Jesus as Guest, Host, and Meal: Three Images as Approach to the Christological Problem in Africa

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In Africa, the Christological problem is a deep quest that deals with the integration of Christ into the African worldview. At the core of the Christological problem in Africa are the perceived foreignness of Jesus Christ and the question of his divinity.[1]

In the African worldview, the metaphysical conception is of a hierarchy in beings, with God at the top because of his perfection, and human beings and other beings at the bottom. Between God and the human beings are intermediaries or mediators such as spirits-divinities who are governors of the world, the ancestors who are intercessors, and the diviners, who, being "bilingual," can communicate both with the spiritual and the earthly world. Even as that religious or metaphysical universe allows the mediation of intermediaries and acknowledges the existence of some "divinities," it does perceive their role as subordinate to the Absolute and Supreme Being. In such a monotheistic setting, the divinity of Christ, his consubstantiality with God, is incomprehensible. If Jesus is perceived as a stranger in the African's metaphysical conception and religious system, he also remains an "alien in the lives and deliberations of the millions of African

1 Enyi Ben Udoh, *Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988), 81 and 212.

Christians."[2] In times of trouble or limit situations, many prefer to resort to the traditional diviners for quick answers and find more assurance and comfort in their traditional religion than in Christian rituals or its virtues such as faith and hope.[3]

From an African viewpoint, the identity and role of Jesus remain problematic. Regarding Christ's consubstantiality, he is perceived as an "illegal alien" who becomes out of place in the African religious system. He is likewise perceived as abrogating African religious institutions. As to his role and function, Christ is perceived to have little relevance to peoples' lives in times of trouble or is not believed to be powerful enough.[4] The Christological problem, which deals with the ontological dimension and the soteriological aspect, is related to the image of the foreignness of Christ, which has contributed to a double religious belonging.

2 Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, "The Quest for an African Christ," *Hekima Review* 11 (September 1994): 96.

3 People turn to traditional diviners because they are believed to give quick and tangible answers to people's struggles. At the same time, many pastors or priests usually recommend to people the Christian principles of hope and faith. Suppose the traditional diviners and medicine-men who seem capable of controlling the hidden or invisible forces to help others--are not wholly evil as some people may think. In that case, they also have an ambiguous part or even a mysterious or dark side since the same powers used to help people can be used to harm them. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), 26 and 30.

4 On the perception of Christ: A distinction should be made between the perception and the reality. The perception that many African Christians have may be related to the Christ presented to them by missionaries and even by the local Church today. While people firmly believe that misfortune, sickness, death always have a religious cause, the mainline local Churches generally regard those beliefs of people as merely superstitious, and they hesitate to offer a proper ministry of healing. As a consequence, many who are looking for something tangible and immediate healing believed that the Christ presented by the Church "is not powerful enough" to deal with their situation. Furthermore, this Christ does not intervene in the major cycle or challenge of their life.

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Udoh's Self-Understanding of His Project and His Methodology

The Primacy of the Christological Problem and Udoh's Proposal

Enyi Ben Udoh is convinced that African theology will have no substantial contribution if it fails to respond adequately to the Christological problem. For him, the Christ-question is both perennial and imperative. It is "perennial because every generation, every culture and every language which is associated with the image of Christ, has to respond to it. Imperative, because without adhering to it, no Christian body could fully mature and be firmly rooted so as not to be swept away by every wind of doctrine."[5] In other words, the Christological question for Udoh is an essential and legitimate matter which demands an answer. Udoh perceives his task as laying a foundation that can be perennial and on which others can build. Udoh distinguishes his project from other Christological proposals by affirming that his idea is meant to pinpoint the heart of the Christological problem and suggest a re-encounter with Christ.

Udoh approaches the Christological problem in Africa at two levels: the image of Christ's foreignness and the divinity of Christ. For Udoh, because of the tendency of the Western missionaries to impose Christ, by all means, Africans end up perceiving Jesus as an alien. Udoh states that it is imperative to change this image of Jesus as an illegal alien—which makes him vulnerable to rejection and even to exclusion—to being a legitimate guest. Since in Africa, a guest is seen as a benediction and is generally treated with due respect and

5 Udoh, *Guest Christology*, 164.

dignity. If Jesus is presented as a legitimate alien or a guest, he will be accepted and treated with honor by Africans. However, he will also be expected to conform to the customs of his African hosts. To reduce the gap between Christ and the Africans, Udoh builds a Christological approach which "undertakes a dialectical initiation of Christ and Africa to one another in a manner that does not alienate or dissolve the integrity of either party."[6] As a guest, Jesus has to move a step forward by passing through a cultural rite of initiation (inculturation), which will enable him to become a legitimate member of the clan.[7] A progressive change of status may lead Jesus to become slowly a kin and even a Lord.

As to the divinity of Jesus, Udoh states that a proper and suitable Christology should restore his full human status to him. For Udoh, the divinity of Jesus constitutes a stumbling block for Africans. The fact that Africans have difficulty conceiving the divinity of Christ in their worldview and belief system also leads them to perceive Jesus as foreign. The Christological problem in Africa is related to the image of the foreignness of Christ.

Methodology: Starting Point of a Guest Christology

Udoh rejects a Christology from above as a proper starting point and prefers to use a Christology from below. Instead of starting from the Lordship of Christ as some African theologians do, he prefers to begin with what he perceives as Christ's current status. The emphasis is not on doctrinal aspects but rather on the perception of Christ as experienced by Africans. Udoh also argues against a high Christology, which in his

6 Ibid., 17.
7 Ibid., 194.

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context seems inadequate. For him, a high Christology is improper for people for whom the divinity of Jesus—being also a human—appears as an absurdity.[8] It is then natural that he chooses a low Christology. Udoh goes back to where people locate Jesus, who is perceived as a foreigner. To encapsulate his idea, Udoh uses the metaphor of a guest. However, while this concept conveys a certain reality or points to Africans' experience, the term "guest" as a metaphor is itself limited because it reduces Jesus to a visitor or a mere human: "At best, it places him on equal footing with us. Because of that limitation . . . a Christian finds him or herself searching for answers outside of Christ. But a Christology designed to deal with those profound yearnings . . . will have to go beyond the mere guest symbolism. It must face up to the naturalization question in Africa."[9]

Udoh strongly believes that it is only after dealing with the alien image of Jesus that it can be possible to talk about his role in the salvation of persons. The proclamation of Jesus' Lordship by Africans should be the term of a process which presupposes a proper engagement with the Christological problem. A proper African Christology cannot bypass the actual given experience, the perception of Jesus as an alien, which is the root of the problem. If it does, there will be a

8 According to Udoh, the slogan "mann no bi god ; god no bi mann" literally means that man is not a god and god is not a man showing the African theism and how difficult it is to accept the divinity of Christ. For him, as an ordinary, normal, and Jewish male, Jesus does not raise serious problems for the African. His historicity is, therefore, incontestable even among non-Christian Africans. At issue is his divinity compounded by the Scottish emphasis in Nigeria. Udoh stresses the gap of communication between the missionaries and the Africans in these terms: "If the missionaries charged Africans with 'paganism' and religious ignorance because they rejected the divinity of Jesus, Africans consider Jesus' divinity blasphemous." Ibid., 167 and 264.

9 Ibid.

severe gap between the profession of faith and the living experience of the believers. Far from being a theoretical issue, this dilemma is perceptible in some Christians' actual living experience. In the same vein, Udoh states that:

> While the average member [in the Church] conceives of Christ as stranger, the Church unequivocally keeps celebrating his Lordship. Creeds, sermons and liturgies are addressed in a Lordship garb. The speakers and the audience, using two contrasting symbolisms to describe the one character, create for themselves a communication problem. So the gap becomes even wider between the preacher and the congregation, between the congregation and society at large.[10]

To close this gap, a proper methodology needs to start with Christ as a guest instead of Christ as Lord. Otherwise, while confessing the creeds or proclaiming Christ as Lord, Jesus will remain in the periphery of the people's lives or just the object of a pure slogan. Udoh's methodology obeys a certain dynamic or progress. By starting with Christ as a guest, Udoh's purpose is to dismiss the alien image of Christ so that people can accept him. According to him, it is only after dispelling the issue of foreignness of Jesus that his soteriological function or his Lordship can be addressed.

The Guest Paradigm

Jesus Our Guest

Udoh does not use the word "guest" in its broad and popular sense but in a restrictive sense. Guest for him describes a person who, by force or volition, has abandoned his historical

10 Ibid., 216.

roots for a new milieu or place where he starts a new life. By identifying Jesus as a guest, "we are suggesting that he is human; that his cradle-history belongs elsewhere; and that he is looking for understanding, love, and acceptance he could not find elsewhere."[11] These three main characteristics need to be clarified.

Historicity of Jesus as Point of Departure of Udoh's Christology

Udoh believes that historicity should be the point of departure of a Christology that tries to re-communicate God through Jesus of Nazareth. For Jesus to be accepted in African cultures and for the faith to be fully integrated to life, Christology must start from the full humanity of Jesus. For a guest Christology, Udoh strongly argues that emphasizing the humanity of Jesus is essential. Why such stress on the humanity of Jesus? In fact, for Udoh, to be accepted in African cultures, Jesus needs to be initiated through the guest ceremony. However, this initiation, which would transform Jesus into a citizen, is only possible in the human world and for those who are humans. The bottom line of Udoh's perspective is that the full humanity of Jesus is fundamental and a prerequisite for the ritual process.[12]

Jesus' Status as a Foreigner

As any other alien or even as a refugee, Jesus' status as an alien and a foreigner makes him exposed or vulnerable to rejection and exclusion.[13] This possibility of Jesus being

11 Ibid., 222.
12 Ibid., 224.
13 Ibid., 225.

rejected can be explored since the New Testament offers episodes wherein Jesus is asked to leave a particular region (Lk 8:37) or is rebuffed even in his hometown Nazareth (Lk 4:23-30).

Seeing Jesus as stranger allows Africans to assume the responsibility of a host, to experience a common life with Christ with his ups and downs and with his joys and frustrations.[14] What is the outcome of such a logic? A presentation of Jesus both as a human and stranger allows the figure of Jesus to be identified with the problems and needs of Africans. This can contribute to establishing a new kind of relationship based on acceptance and mutual trust between both partners. A conception of Jesus as foreigner makes him share the Africans' conditions since, as a foreigner in a host country, he has to struggle like the Africans to integrate two different world views with their contradictions, richness, and limitations situation that Africans also have to deal with. Jesus need not be born biologically as an African to be accepted. Still, he has to participate and identify himself with the host culture's needs and problems.

A Jesus in Need: His "Wretched Imagery"

For Udoh, the guest metaphor also has a relation with a sense of need and a certain vulnerability. The guest—ignorant of his new environment—needs to be introduced to the host culture to become familiar with it. Such familiarity will also be fundamental to his integration. The Christological significance of this third characteristic is to stress not only the limitations of Jesus' consciousness but also his need to be helped. As a stranger in a new land, Jesus needs to be

14 Ibid.

guided by his host to be aware of the socio-cultural environment and is, in that sense, dependent on the host who has the responsibility to lead him on tour.[15] The kind of help needed by a displaced person in a host culture can be expounded or extended from hospitality to compassion and protection.

By suggesting such a disconcerting role reversal, Udoh calls for a reexamination of Christ's status as a guest, which allows for a constructive interaction based on mutual consent between both parties, guests, and hosts. Christ as a guest is no longer perceived as imposed but welcomed freely and responsibly by the Africans. The guest status of Christ not only makes both parties mutually dependent but it also "provides an extra room for the Africans to reevaluate Christ, first hand, based on the scriptural testimony. . . . The guest status of Christ offers us the most adequate prerequisite for his leadership or saving role."[16] For Udoh, the soteriological mission of Christ and his leadership cannot be proclaimed before prior acceptance of him as a guest. From being a guest, he can become kin and later a Lord.

From Guest to Kin

Necessity of the Process of Naturalization of Jesus

According to Udoh, for Christianity to be deeply rooted in Africa, there is a need for Jesus to go through a process of naturalization. Though Christ is proclaimed from the lips, the relationship that many Africans have with him does not go "beyond that of a sojourner. Since he is an ordinary, dependent alien, it makes no sense for them to rely upon him

15 Ibid., 227.
16 Ibid., 229.

for answers to their deep religious questions. Because other forces are closer, more enduring, and often more trustworthy, they choose to stay connected with them in an intimate sense."[17] Thus, there is a need for the naturalization of Jesus so that Jesus can become a kin. How is this naturalization possible?

Cultural Backgrounds: A Christology Based on Family Ethos-Hospitality

To lay the grounds for his Christology, Udoh finds his inspiration in one of the most important cultural values in African societies: extended family ethos-hospitality. African families are characterized by the notion of extended families that are open, inclusive, and accommodating towards guests or even strangers who can become part of the group using cultural naturalization.[18] Various forms of adoption rituals pervade the African continent and thus indicate the importance of this cultural value of hospitality in most of the countries. Udoh chooses the kola nut ceremony, which is practiced in many countries in West Africa. In the West African cultural setting, especially in Nigeria, the acceptance or rejection of a guest depends on whether or not he or she is offered a kola nut. Such an offer marks the beginning of a new and better form of relationship.[19]

Udoh explains that "the philosophy behind the kolanut ceremony is to provide a sensible channel through which

17 Ibid., 230.

18 Ibid., 194.

19 Believed by the *Igbo* of Nigeria to be the first tree created by *Chukwu* (God), the kola tree is regarded as sacred, and the kola nut is used in various ritual ceremonies or events such as marriage, welcoming guests. As for the welcoming ritual, the kola nut is offered just after the greeting as a symbolic action of welcoming. If there are many guests, a plate containing a kola nut is presented to the most

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social cohesion and transformation of relationships can come about by hospitable gestures and fair distribution of resources."[20] Udoh is convinced that if such a ritual or social device has proved its importance in terms of integrating or incorporating aliens into a host community in Africa, then this might be useful for Jesus' initiation so that he can be fully accepted. If the Christological problem in Africa is also related to a question of trust and faith, a ritual initiation of Jesus will be useful to establish a bond between him and the Africans.

Impacts of the Ritual Initiation on Jesus' Status

A foreigner who does not go through a process of naturalization remains an outsider. However, by going through this process, one can become kin. As a process that incorporates a person into the group, naturalization requires a point of entry and a process of growth. Guest and kin are two metaphors that try to express this principle of opening and continuity.[21] If the guest rite marks the beginning of an ongoing process, the kin level is perceived as the second stage. For Udoh, "if kolanut [kola nut] represents a social text in this regard, the kin-phase signifies its reading and interpretation. The

senior in the group who touches the plate with his right hand and passes it on before it returns to the host who blesses with these words, "Whatever good he [the guest] is looking for, he will see it." The kola nut is broken and shared with those present and with the ancestors to whom it is offered. The *Igbo* believed that the more parts the kola nut is broken into, the more prosperity it brings to both the guest and the host. Ibid., 197.

20 By breaking the kola nut and sharing it with the guest (distribution), the host shows the guest his hospitality, which includes welcoming, assistance, and protection. The prayers made by the host before or while breaking the kola nut is essentially a petition for the good life, health, peace, prosperity, and protection from enemies or misfortunes. This justifies the common saying among the *Igbo*: "He who brings kola brings life." Ibid., 198. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: First Anchor Books, 1994), 6.

21 Ibid., 231.

post-ritual phase is certainly an experimental process. It is a learning procedure by which the new member attempts to justify his citizenship."[22] With the initiation of the kola nut ritual, the guest now enjoys some rights and has some new commitments. But what are the advantages of his new status? For Udoh, the double status of the one who has been initiated is characterized by relationality and participation.[23] But what is the Christological meaning of this initiation?

For Udoh, if such a question can be answered at all, all the answers seem to converge on the fact that "Jesus' initiation puts him on equal footing with us, not only as completely human but also as one with whom we share a common history and destiny. It means we are united in constitution and purpose, sharing similar beliefs, protected by common prohibitions and bound by a common heritage which originates with God."[24] Entering through the family emphasizes Jesus' *kenosis*. By accepting the initiation, Jesus consents to come to the Africans through their door, through their culture. By "entering from below"—and not from above as if he comes to impose his rules—Jesus will gradually win their acceptance. The initiation will transform Jesus' status from guest to kin. It makes him closer and more intimate to the people. He is perceived as one-of-them because henceforth, he shares their story and destiny.

The presence and participation of the guest also call for a certain adjustment and a certain dynamic of growth, which can even come through criticism. Therefore, the presence of a guest can become transformative and enriching.

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 232.
24 Ibid., 243.

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This can be said of Jesus as well, the presence of whom has been at once an enrichment and a symbol of our void. Moreover, his presence in our community has set in motion a blending together of past and present, of God and the cosmos in a more intimate manner. That is to say, in Jesus we have seen an important member in our midst, a kin whose presence we can celebrate, whose voice we can heed and in whom we can reaffirm our kinship with one another. For Jesus it is an opportunity to unfold his power and mission in a different culture. It is indeed a chance for him to declare his candidacy publicly in indigenous languages and dialects, and perhaps announce his Lordship over all.[25]

The presence of the guest is beneficial for both parties (guest and host). Jesus' presence is a blessing for the Africans since it enriches them in diverse ways. For Jesus, it is an occasion to make himself known, to lead his host and prepare them to accept his Lordship.

Jesus as Lord

After a gradual process of mutual encounter, learning, and sharing, Jesus' Lordship should be the ultimate experience.[26] For Udoh, since kings are crowned by people and thus have their mandate, Jesus Lordship should be the result of a process where people elevate him. The uniqueness of his role, which encompasses a social integration of the various strands, can make him kin but also a stranger who comes from another world.[27] The fact that Jesus is also detached from his host is a great advantage for the host culture, which he can also enrich with his values and virtues.

25 Ibid., 245-46.
26 Ibid., 168.
27 Ibid., 253.

Such a position of Jesus who can perceive his new home from another vantage point is fundamental and is a source of enrichment for the host. The presence of Jesus coming from another cultural background makes people aware of their true identity, strengths, and limitations. He empowers them to surpass their vulnerabilities and fragilities. That is perhaps what Udoh is trying to explain when he affirms that "the uniqueness of Jesus allows us to see who we really are, a blend of finitude and infinitude. . . . Jesus not only makes us aware of our frailties, he lends us the energy to transcend our limitations."[28]

This special position of Jesus, which is beyond all other human experiences naturally leads him to play a leadership role in his new home. For Udoh, "Jesus as Lord means he is the head of the household, of our lives and our daily deliberations. It is our business then to proclaim his Lordship in words and deeds in such a way as to open for others a free and safe passage into the fold."[29] In other words, the proclamation of Jesus' Lordship should not be the exclusive role of missionaries or theologians but should come from the people of the grassroots.

Grounds for a Dialectic between Guest Christology and Host Christology

Jesus' Dialectical Role as Guest-Host

Through the incarnation, the Logos became flesh and entered space and time as a guest in visitation. The kenosis of Christ has perceived that the Eternal host became a guest

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.

to bring people the hospitality of the Father. Jesus came as a homeless one in this world, and during his ministry, he was dependent on the generosity of friends.

"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). This passage well summarizes Jesus' way of life as an itinerant preacher who was dependent on the hospitality of people. Guest of Martha and Mary, Simon, Zacchaeus, and others, Jesus benefited from the hospitality of many of his contemporaries during his ministry. If Jesus was most of the time other people's guest, he was also presented on few but decisive and meaningful occasions as the master of hospitality, the one hosting the others as in the multiplication of loaves (Mk 6:34-44 or Mt 14:14-21 or Lk 9:11b-17; Mk 8:1-9 or Mt 15:32-38 with 16:5-12 and Jn 6:1-15). Thus, while presenting Jesus as a guest seeking hospitality, the Gospels also show him as a host who breaks the bread, multiplies it, and nurtures his people (Mk 6:34-44; Mt 15:32-38; Lk 9:11b-17; Jn 6:1-15). Moreover, he is depicted as a host who welcomes people, especially the outcasts like Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10) and the poor (sociological and economical poor like the woman with a hemorrhage, the lepers) into the Kingdom of God. Throughout his life, Jesus embodies this dialectical role as guest and host.

The dialectic "guest-host" relationship which characterizes Jesus is a paradigm which might help Africans to understand "the message of Jesus Christ, through whom God, as a stranger, visited humanity (Cf. Jn 1:1-14), and also played host to it as a foretaste of the eschatological banquet in his heavenly home (Cf. Jn 14:2)." This fluidity of roles which appears not only in Jesus' ministry but also in the use of both concepts (guest-host) reminds one to avoid diametrically opposing host and guest Christology but to perceive them

instead as different but complementary angles from which one can look at Jesus.

Jesus, a Host in Africa

The idea of "organic medium" present in many myths in Africa suggests a conception of an entity that serves as a mediator between the creator and the creatures. Parallelism with Christ's role has been made by some theologians such as Penoukou to suggest the idea of the implicit presence of Christ in African traditional beliefs. From the idea of an organic medium that underlines the double belonging of Christ, Penoukou emphasizes the solidarity (*Ubuntu*), which binds human beings together with Christ and points to him as concerned with their well-being.[30] Penoukou seems to indicate already that Christ can be perceived not only as of the Emmanuel but also as kin and perhaps by extension, a host in Africa. Thus, he can truly feel comfortable in his home. However, it might be useful to see how Christ can be recognized as truly a host in Africa.

Jesus as Embodiment of *Ubuntu*

As mentioned above, African hospitality is based on the central concept of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* defines not only the African's conception of human maturity but also the deep spiritual longing for life fulfilment: "A person who is truly *muntu* [mature human being] and manifests *ubuntu* is . . . someone who is profoundly related to his or her primary source of meaning and power (i.e., God), is deeply grounded in the community, and lives in harmony with other human

30 Penoukou, "Christology in the Village," 42-50.

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beings."[31] All of these characteristics are perceptible in the life of Jesus. The New Testament shows clearly that Jesus is in total communion with his Father (Jn 14:9). This communion is so profound that Jesus says that he who has seen him has seen the Father (Lk 9:48) or that He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). In the gospels, Jesus is depicted as praying alone (Mk 14:23; Mk 1:35; Lk 9:18; Lk 22:39-41) or even discerning God's will (Lk 6:12-13). Jesus is also portrayed as giving thanks to his Father, for example, before the multiplication of the bread (Mt 15:36; Jn 6:11; Mk 6:41). His familiarity with God the Father is revealed throughout the gospels.

Jesus was very rooted in his community. He was fully aware of the reality of his people, their struggles, and their hopes. In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus suggested three non-violent actions, which are signs of protests against the vicious circle of domination and, thus, a way of proclaiming liberation. Jesus was an artisan of peace and a promoter of non-violence that seeks to resist systemic domination (Mt 5:38-42) and promote the greater good of the community. By curing all kinds of human suffering, Jesus worked for the well-being of his community during his public ministry. However, his mission of establishing harmony or reconciliation between the human race and God also made him an opponent of self-righteous people. Jesus likewise fought for the dignity and integrity of the human person and called for this interconnectedness between fellow human beings and God. His total obedience to the Father until the end won salvation for humanity. Thus, his life was the embodiment of all these values summarized by the term *ubuntu*.

31 Fulgence Nyengele, "African Spirituality and the Wesleyan Spirit: Implications for Spiritual Formation in a Multicultural Church and Culturally Pluralistic World," (paper presented at the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, 2013), 15.

In African terms, Jesus is fully a *muntu* (a mature and accomplished human being) whose life manifests *ubuntu*. If *ubuntu* is described as somebody who is hospitable, generous, kind, caring, loving, compassionate, merciful, and grace-full, there is no doubt that Jesus is himself "the perfect man," as *GS,* no. 38 states it, and thus the perfect embodiment of *ubuntu*.[32] Through his life, Jesus has shown all these values in their perfection (Mt 8:16-17; Mt 9:36; Mt 14:14; Mt 15:32; Mk 1:39-40; Lk 5:12-13; Jn 11:34-38).

In a setting where the host is expected to treat the guest with kindness and generosity, Jesus of Nazareth is the perfect host from an African perspective. Since Jesus lives out the ideal of *ubuntu*, "a major goal toward which [African] communities orient their members,"[33] Jesus can be considered as a model host, like the ancestors who have reached this ideal. Moreover, as the perfect embodiment of *ubuntu*, he can be given the title of an ancestor. But is Jesus only an ethical model of host for Africans? Or can he be considered as a host for Africans? How is Jesus as a host to the Africans?

Jesus is not the ancestor of Africans by association or by privilege. However, as head of the new creation, he is always and already an ancestor, a "proto-ancestor"[34] for all of humanity and thus for Africans, too. As Proto-ancestor, he is related to all the Africans, and accordingly, the argument of his foreignness can be dismissed. By being the first of the new

32 See *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), December 7, 1965, no. 22 and 38. Henceforth referred to as *GS*. In this paper, the version of *Gaudium et Spes* will come from: *Documents of Vatican II* ed. James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines, 2011). *Gaudium et Spes* only mentions Jesus as the perfect man. As a perfect man, Jesus is in African cultures, the perfect embodiment of *Ubuntu*.

33 Nyengele, "African Spirituality and the Wesleyan Spirit," 14-15

34 Bujo, *African Theology in Social Context*, 71.

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creation, he is the First and Supreme Host who embodies and fulfills Africans' quest for *ubuntu*. He is not only perceived through our categories, but he perfects and transcends them. He is the Master of Hospitality who perfects *ubuntu*.

Jesus as an African Host

As Proto-ancestor and thus universal host of all and by fulfilling all that is expected from a host in Africa, Jesus Christ clearly shows that he is not only a model of hospitality, but he is also "an African" host for all the Africans. Because of his proximity to the poor and the outcasts, and that Africa is still a continent where the majority of people still live in poverty, the image of Jesus as a host for the Africans does make sense. Christ has a particular concern for the poor, the oppressed, and the outcasts, not because of their moral disposition but because of their needs. During his ministry, Jesus always privileged the marginalized and not only the economic poor (widows, strangers, and orphans or the materially deprived) but also the sociological poor (outcasts, tax collectors, lepers, and many others). The Gospel is filled with accounts of Jesus' preferential ministry to the poor. Jesus' option for the poor is not grounded in the virtues of the poor. Still, it is rooted in the fact that material deprivation (for the economically poor) and discrimination (for the sociologically poor) are dehumanizing and are against God's loving plan and intention.

God's love is inclusive, creative, and restorative. Since He wills and intends the full realization of the potentialities of each human being and of the human community, God supplies what is lacking in them.[35] Since the poor are those in greater need, God has a special concern for them. Jesus,

35 Roger Haight, "The Preferential Option for the Poor," in *Morality,*

as the embodiment of God's hospitality, is also the host for all the poor (socially and materially) in Africa. Christ as the host is not a complacent image but a liberating image. As mentioned in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 4), Jesus comes to liberate people from their captivity, free them from oppressive and dehumanizing situations, from the slavery of sin and death. Jesus' ministry also means releasing people from their selfishness and the social structures which encourage injustice so that people may live out their true identity as children of God. Hospitality and solidarity with the poor will naturally flow from the recovery of this new identity. The host is Christ who gives life: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). As a host, he also came to satisfy the quest of all Africans for life, vitality, or life-force.

From a Dialectical Guest-Host Christology to a Threefold Christology

Hospitality conveys an exchange between the guest and the host, a giving and receiving that enriches both parties. In Eastern Mediterranean cultures, the primary expression of hospitality is almost always through a meal, however simple.[36] In various cultures in the world, a meal is also how hosts and guests are bound to each other by friendship and mutual obligations. In Africa, the climax of the encounter between the host and the guest is when both share a meal--which is

Religion, and the Filipino: Essays in Honor of Vitaliano R. Gorospe, S.J., ed. Rene Javellana (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1994), 173.

36 Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist in the Gospel of Luke* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1994), 19. According to LaVerdiere, hospitality was expected from everybody, even from the poorest of the poor. It can be offered even in the humblest place at its basic and simple level (a meal and a breaking of bread).

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believed to be the symbol of friendship and love. The relationship between the guest and the host deepens as they eat and drink together. The meal is the meeting point in the interaction between the guest and the host. By stressing the idea of a threefold Christology, this writer is saying that Jesus is not only a guest and a host, but he identifies himself also as a meal which binds together God and his people. Jesus has often switched his role from guest to host but also from host to meal or drink.[37]

The episode of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John (Jn 4) offers a meaningful back-and-forth exchange of roles. The Samaritan woman who is playing the role of host at the beginning of the story becomes the guest who is begging for a drink. From the guest who asks for a simple drink, Jesus presents himself as the host who provides a better or superior drink—a living and eternal water. Moreover, Jesus introduces himself as both the giver of the gift and the gift itself, the source or provider, and the substance of the living water, which will become available through his death (Jn 7:37-39).[38] The story of the Samaritan woman stresses Jesus' threefold role as a guest, a host, and a meal or a drink (living water). However, the drink he refers to here is not material but metaphorical (disclosure of himself).

The Last Supper offers a complete image of this threefold role of Jesus as guest, host, and meal. According to the Synoptics, the Last Supper of Jesus is held in a place which belongs to someone that Jesus probably knew (Mt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-26; Lk 22:7-39). Regardless of the relationship that

37 The meal generally includes the food and the drink. In the case of the Last Supper or the Eucharist, the bread and the wine are conveyed.

38 Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 57.

Jesus had with the owner of the apartment, Jesus is the guest in the house where he holds his Passover meal. However, Jesus also becomes the host who breaks the bread and shares the wine with his disciples. During the last supper, he takes the bread, breaks it, and gives to his disciples saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he does the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-20). By this gesture, which is ritual anticipation of his passion, Jesus indicates clearly that he is not only the host but also the meal.

A Meal Christology

A meal Christology is a proposal that emphasizes not only the significance of meals in Jesus' ministry but also Jesus' self-identification with a meal. A meal Christology involves a soteriological aspect since Jesus identifies himself as the substance of the meal, which gives eternal life. By presenting Jesus as a meal, the researcher does not intend to reduce him to a meal but refers to the metaphor and symbol that Jesus chose to identify himself with: the bread and the wine. In the Jewish setting, bread was a basic food taken at every meal. In that sense, the term bread refers to the entire meal. Given that background where the terms bread and meal can be interchangeable, to say that Jesus is the bread of life (Jn 6:35) is also equivalent to the affirmation that Jesus is the "meal of life." Moreover, during the Last Supper, the words pronounced over the bread and wine suggest Jesus' identification with the sacred meal. He chooses bread and wine as the signs of his salvific death and the sacrament of his abiding presence.

The idea of a meal can be expounded when placed in the general context of a gift. The meal symbolically represents the gift through which communion between the guest and the host is established and deepened. During the Lord's Supper, the gift offered to the disciples, which seems symbolic, is, at the same time, an offer of life and salvation that calls for a response. The meal offered by Jesus to his disciples is a gift which was accepted by his followers. Both the offer and the reception of the gift of salvation are fundamental. A meal Christology is objective and subjective since while the offer of salvation is freely given, it also requires a response of faith.

A Christology Centered on the Eucharist in Africa

Jesus in the Eucharist embodies and transcends the African notion of a common meal. The Eucharist is the meal par excellence which satisfies the deep hunger of Africans. The Eucharist stands as a complete meal that fulfills Africans' longing: a longing for intimacy and longing for reconciliation, peace, and justice. In the Eucharist, God becomes the meal that not only satiates humanity's hunger but also offers us the gift of eternal life or communion with the Lord. The Eucharist also invites people to ongoing conversion.

Intimacy with Christ: Total Allegiance to Christ

The Eucharistic meal through which a believer partakes of the body and blood of Christ deepens one's intimacy with the Lord. The peculiarity of the Eucharistic meal is that not only is one at the host's table but also "consumes" the giver of the gift and so becomes one with him. By uniting one with the person of Christ, the Eucharistic meal incorporates him or her into the Mystical Body of Christ. "Whoever eats my flesh

and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56). At the same time, the Eucharist introduces one to the inner life of the Trinity, "In eating his body and drinking his blood', one forges a communion of life with the Triune God, a new covenant in the blood of Christ (Cf. Lk 22:20)."[39] By giving his body and blood, Jesus gives people the possibility of entering in a deep relationship with the Trinity and ultimately confers to them the grace of divinization. This intimacy with the Lord is a deeply religious experience that can satisfy the Africans' longing for the divine. Once the African Christians' bond with Christ is strengthened, total allegiance to Christ can follow.

The abiding presence of Christ made real in the Eucharist assures African Christians that the forces of evil cannot prevail in their life. Intimacy with Jesus can strengthen them in their faith. For African Christians who are so afraid of evil mystical powers, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the sure guarantee of God's sovereignty and protection over their life. The disappearance of a double religious loyalty will be a consequence of African Christians' personal and deep encounter and intimacy with Christ himself.

The Eucharistic meal also has a missionary dimension in that one who experiences a moment of intimacy with Jesus through the meal is naturally led to share his experience with others. After breaking bread with the Lord, the disciples of Emmaus return to Jerusalem to proclaim the Risen Christ. The eleven are also sent to proclaim the Good News after a meal that Jesus shared with them (cf. Lk 24:36-53; Mk

39 Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, "Living the Eucharist in Asia," (paper presented at the 9th FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila Philippines, August 10-16 2009), no. 129b.

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16:14). The Eucharistic meal thus invites Christians to go on a mission. For African Christians who believe that meals are always shared with others, it is easier to understand that by participating in the Eucharistic meal, they are also sent on a mission, a mission of transforming the world: "The Eucharist invites us to become Eucharistic people. . . . It is an expression of divine caritas, God's kenotic love-as-nourishment. The Eucharist is an invitation and a challenge to become God's nourishing gift for one another."40 The Eucharist is a meal of love that invites Christians to become a gift to others.

Just as food gives strength to a person to walk to their destination, so Jesus in the Eucharistic meal gives people strength for their pilgrimage toward the heavenly Kingdom, where total communion with God will be possible. As promised by Jesus, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day" (Jn 6:54).

Eucharist as a Communal Meal and its Implications

The Eucharist embodies both the African notion of a common meal and aspirations. Meals in Africa are moments of fellowship and reconciliation among people and between people and God. The reconciling grace of Christ in the Eucharist pertains to the restoration of every human being, their integration to the community, and the healing of human communities disaggregated by sin. During the Confiteor and the Kyrie, Christians are invited to ask for forgiveness from the Lord. They are also called to forgive one another before

40 Ángel Méndez-Montoya, "Eating and the Eucharist: A Transformation of Desire" https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/bible_in_transmission/files/2013_summer/BiT_Summer_2013_Mendez-Montoya.pdf (accessed June 27, 2018).

presenting their offerings. The Eucharist can bring people together, reconcile them, and heal their painful memories.

In Africa, meals have always been conceived as moments of communion and peace akin to the Eucharistic *agape*. However, more than just strengthening relationships among human beings, Jesus in the Eucharist brings human beings closer to communion with God and with one another. The Eucharist is a gathering of the family of God. The Eucharist should foster cohesion and help to overcome hostilities and divisions. In Africa, where tribal and cultural differences can become sources of division, Christians strengthened by the Eucharist should become promoters of unity and peace. The kiss of peace in the Eucharistic celebration should not only be a formality but should lead Christians to become real channels of peace and hope in Africa.

The Eucharistic celebration is a gathering of people from diverse social, political, and cultural backgrounds. Called to be together, the people of God are gathered to partake of the same sacrifice. The Eucharist should foster a sense of justice since all have the same dignity before God. Membership and participation in the Body of Christ should lead Christians to promote solidarity and justice in their relationship with others through their common filiation.

The service of reconciliation, justice, and peace that the Church is expected to carry out is the work of the whole people of God. In African cultures, the preparation of a meal requires the participation of many people. Likewise, in the Eucharistic meal and celebration, each community is involved, each according to their function. Collaboration and cooperation in mission are important.

In traditional African society, there is always a surplus of food shared with a potential guest who may pass by. Moreover, food is never taken alone but shared with others so that no one is hungry. In a continent characterized by an abundance of resources, starvation is a scandal that should be overcome by a serious reflection--both on the African notion of the communal meal and the Eucharist. Christ's command (Mt 25:31-46) and his preferential option for the poor should also become the option of all Christians.

The Model of Hospitality with its Three Components and the Christological Problem in Africa: Theological and Pastoral Suggestions

The recognition by the disciples of the true identity of Jesus was a gradual process. From their initial encounter with Jesus, the disciples grew in their understanding and knowledge of Jesus and his messianic role and divinity. In this vein, the researcher suggests re-encounter with Christ as a guest, host, and meal. This process is also a gradual process that follows the disciples' path on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is seen as a foreigner, the only stranger who is not aware of the recent events. "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" asked Cleopas (Lk 24:18). On the road, the stranger listens carefully to the disciples, and in the light of the content of their sharing, he reinterprets the meaning of the event for them. He starts from their story and connects that story with the Scriptures. After listening to this stranger, the disciples beg Jesus to become their guest: "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." (Lk 24:29).

From being a stranger, Jesus is now a guest. A role reversal has taken place with him becoming the host who breaks the bread. "Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight" (Lk 24:31). Jesus becomes the bread, the meal which gives them the courage and the energy to return to Jerusalem that same night. He disappears from their sight because he has become the meal which they consume but which is not destroyed but integrated into them and transforms them.

As an approach to the Christological model, the researcher proposes hospitality with its three components of guest, host, and meal as a gradual process of encounter or re-encounter with Christ to help dispel the image of the foreignness of Jesus. If Africans accept Jesus as one of them (guest Christology), if he responds to their needs for protection as a host (host Christology) and if a deep intimacy can be established between himself and the Africans (meal Christology), then the image of a foreign Christ--which is at the root of the Christological problem--may gradually disappear. If this image is dispelled, people may begin to rely on Jesus for answers, give him full allegiance, and proclaim him as their Savior and God.

Jesus as a Guest: An Acceptance of Jesus

Guest Christology is an attempt "to bring Africa and Christ closer to one another" and to address the problem of the image of Christ perceived as an illegal alien.[41] Guest Christology stresses the acceptance of Christ in Africa not as an illegal alien but as a legitimate guest. If Jesus is presented as a guest, he may be accepted by Africans because of their legendary virtue of hospitality. The child Jesus has found a

41 Udoh, *Guest Christology*, 209.

refuge, a home in Egypt, in African soil. Africans can show their generosity and care for Jesus and slowly accept him as one of them.

In a worldview where a guest can adapt and fully participate in the activities of the host, Jesus and his disciples can effectively find their way into the new culture by embracing it with the help of Africans. By living with Jesus for a certain time, people will slowly trust him and gradually learn to rely on him. By knowing their culture, Jesus and his followers can transform it from within. The guest Christology respects the integrity of Africans who find a role to play in that paradigm as active subjects. A guest approach will also lead to an acceptance of Jesus because it enables Africans to empathize with him. In fact, as a guest, Jesus Christ is a child of two worlds and has to deal with the difficulty of dual belonging. Though their situation is not the same, Africans who are also children of two worlds (traditional and western cultures) would be able to identify themselves with him. This double identification of Christ—being a child of two worlds who adopts African culture—will help Jesus win the acceptance of Africans.

In an African setting where people are immersed in the African traditional religion before their birth, guest Christology may be a good starting point. For people rooted in their own traditional religion, the proclamation of the Gospel may need to start by introducing Jesus as a guest.

Jesus as a Host: Protector and Healer

For Christ to become meaningful for Africans and be fully accepted in their cultures, he has to respond to their deepest quest. One of the pressing matters for Africans concerns

dealing with sickness, witchcraft, misfortunes, or spirit possession. The mainline Christian Churches in Africa do not always address these issues adequately or even deny the existence of such phenomena. Their inadequacy in dealing with such issues and the pressure of family members who encourage their own to consult diviners during moments of crises lead some converts to go back to African traditional religion or to combine both. Moreover, "because they obtain immediate returns from them [African Traditional Religion, traditionals beliefs and ritual practices], many professed Christians tend to revert back to African traditional practices for worrying socio-spiritual issues."[42]

In a context where illness is believed to be due to supernatural causes, Christ may need to be presented as a host who protects Africans against these hostile forces. Mbiti asserts that "unless Christianity fully occupies the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of crisis and emergency."[43] To resolve double religious belonging, which is rooted in the need of people to protect themselves and their families against misfortune, witchcraft, and evil spirits, a host Christology may be helpful. Christ can be introduced as a host healer or a host protector. In fact, in African cultures, ancestors who are believed to be hosts reputedly protect their descendants' lives. Jesus embodies and transcends this role given to the ancestors. As an ancestor-host, Jesus Christ belongs to two worlds, which is a position that enables him to assure more than any ancestor the protection of Africans from all evil spirits and threats. His ministry on earth and

42 Joel Mokhoathi, "From Contextual Theology to African Christianity," Religions 8 (12): 7 https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8120266 (accessed 10 August 2018).

43 Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 3.

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his resurrection reveal his sovereignty against all forces. To introduce Jesus as a host may help Africans to rely deeply on him and not look for protection anymore from other forces.

A host Christology thus presents Jesus as the one embracing all Africans with their joys and struggles. Catechetical instruction should develop in the Christian the reflex to turn to Jesus as their Savior and Messiah. A re-evangelization of Christians living with a schizophrenic faith may help address the Christological problem. The structure of basic ecclesial communities may be of great help for individual Christians who are confronted with the pressure of family members who require them to consult diviners to identify the "why" of their misfortune and the "who" behind it. Since host Christology stresses Jesus as a host who is already present in their cultures, the Gospel should not be presented as alienating people from their culture, but as an "enrichment or even perfection" of their culture. A profound catechesis that is based on cultural values like hospitality may help.

Meal Christology: Intimacy with Christ

Meals are not only for subsistence (biological) but also have an important social dimension (sociological and even political) in the life of a community. In African traditions and in many cultures around the world, meals connect and bind people together. Table companionships are moments of intimacy and fellowship. Thus, meal Christology highlights the intimacy that Jesus wants to establish with humanity, especially with Africans. The gap which can exist between host and guest is abolished since Jesus invites them to share in his divine life. If Africans find in Jesus a reliable and trustworthy friend, they will then seek him and eventually give him full

recognition and allegiance. Moreover, as a meal, Jesus can also satisfy the deep fits of Africans' hunger, their hunger for transcendence, for God, their needs for reconciliation, justice and peace, and the right relationship with the environment. In a continent where life is the principal value, Jesus' offer of life may more likely be accepted. The Africans' quest for life finds fulfillment in Jesus since Jesus has come to offer life and life in abundance. Meal Christology underlines that Jesus is offering to Africans living in abundance, is giving himself to redeem them, is inviting them to intimacy (through a meal), and true discipleship (becoming bread broken for others).

A meal Christology aims to root African Christians in their faith by leading them to real intimacy with Jesus Christ. Once a stable relationship with Christ has been established, the African Christian can be thoroughly grounded in his faith and become himself a true disciple and bread broken for others.