the African understanding is that “[a]ctual time . . . moves ‘backward’ rather than ‘forward’; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly in what has taken place.”²² To this end, Mbiti proposes two Swahili words: *Sasa* (‘now-period’ or ‘now-ness’)²³ and *Zamani* (‘the past’) to convey an African understanding of time, emphasising an overlap and inseparability of both concepts.²⁴

This African concept of time feeds directly into Nyamiti's second characteristic of ancestors: their **supernatural status**. In the hierarchy of African ontology, it is believed that humans who have lived longer in the *Sasa*—the older ones among the living—have more authority. Even more so, those who have been transitioned from the *Sasa* to the *Zamani* are ushered into a higher ontological category that confers upon them a supernatural status that gives them power and authority over all that remains in the *Sasa*. Due to the centrality of this *Zamani* time concept in African religious thought, Mbiti argues, ancestors hold supernatural status and are ontologically the future of all humanity.²⁵ From another perspective, as parents transmit life to their offspring, ancestors are believed to impart life to the living, and as Mulago submits, 'whoever gives life or any means towards life to another person is to that extent superior to him.'²⁶ To this end, ancestors, in their personal relationship with their descendants, can be implored occasionally for advice on personal issues, venerated and/or worshipped, albeit ambiguously, and they are believed to be capable of bestowing good fortune or misfortune.

Third, the sacred status of the ancestors places them in a capacity to **mediate between God and humanity**. As Bujo rightly noted, 'Life is a participation in God, but it is always mediated by one standing above the recipient in the hierarchy of being.'²⁷ Of course, the African ontological hierarchy pinnacles with God at the top and ends with humans at its base. In between these two categories, however, are spirits which 'consist of extra-human beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago.'²⁸ In this understanding, it is believed that God transmits life through the ancestors such that 'Africans see life as a gift from God *and* from the ancestors.'²⁹ This confers a natural mediatory characteristic on ancestors as they 'live on in their descendants.'³⁰ It should be emphasised, however, that ancestors are not of divine nature. While they may be venerated and worshipped, they, in turn, worship God.³¹

Nyamiti's fourth characteristic is the **sacred communication** that goes on between the ancestors and their descendants. An ancestor is only reckoned as one if his or her spirit remains in contact with the descen-

dants and remains active in the daily routine of the family.³² Mbiti posits that ancestors could be acknowledged for up to four or five generations after which their memory fades and they are reckoned as being truly dead.³³ Even then, their spirit continues to reside in the spirit world. Finally, the characteristic of **exemplarity** which portrays ancestors as instructors of appropriate social behaviours having lived a life worth emulating. It is this feature of ancestorship, as Sarpong argues,³⁴ that disqualifies many from the privilege of being acknowledged as ancestors even after their transition from *Sasa* into *Zamani*. To become an ancestor must have been precluded by living a full life evidenced by longevity, reproduction, and a natural death.³⁵

Jesus as Proto-Ancestor?

The question of Jesus is central to the Christian faith both on an individual level and as a people group. If, as in the New Testament, Jesus was analogised by such metaphorical ideas as Son, Teacher, King, and Saviour—albeit in a class of his own—what is to stop us from analogising him through the metaphor of an ancestor—in a class of his own? To wrestle with this question, having admitted differing nuances and emphases in ancestral belief across various ethnic groups in Africa, it will be appropriate to place the discourse in the context of the tradition of an ethnic group. For this purpose, the Yoruba tradition is chosen.³⁶ The task at hand is not to summarise Yoruba traditional religion but to examine some of its fundamental elements that has to do with ancestor belief and its implication for an Ancestor Christology.

Central to the understanding of Yoruba traditional religion are five fundamental beliefs including belief in *God (Supreme Being), divinities, ancestors, spirits and mysterious powers*.³⁷ While none of these will be discussed in detail, the first three will be considered briefly as they are central to an understanding of ancestor Christology. Yorubas call God *Olorun*³⁸ or *Olodumare*.³⁹ In Yoruba cosmology, it may appear that *Olorun* is distant and remote, as some scholars have suggested.⁴⁰ However, he pervades the reasoning of Yorubas so much

that personal and private ejaculatory prayers can be made to him, and his name is often used in greetings, proverbs and incantations.⁴¹ Hence, Olowola strongly argues—quite convincingly—that the Yorubas maintain a vital relationship with *Olodumare*.⁴² Precisely, however, he is worshipped through the worship of divinities. This seeming aloofness in *Olodumare*'s dealing with humanity, however, has not always been the case according to different versions of Yoruba myths which describe a time when heaven and earth were so close that there was 'uninhibited communication between the two'⁴³ until some misbehaviour on the part of humans led to their separation from God.⁴⁴ This necessitates a need for intermediaries between humans and God⁴⁵—a need fulfilled by the divinities (known as *Orisa*⁴⁶). They are believed to be the offspring of *Olodumare* and possessors of his attributes.⁴⁷ Traditional Yoruba people approach the divinities to express their dependence on them by making sacrifices to them in hopes of receiving their help for different things—protection, provision, fruitfulness, healing, direction, prosperity, etc.⁴⁸ In gratitude for help received, they offer sacrifices, worship or even give theophoric names to their offspring in honour of the divinity that favoured them.⁴⁹ The divinities, besides being intermediaries between men and God also act as society's guardians of morality.⁵⁰ Violation of the community's morality code attracts misfortune as punishment from the divinities while adherence attracts their blessing.

While some parts of Africa favour an acknowledgement of ancestors over divinities, the Yorubas acknowledge both quite extensively. The ancestors are the dead parents of the family believed to continue existing as spirits after their death and with an undying interest in the welfare of their families. In this regard, they are 'spiritual superintendents of family affairs'.⁵¹ Yorubas depend heavily on their ancestors in every aspect of life just like they depend on divinities, except that 'a person's relationship with the ancestors is closer and more cordial than the relationship with the divinities.'⁵² One common limitation of ancestors, however, is that their influence is limited to their specific families.⁵³

The Jesus of the bible fits these three categories of divine revelation—Supreme Being, divinity and ancestor—in superlative dimensions. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day understood that Jesus’ claim transcends being a Son of God to being ‘God’—the equivalent of the *Supreme Being* in African traditional belief.⁵⁴ More prominently, his mediatory role between men and God places him as a divinity, and his accessibility and cordiality (as portrayed in the Gospels) draws his divinity into the ancestor category. While divinities and ancestors are revered in part for their possession of God’s attributes, it is clear that no single divinity or ancestor encompasses the fullness of all the attributes of God. Jesus, however, is presented in the New Testament as ‘the complete fullness of deity living in human form’,⁵⁵ ‘the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.’⁵⁶ Further, Jesus fulfils the role of ancestors—the role of being the guardians of morality in their community—in that he has become the perfect example for all his followers.⁵⁷ In the same breath with which Paul puts forward the *brother ancestorship* of Jesus,⁵⁸ he also points to the goal of Jesus’ followers (his brothers and sisters), viz: ‘to be conformed to [his] image’. There are specific situations in the book of Acts which fit the ministry of Jesus within the framework of the role of ancestors in guarding morality.⁵⁹ Like the Yoruba ancestors, Jesus influences the morality of his followers by maintaining *sacred communication* with them—both through the scriptures and (demonstrations of) the indwelling Spirit of God.

Some scholars have questioned Bujo’s ancestor Christology by denouncing his limited application of the *ancestor* category to only good and God-fearing ancestors.⁶⁰ Specifically, Bujo posits, ‘[w]e are not speaking of ancestors whose activities after death spread fear and anxiety rather than love among the living.’⁶¹ He did not factor, it would seem, the full meaning that the word ‘ancestor’ conveys to various Africans in their various contexts. In any case, it is here argued that the underlying tension here—both for Bujo and his critics—is a limited understanding of the attributes of God. More often than none, the Christian God is presented as being superlatively *good*, albeit, with the

meaning of *goodness* being shaped exclusively by how humans perceive goodness.⁶² A thorough examination of the attributes of God (a task which no human mind can comprehensively accomplish)—notably his goodness, love, justice and sovereignty—can and should lead us to images of God that are beyond the stereotypical categories of our imaginations about him, and perhaps, give room for attributes expressed in ancestors to whom we will not readily liken Jesus—albeit in the purest and just expression of those attributes.

Jesus as Proto-Ancestor: Personal Submission

Presenting Jesus as an ancestor, much like any other metaphor by which he could be presented, is not without its problematic tensions. However, the tensions do not rule out the viability of such a representation. If ancestors are *living dead* members of one's lineage, so is Jesus. Except that he is not only living in the afterlife spirit-realm sense; he resurrected *bodily* on this side of eternity and ascended into heaven *bodily*—a claim that no ancestor can make. And while non-Jews may find it problematic to relate to an ancestor that is not from their lineage, this can be resolved in either of two ways. One way is to understand Jesus' genealogy in the Lukan sense.⁶³ Luke traces Jesus' genealogy ultimately back to Adam, the first human and direct descendant of God's creative force, thus linking Jesus' human ancestry to all tribes on earth. And that Luke relays this genealogy account just after God declares Jesus as his 'beloved Son' makes this take more striking. Another way to resolve this is to duly acknowledge one of the mysteries unpacked in the New Testament, viz: the mystery of a new family of God's people—a single body that transcends racial lines and in which Jesus can conveniently be an ancestor to every member. The limitation of ancestors being able to influence only the members of their families is thus taken away in Jesus Christ and placing him in a class above other ancestors—a *Proto-Ancestor*.

If ancestors are mediators between humans and God, so is Jesus.⁶⁴ Except that not only is he a mediator of the new covenant between both

parties, but he is also God—‘very God of very God!’⁶⁵ If ancestors have a personal interest in the affairs of the family they left behind, so does Jesus. Except that his love for his family ultimately expressed in laying down his life for them is such as is unrivalled by any ancestor, for greater love has no man than that.⁶⁶ Ancestors continue to communicate and commune with their family members, so does Jesus—for as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the members of his family.⁶⁷ If ancestors are guardians of morality and ethics, so is the Spirit of Jesus who both teaches us God’s will and empowers us to do it.⁶⁸ The bible speaks of the living faithfuls being surrounded by ‘a cloud of many witnesses’⁶⁹—those who have walked the walk and now live on in the limitless presence of the Father cheering on the living as they run the race of faith—the Africans speak of their ancestors in the same light. Jesus calls God the ‘God of the living, not the dead’⁷⁰; the Africans think of *Olorun* in the same light.

We speak of Jesus as the King, but we know he is not a king in the King-James- or King-Herod-sense of the word. So we call him the ‘King of kings’. We address Jesus as Lord, but surely not in the same class as ‘Lord Lugard’, so we call him the ‘Lord of lords’.⁷¹ We call him the ‘Son of Man’ or ‘Son of God’ but we know he’s a son in a class of his own. Whatever contexts any metaphor is used in application to the triune God and either of the three Persons therein—be it Jewish or Western, or Asian or African—we know that he is all that, and infinitely more. He is a King like no other, Lord like no other, Son like no other, Saviour like no other and most definitely an Ancestor like no other. African Christians that made the transition from African Traditional Religion to Christianity came to the conclusion that in Jesus—and his Holy Spirit—is found an embodiment of all that they have ascribed to various divinities and ancestors, only in a much purer and more potent sense.⁷² It is therefore not uncommon to see Africans change their theophoric names—forenames or last names—substituting divinities for *God* or *Jesus*.⁷³ Tope Alabi, a popular Nigerian Christian artiste recently awarded ‘Luminary of Yoruba Artistry’⁷⁴ and well known for her vastness in panegyrics for God in undiluted Yoruba

language, freely ascribes to God and to Jesus the same panegyrics that used to be ascribed to some ancestors or divinities.⁷⁵ In many of her countless songs, she praises God as ‘*owo kembe rebi ija*’⁷⁶ which literally means ‘the one who wears baggy trousers to the war front.’ This was, in fact, an adulation for *Ogunmola*, an ancestral warrior figure amongst the Ibadan people in south-west Nigeria.⁷⁷ It makes sense for Tope Alabi—and any other Yoruba Christian—to conceptualise Jesus as a warrior like Ogunmola, except that he is infinitely more powerful than Ogunmola.

It is important to mention, however, that there are Africans today who due to different factors—globalisation, urbanisation, (post-)modernity, etc—do not embrace ancestral belief at all. It will be meaningless to present Jesus and his good news to such people in *ancestor wrapping*. To those who still acknowledge ancestral beliefs in their worldview, however, presenting Jesus as an ancestor—a Proto Ancestor—is a viable point to begin a Christological presentation, albeit as a beginning. Ancestor Christology is, on its own, incapable of providing total Christology to African Christians (and neither is any other type of Christology on its own). However, it provides a bridge to commence journeying from a significant African reality to an understanding of crucial aspects of Christ's functions, namely his mediation and guidance. Such a representation acknowledges that Africans are not ignorant of God. Rather, it validates divine revelation within African Religion prior to the re-introduction of Christianity to the continent.⁷⁸ It will be employing Paul's missiological approach to the Greeks in Athens by readily acknowledging their altar to the ‘Unknown God’ and introducing them to the same without outrightly dismissing their existing revelation of God in their many other deities.⁷⁹ If indeed Jesus is the epitome of the revelation of God, to introduce him to anyone or any people group will be to primarily acknowledge their dimension of the revelation of God, and then journey with them from where they are to a fuller truth. Can presenting Jesus as a Proto-Ancestor to Africans foster such a gospel retransmission? This author is persuaded that it can.

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1. John S Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), p. 1.
2. Jacob Olupona and Anthony Chiorazzi, 'The Spirituality of Africa', *The Harvard Gazette*, 2015 <<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/10/the-spirituality-of-africa/>> [accessed 1 September 2019]. Jacob Olupona is a Professor of Indigenous African religions at Harvard Divinity School and Professor of African and African-American studies in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences.
3. This social philosophy upon which African culture is established has often been referred to as *Ubuntu*—the interconnectedness and common humanity of the African peoples that calls upon each one to feel and believe that: "Your pain is My pain, My wealth is Your wealth, Your salvation is My salvation." *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*—a person is a person because of others. See Barbara Nussbaum, 'African Culture and Ubuntu', *Perspectives*, 17.1 (2003), 1–12.
4. See James Thayer Addison, 'Ancestor Worship in Africa', *Harvard Theological Review*, 17.2 (1924), 155–71.
5. Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), p. 2.
6. Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 11.
7. Bujo, p. 12.
8. Pobe had earlier proposed a similar ancestor Christology in 1979. In his words, 'Our approach would be to look on Jesus as the Great and Greatest Ancestor—in Akan language Nana . . . [Yet,] he is superior to the other ancestors by virtue of being closest to God and as God.' See John S Pobe, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 94.
9. J Mutiso-Mbinda, 'Anthropology and the Paschal Mystery', *Spearhead* 59 (Eldoret: Ggaba Publications, 1979), p. 52.
10. In his 1984 book, *Christ as our Ancestor*, Nyamiti distinguishes between the popular parent ancestorship and the less popular brother ancestorship, ascribing the latter to Jesus—the 'firstborn among many brothers' (Romans 8:29). He submits that Christ 'shines forth as the Brother Ancestor par excellence, of whom the African ancestors are but faint and poor images.' See Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Mambo Press, 1984), p. 70.
11. Emmanuel Milingo, *The World in between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 78.
12. Dickson is a Ghanaian Methodist. In 1984, he writes: 'Christ was the perfect victim; by his death he merits, to use an African image, to be looked upon as

- Ancestor, the greatest of ancestors, who never ceases to be one of the 'living-dead,' because there always will be people alive who knew him, whose lives were irreversibly affected by his life and work . . .' See Kwesi A Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), pp. 197-198.
13. François Kabasele, 'Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother', in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. by Robert Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 123-4.
 14. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 217.
 15. See Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 85; Marc Ntetem, 'Initiation, Traditional and Christian', in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. by J. Parratt, rev (London: SPCK, 1997), p. 102.
 16. Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 93.
 17. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, 'Jesus Christ-Some Christological Aspects from African Perspectives', in *African Dilemma: A Cry for Life* (EATWOT, 1992), pp. 58-73.
 18. Diane B Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).
 19. The Yoruba Traditional religion is practised in the South Western part of Nigeria and elsewhere in the diaspora.
 20. Cited in Jaco Beyers and Dora N Mphahlele, 'Jesus Christ as Ancestor: An African Christian Understanding', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 65.1 (2009), 38-42 <<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v65i1.132>>.
 21. It goes without saying that since ancestry is a chronological reality, ancestorship will be heavily influenced by how time is conceived.
 22. Mbiti, p. 17.
 23. Mbiti, p. 21.
 24. Mbiti, p. 22.
 25. Mbiti, p. 16.
 26. Vincent Mulago, 'Traditional African Religion and Christianity', in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. by Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1991), p. 121.
 27. Bujo, p. 20.
 28. Mbiti, p. 15.
 29. Bujo, p. 26. Emphasis added.
 30. Bujo, p. 20.
 31. Diane B Stinton, 'Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christologies' (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), p. 135.
 32. Mbiti, p. 82.
 33. Mbiti, p. 83.
 34. Cited by Stinton, 'Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christologies', pp. 134-135.
 35. As opposed to death by suicide, unclean disease, accident, or death during childbirth.
 36. This ethnic group and their traditional religion is chosen for a couple of reasons. Besides this author being from this ethnic group (and hence, a participant

- critique), “The situation in Yoruba religion is a near representative of the situation in the whole of Africa” as Ade Dopamu, Professor of Religion, has observed. See Ade Dopamu, ‘The Yoruba Religious System’, *Africa Update*, 6.3 (1999), 2–17, p. 3.
37. J Omoṣade Awolalu and P Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press & Book Industries, 1979), pp. 34, 240.
 38. It means ‘the Owner of heaven’ or ‘the Lord of heaven’. See Awolalu and Dopamu, p. 37.
 39. Unlike *Olorun*, *Olodumare* is not as fully self-explanatory and has always been ‘a subject of much guess-work and debate.’ See E Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962), p. 33. However, while the etymology and origin of the name remains debatable, Yorubas believe that *Olodumare* is an immortal, eternal Supreme Being who possesses authority, goodness and power in its superlative form. Hence, Awolalu and Dopamu suggest that *Olodumare* means ‘The King unique who holds the sceptre, wields authority and has the quality which is superlative in worth, and He is at the same time permanent, unchanging and reliable.’ See Awolalu and Dopamu, p. 38.
 40. Specifically because *Olorun* has no priests, no temples, no shrines, no communal prayers, no annual ceremonies dedicated to him, and he ‘does not interfere directly in natural events and history but works through a host of intermediaries’. See Dopamu, pp. 3-4. Thomas Lawson corroborates this by suggesting that the Yorubas believe that *Olorun* is austere, remote, and difficult to approach in E Thomas Lawson, *Religions of Africa: Traditions in Transformation* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 58. Likewise, Bolaji Idowu suggests that the Yoruba believe that God is only concerned with his own welfare and his own greatness, and has no interest in the affairs of the world in E Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 144.
 41. See Dopamu, pp. 3-4..
 42. Cornelius Abiodun Olowola, ‘The Yoruba Traditional Religion: A Critique’ (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1983), p. 218.
 43. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, p. 144.
 44. Gbola Aderibigbe, ‘Yoruba Cosmology as a Theory of Creation: Limits and Assets’, *Asia Journal of Theology*, 13.2 (1999), 328–38, p. 331; E O Babalola, ‘Cosmogonic Stories in the Indigenous Religion of the Yoruba and the Bible: A Comparative Investigation’, *Bible Bhashyam*, 21.1 (1995), 204–14, p. 209.
 45. The similarity between these myths and the biblical account of the fall of the human race through Adam and Eve’s error (Gen 3) is quite striking.
 46. Plural: *Orisas*. See Kofi Johnson and Tunde Oyinade, ‘Monotheism in Traditional Yoruba Religion’, *Thinking about Religion*, 3 (2004), 1–8, p. 2.
 47. Dopamu, p. 5.
 48. Segun Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 93.
 49. For example, *Osunfunmilayo* which means ‘the goddess *Osun* gave me joy.’ See Joseph Adyinka Olanrewaju, ‘The Relationship Between People and Supernatural Beings in Yoruba Traditional Culture’, *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 5.2 (2009), 41–49, p. 44.

50. Theophilus N O Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: African Universities Press, 1987), p. 73.
51. Dopamu, p. 13.
52. Olanrewaju, p. 45.
53. Dopamu, p. 14.
54. While the question of whether Jesus is God and whether Jesus *knew* that he was God remain a scholarly argument amongst New Testament scholars, it is clear, as N.T. Wright argues, ‘. . . if you start with the God of the Exodus, of Isaiah, of creation and covenant, of the Psalms, and ask what that God might be like, were he to become human, you will find that he might look very much like Jesus of Nazareth, and perhaps never more so than when he dies on a Roman cross.’ See Nicholas Thomas Wright, ‘Jesus and the Identity of God’, *Ex Auditu*, 14 (1998), 42–56, p. 54; Jesus ‘believed he had to do and be, for Israel and the world, that which according to scripture only YHWH himself could do and be.’ See Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 653.
55. Colossians 2:9, The Passion Translation. The NRSV reads “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”.
56. Hebrews 1:3 NRSV. The Passion Translation reads: He is “the dazzling radiance of God’s splendour, the exact expression of God’s true nature—his mirror image!”
57. See 1 Peter 2:20-25
58. In Romans 8:29
59. For example, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead because they attempted to deceive the community of Jesus’ followers (Acts 5:1-11). The seven sons of Sceva were beaten by a demon possessed person because they were abusing the name of Jesus, their (Jewish) ancestor as it were (Acts 19:11-20). Saul of Tarsus was blinded by Jesus to dissuade him from a continued persecution of his followers (Acts 9:1-19). And Bar-Jesus was struck by temporary blindness for attempting to thwart the mission work of Jesus’ followers (Acts 13:6-12).
60. For example, Ben Langford, *The Role of Ancestors within African Traditional Religion*, 2014.
61. Bujo, p. 79.
62. The same could be said of other attributes of God. We only describe God in human terms and in consistence with human understanding of our comprehension of God. However, we must admit that this is a limited understanding.
63. See Charles A Wanamaker, ‘Jesus the Ancestor: Reading the Story of Jesus from an African Cristian Perspective’, *Scriptura*, 1997, 281–98, p. 292; Nyamiti, pp. 27-28.
64. See Hebrews 9:15; 1 Timothy 2:5
65. David Maxwell, ‘The Nicene Creed in the Church’, *Concordia Journal*, 41.1 (2015), p. 15.
66. See John 15:13
67. Romans 8:14
68. See Philippians 2:12-13
69. Hebrews 12:1
70. See Mark 12:27; Matthew 22:32-34

71. See Revelation 19:16; 1:5; Deuteronomy 10:17; Daniel 2:47; Psalm 136:3.
72. Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Introduction to African Traditional Religions (Unpublished Lecture Note)* (Liverpool, 2019)
73. See Reuben O Ikotun and Omobola A Aladesanmi, 'Surname Change among Some Yorùbá Christians', *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3.6 (2012), 903–8.
74. This was as a result of a competition by United Bank of Africa in their 70th year anniversary celebration. See 'Tope Alabi Crowned Luminary of Yoruba Artistry', *Oak TV Newstrack*, 2019 <<https://oak.tv/newstrack/commentsection-tope-alabi-ubaat70/>> [accessed 1 August 2019].
75. Tope Alabi's songs—especially her panegyrics—hold a rich untapped reserve that could facilitate a better (theological) understanding of Yoruba Christians. For more on her works and influence in Nigerian Entertainment Industry, see S T Adeyemi, 'The Culture Specific Application of Sound in Nigerian Video Movies', *Nigerian Music Review*, 5.1 (2004), 51–61; George Olusola Ajibade, 'New Wine in Old Cups: Postcolonial Performance of Christian Music in Yorùbá Land', *Studies in World Christianity*, 13.2 (2007), 105–26.
76. T.Y. Bello, 'WAR - Tope Alabi and TY Bello (Spontaneous Song)', *TY Bello (Instagram)*, 2019 <<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bt6LL0tBf4H/?hl=en>> [accessed 9 September 2019]
77. Lamidi Kolawole, 'Praise for Ibadan, "Ilu Ogunmola"', *Lamidi Kolawole (Twitter)*, 2017 <<https://twitter.com/LamidiKolawole3/status/1089137832642445312>> [accessed 9 September 2019]
78. Abioje makes a convincing case for such with regards to Yoruba Traditional religion in Pius Oyeniran Abioje, 'Divine Revelation in Yoruba Traditional Religion and in Christianity', *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6.4 (2013), 42–49.
79. Acts 17

