

**Conceptualising the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ in the  
Africa Pentecostal Independent churches: A Bethesda Apostolic  
Faith Mission Church case study**

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**DECLARATION**

I, Modisatoli Motseokae Petrus Tsiane, declare that this research is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. All copyright is ceded to the University of the Free State.

Signed .....

Date.....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research to my wife Joyce, children Lorato and Bontsi and granddaughter Snovuyo.

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I am deeply grateful to God our Almighty Father and to the Lord Jesus our Saviour and the Holy Spirit who made it possible for me to complete this study.

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“Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” Romans 10:11.

## **DISCLAIMER**

This study is based upon research supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa. Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and therefore the NRF does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

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## **Introduction**

The divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ is a contentious issue which has been debated over centuries. This is a complex matter that cannot be explained easily. This issue is not easily comprehensible to people outside the Christian faith. They find it most difficult to make sense of Christianity's triune God as well as the deity of Jesus Christ. Far-reaching questions have been raised on this issue on a daily basis. His divinity is a mystery.

Africans understand Christianity as a world religion "instituted" by God. It has been established by Jesus Christ as the "Saviour" of the world (Idowu 1965:7). Christianity has been practised in parts of Africa since "the early church". It had its presence in other places in sub-Saharan Africa (Plantinga, Thompson & Lundberg 2010:379). This faith is so old that it could therefore be described as an indigenous religion. It was well established before the advent of Islam (Mbiti 1989:223).

The churches established from the Western missionary endeavour believe that Jesus Christ had two natures. He was fully human and fully God (Migliore 2004:177). They regard the African Churches as being erratic in their perspective about the true nature of Jesus Christ. These churches look down upon the African Pentecostal Independent Churches and regard these African-founded denominations as "sects" (Makhubu 1985:1). They do not want to accept them as fully-fledged Christian churches. They use the term "movement" in order to "avoid the use of church" in their description of these emerging African Pentecostal Independent Churches (Makhubu 1985:1).

These African Pentecostal churches emphasise the "experience of the Holy Spirit" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:130). They are not just sects but true Christian denominations. They are also known as "Spiritual Churches" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:130). In his exposition, the Apostle Paul says the term "spiritual" refers to "the Spirit of God". Paul said the church is supposed to be "charismatic". It must function "in the gifts of the grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:130). In other words, the church is Pentecostal in nature. The African Pentecostal churches have the ability to "spread widely and quickly". This ability is said to be part of "the history of Pentecostalism from its beginnings" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:131). The allegations

made by the Western churches were of a serious nature. The alleged error in their theology led to disagreement with the African Pentecostal Independent Churches.

The African Pentecostal Independent Churches came about by breaking away from “mission churches” and from “one another”. Most of these independent churches originate from established denominations such as Anglican, Lutheran and other Protestant Church backgrounds (Mbiti 1989:226-227). Only a few originated from the Roman Catholic Church. These churches are seen as “attempts” by the African nations to “indigenize” Christianity (Mbiti 1989:227). The African people intend to “interpret” Christianity in a manner “practical and meaningful” to their lives. It is, however, also the view of this study that the African-founded churches do also acknowledge the two natures of Jesus Christ.

One of the many reasons for separation from Western mission churches was the unwanted “control” of congregations by the missionaries (Mbiti 1989:227). This gave an impression that foreigners were ruling Africans regarding “political” and “ecclesiastical” issues. Africans belonged to Africa and their churches had to reflect their African nature.

All was not wrong about the mission enterprise. According to Appia-Kubi and Torres, there are various schools of thought which describe the goal of mission work. One school describes the aim as the “conversion of the infidel”. The second school refers to “establishing” the church, and the third is about the birth of a “native church” (Appia-Kubi & Torres 1979:23). The native church is to be assisted to take its “responsibility” to Christ and other churches.

For other theologians, the role of missions is to “heal”, “convert” and “Christianize” people (Appia-Kubi & Torres 1979:24). These theologians see the duty of the missionary as to “proclaim the Gospel”.

Anderson describes African Pentecostal Independent Churches or “Moya” churches as denominations catering mainly for African spirituality. These churches represent a unique blend of “African expression” of Christian faith (Anderson 1992:6). These churches are presently popular among a cross-section of urbanites. Their growing popularity may be ascribed to their adaptability to the African culture. In another opinion, the church should be good news in “the concrete situation” (Kritzinger, Saayman & Meiring 1994:151). Kritzinger et al. add that the church ought to make a difference in the “place and time” it is located.

Anderson ascribes their emergence to spiritual “hunger” which ought to be lessened through an African practice of Christianity (Anderson 1992:18). He makes it explicitly clear that Africans are not in favour of a mere importation of Western Christianity. Migliore adds that many Christians of Asiatic, African and Latin American origin believe that their theology must attend to their particular “cultures” and “form of thought” (Migliore 2004:198). In his assessment Anderson highlights an important role played by these churches. Their “inculturation” of the Christian religion in the African continent contributed to African Christian theology (Anderson 2000:220).

Although the African Pentecostal churches are indigenous churches they adhere to the basic beliefs about Christ. It is necessary to ascertain how these beliefs are viewed by a particular indigenous church. The general view that they do not regard Christ as Divine as mainline churches do, should be scrutinised and responded to.

## **Background and orientation**

The intention of this study is to explore the validity of allegations made by Western missionary established churches against the position taken by African Pentecostal Independent Churches. Western Christian missions are responsible for the spreading of Christianity in Africa. They found the African Pentecostals lacking in biblical hermeneutics. Van Engen describes mission as God's people who cross barriers "from church to nonchurch" to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God (Van Engen 1996:26-27). This goal will be achieved by means of the church's involvement in God's "mission of reconciling people". The author deliberates on how some mission theologians categorised the different aspects of their obligation. According to this method, mission is "mission Dei" (Van Engen 1996:27). Mission theologians enquire about mission as it "utilizes human instrumentality (mission hominum)" and missions taking different shapes through the "endeavors of the churches (missiones ecclesiarum)", and mission as it "impacts global civilization (mission politica oecumenica)" (Van Engen 1996:27).

The Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church is reviewed. This church falls within the category of African Pentecostals. The research emphasis is to investigate a scriptural hermeneutic for Jesus Christ's identity from the African perspective. It is the researcher's purpose to address the issue of the humanity and divinity of Christ appropriately in an effort to get a relevant African experience of this matter. In other words, how do Africans experience the humanity and divinity of Jesus in their daily lives? In most instances, Africans are subjected to oppression and suffer bitterly from poverty and associated illnesses. In South Africa, there are also concerns about unemployment and the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The position of the mission churches was also investigated. The validity of allegations made by Western established missionary churches against the African Pentecostal Churches were scrutinised. These African initiated churches are being criticised by the historic churches as having a "poor theology" including a "weak exegesis" (Clark, Lederle *et al.*. 1989:12).

## **Problem statement**

The problem to be investigated is whether the African Pentecostal churches have a Biblical view on the two natures of Christ, especially his Divinity. Do the members of these churches, and

especially the Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church, have an acceptable view on the natures of Christ? Do they adhere to it and are they prepared to explain their views? How should the church regard her relation to the African background and the views on Christ?

## **Hypothesis**

The central hypothesis is that the Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church has a clear view on the Divinity of Christ and should not be excluded from the Christian community.

## **Research methodology**

To investigate the question of African Pentecostal Independent Churches concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ, a case study methodology will be applied. Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church is the case study. The question about the African perspective on the identity of Christ was studied. The researcher also paid attention to the community primarily served by this church. A questionnaire was prepared to elicit a response from the respondents. A “well-designed questionnaire” is necessary for good results (Skinner & Van Essen 1982:278). The questions asked must be understandable. The authors advise that researchers should not ask “biased, ambiguous or leading questions” (Skinner & Van Essen 1982:278).

The researcher then gave the questionnaires to the respondents. The questionnaires are applied to a sample of subjects. It is vital to select a suitable sample in order to have opinions that are representative of the whole congregation (Skinner & Van Essen 1982:276).

Questionnaires were sent to or administered directly in interviews to this sample or a small proportion of the congregants (Giddens 2006:87). There are two kinds of questionnaires. One is standardised or close-ended questionnaires. The other is open-ended (Giddens 2006:87-88). The latter was administered to the sample. In an open-ended questionnaire, the respondents are able to articulate their perspectives in their own words. The respondents are expected to fill in and return the questionnaires on time. An advantage of the use of questionnaires is their accessibility to many at the same time (Pervin, Cervone & John 2005:50). The case study is to reveal the truth as regard the official position of the church concerning the two natures of Jesus Christ. Researchers use case studies purely for research purposes (Pervin et al.. 2005:46).

A qualitative approach is needed for tackling the research problem (Jordaan & Jordaan 2003:68). Qualitative research entails the assimilation of information. The information is needed to explain a phenomenon such as how the adherents of Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church view the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ.

The collected data are “meaningless” if not analysed and interpreted (Jordaan and Jordaan 2003:71). Data analysis is vital for the understanding of a phenomenon. Alone data is worthless (Tischler 2007:43). Analysed data is necessary to prove whether it is true that the stance of the African Pentecostal Independent Churches concerning the nature of Jesus Christ is flawed. Data must be analysed into useful categories in order to determine existing relationships (Tischler 2007:43).

Tischler (2007:43) notes that research bias comes to the fore in data collection. According to him, researchers have the tendency to choose data that support their hypothesis. They ignore the data that seem to be against it (Tischler 2007:41). They have a tendency to “structure” their study to give them a favourable result and like to publish results that support their argument. Bias might also appear in another form. It happens when a participant in a survey in which questionnaires are used loses interest. This is called a non-response bias (Giddens 2006:80). When too few respondents take part in a survey, there is a strong likelihood that the survey of those who participated will be biased (Giddens 2006:80). There is also the danger of observer bias. The researcher’s own cultural assumptions may be reflected in his own work. This kind of bias is difficult to detect or to eliminate.

Conclusions could be drawn from the research work. It is the purpose of any research work to add to scientific knowledge, and to fulfil the intended purpose of the research. The importance of drawing conclusions from the collected data is to apply that information to similar situations (Tischler 2007:45). Sometimes problems do arise in completed research. The study must show reliability. The results of the research are expected to be reputable (Tischler 2007:45). The research must also demonstrate validity. The study must be in a position to test only what it initially intended to test.

Tischler (2007:45) notes that it is unlikely that the research will give all the relevant answers to a stated question. According to him, good research usually uncovers unanticipated information that

requires further research. An interesting part of research is that with on-going studies new perspectives open up and there are further questions that demand answers.

Furthermore, a literature study in the build-up to credible research is necessary. Cryer (2006:56) records that any research is based upon what other researchers have done before. It is quite evident that no research stands alone. One researcher builds upon the work of another. Research students need to study the works published by others to find “answers” concerning questions that keep arising (Cryer 2006:57).

It is important for the researcher to familiarise himself with existing work on the topic. Literature studied must be relevant to the research subject. Bak says that the literature of one’s discipline is a reliable “source” to assist in answering a research question (Bak 2004:135). The researcher used literature in support of “argument or counter-argument” (Cryer 2006:63).

The Bible and relevant theological books were studied. The Bible is the most important theological source. In the literature study views from theologians in theologies and commentaries were evaluated.

When a researcher is instructed to work on a project, he is not allowed to give information based only on his own experience. He is supposed to be unbiased. He is expected to do his work in a scientific manner. All scientific research is undertaken for a specific purpose. It might be done as an enquiry about a given phenomenon or institution. It may also be about an enterprise needing information or solution of a problem, and the testing of existing theories (Jordaan & Jordaan 2003:66-67).

It was necessary to include an ethics statement as research in this instance was done with people. No harm is to come to any of the individuals involved. They are to be protected from any harm at all times. They are not to be exposed to any mental or physical abuse. Sometimes researchers are confronted by hostile persons. Respondents are bombarded with questions, and some of these questions are of a personal nature. The following has to be kept in mind: Whose interests are served by the research? Who are those who benefit from it? (Tischler 2007:47).

It is the duty of the researcher to inform the respondents about the research design. The research methodology to be followed must be explained. Bak says that the research design needs to give

some details concerning methods and procedure (Bak 2004:25). There are various methodologies and some are perceived as being harmful. The purpose of the study must be explained. The ethical responsibility of researchers includes, inter alia, the interpretation and presentation of results (Pervin et al. 2005:45).

The goal is to obtain a clear view of the beliefs concerning Christ of the Bethesda Pentecostal church. The research will be of value for the evaluation of the views on Christ in general. It will also assist in the discussion on the differences between mainline and Apostolic churches.

## **CHAPTER 1 The Church in Africa: The African Pentacostal churches**

### **1.1 The development of the churches**

The African continent is known best for its receptiveness of cultures. Christianity expanded faster in Africa as compared with its growth of several centuries in Asia (Harbeson & Rothchild 2009:72). Even the European languages gained “political legitimacy” on the African continent. The African states are now categorised according to a “particular European language” they have appropriated as official medium (Harbeson & Rothchild 2009:72).

In many African countries, governments prioritise the “teaching of European languages in African schools” (Harbeson & Rothchild 2009:73). The authors point out that African leaders have not honoured “the gods of indigenous religions”. No country has ever set aside a “national holiday” in honour of the gods (Harbeson & Rothchild 2009:73). In contrast, all African states have a “national holiday” in respect of either Christian festivals or Muslim festivals (Harbeson & Rothchild 2009:73).

Mashau (2009:109) refers to the fact that Africa is deeply religious. In this religiosity the church had a profound influence but had not always been theologically sound.

It is important to clarify what the African Pentecostal Independent Churches stand for theologically, and how they originated in sub-Saharan Africa. There are misconceptions of who these churches are and whether they represent the Body of Christ.

Makhubu states that the African Independent or Indigenous Church was originally found by Africans who did not have any links with Western missionaries. According to him, the church is a purely “black-controlled denomination with no links in membership or administrative control with any non-African church” (Makhubu 1988:5). He points out that in spite of this characterisation, the Indigenous churches do not practise racism in any manner. They are “not racist at all in outlook and theology” (Makhubu 1985:5).

There is no other route to take in the exposition of the historical background of these churches that would escape the establishment of “Ethiopian-type” churches. This type of churches was “the first AICs in Southern Africa” (Makhubu 1985:5). He notes that they were the first to break away from the missionary churches. The schism came about mainly on “nationalistic grounds”

(Makhubu 1985:5). He says that some of these denominations practice “faith healing and use elements used by Zionists and Apostolics” (Makhubu 1995:6).

The author notes that today there appears to be a few breakaways because the leadership of white churches is now “more concerned about race relations” (Makhubu 1985:6). He, however, mentions a “deepening political and ideological crises” in the country that might lead to further breakaways from historic churches. He gives a broad perspective of “both the emergence of the Ethiopian movement” and what is today known as African Independent Churches (Makhubu 1985:6).

Makhubu notes that the first African Independent Church was established in Zaire around 1870 (Makhubu 1985:6). It is uncertain whether other churches existed before that time as the history of the development of these churches was not recorded. The author says that other breakaways were brought about by founders who were either “expelled from the mainline churches or were forced to leave through various indirect pressures” (Makhubu 1985:6).

Sundkler in Makhubu (1985:7) names Nehemiah Tile as one person who left the Wesleyan church to start the Tembu National Church. Tile was supported by the Tembu Paramount Chief (Makhubu 1985:7). Makhubu believes that the rift between the two parties came about as a result of Tile supporting his cultural practise of circumcision. The mission workers classified this practise “under those which they considered evil and heathen” (Makhubu 1985:7). Tile had been an ordained minister in the Wesleyan church.

Another episode that Sundkler reports is about J.A. Winter of the Berlin Mission who worked in the then Northern Transvaal and who “led and instigated a secession from the Lutheran church” (Makhubu 1985:8). Winter helped to establish the Bapedi Lutheran Church. He knew from the beginning that as a missionary he had to delegate “leadership responsibilities” to the people (Makhubu 1985:8). He antagonised the mission authorities. They then disagreed with him.

To delegate “any form of self-government” to Black people was regarded as being irresponsible. Winter opted to do the opposite. He opted to “propagate the independence of Blacks”. This was an exceptional case, as in many instances, the “desires of the Blacks were overruled by the doctrine of master-servant attitude” (Makhubu 1985:8).

Many of the mission churches practised segregation. The African people were the ones who were most targeted by discriminatory laws including separation in churches. Racial segregation in mission churches had a negative effect on Blacks. Mokone, a Methodist minister, left the church “because of segregated conferences” (Makhubu 1985:8). Mokone resigned and later joined other African Independent Churches’ leaders to establish the “Ethiopian Church”. The leadership was inspired by “Psalm 68:31” (Makhubu 1985:8).

Vilakazi, Mthethwa and Mpanza give their opinion regarding the causes of separation in mission churches. They cried foul of the status of the African branch of the church in comparison to that of the “elect” white church (Vilakazi et al. 1986:17). According to them, the African branch occupied a position of inferiority. They mention that the Africans became aware of this, and their reaction “led to the beginnings of Separatism” (Vilakazi et al.1986:17). They found that European leaders of white churches regarded their African counterparts with suspicion.

The Europeans regarded any sign of “independence and initiative in their African pastors” or “movement towards self-expression” as indiscipline, and the Africans were reprimanded (Vilakazi et al. 1986:17). The authors conclude that African leaders left their “mother-churches” because they disregarded discipline. Africans did not feel comfortable with just filling the numbers but having no say in the affairs of the church. The authors see the “Separatist Church movement” as the struggle of the Black man to defend “his significance as a human being” (Vilakazi et al. 1986:17).

Africans use practical rather than theoretical “concepts”. Makhubu concluded that the African people are “notoriously religious” (Makhubu 1985:59). Africans cannot live without worshipping. Makhubu says it is well-known that Africans “knew God” even before Christianity was introduced to them (Makhubu 1985:59). He emphasises that God was called “by different names by the different ethnic groups”.

Among the Venda, one who “escapes” from danger says he has been “saved by God”. Mbiti (1970:69) mentions that one of the names used to describe God is that of “Deliverer of those in trouble”. This indicates that Africans see God from their own perspective. They see God in their daily situations. They believe that He saves them from all kinds of calamities. African churches therefore also have a specific perspective.

African churches are believed to have grown “in the context” of either “mission churches” or as the offspring of other African-founded churches (Muzorewa 1985:37). The first independent church of a “Ethiopian” nature was founded by Mangena M. Mokone. He was a “malcontented” Wesleyan Methodist church minister.

Parrinder (in Muzorewa 1985:38) gives further reasons for the emergence of African independent churches. Africans were tired of being controlled by foreigners who intended to evangelise Africa by “modern methods”. Africa’s intention was to construct a biblically-based theology that addresses the “spiritual needs” of the African masses. Imported theologies failed to “touch the hearts” of Africans, one of the reasons being that they were trained in a “religious language” that was “foreign” (Muzorewa 1985:96-97).

However, the Western Mission churches argue that African churches are unable to interpret Scripture correctly. Their pastors are seen as being poorly trained. These churches are further accused of emphasising “experience” at the expense of “doctrine” (Clark & Lederle 1989:37). West adds that these churches are being judged as non-Christian and want to take us back to pagan times (West 1975:1).

Kritzinger et al. differ from the critics. They emphasise a rise of a “new hermeneutic” for the “understanding” of Scripture and a new way of “self-understanding” (Kritzinger et al 1994:152). These contextualised theologies differ from one place to another. In the South African situation, these churches are popular among Blacks, because they catered for African spirituality during the “struggle against Apartheid” (Plantinga et al. 2010:379).

Pentecostalism has been criticised as having not contributed to mainstream theology. In Warrington’s opinion, some critics were intent on identifying Pentecostalism on the “basis of their beliefs” (Warrington 2008:18). According to the author, to be able to identify the “core” of the theology of the Pentecostal churches, one has to take note of its theological loci. The Pentecostals emphasise “experiential Christianity” in opposition to doctrinal confession. Life experiences are viewed as important elements of a person’s “hermeneutic and theology” (Warrington 2008:15-16). Warrington argues that in Pentecostalism, theology is recognised as part of the life of a Christian congregation. Theology is seen through peoples’ eyes, not through those of theologians.

Some analysts identify the core of Pentecostal theology as pointing at justification, an act of declaring a sinful man righteous through Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. It also leads to sanctification, a process of acquiring sanctity and spirit-baptism (Warrington 2008:18).

Desmond Tutu disagrees with the Western churches' criticism that African Pentecostal Independent Churches are movements without any theology (Langat 2007:89). Langat says these churches were regarded as having "hardly any decent theology" (Langat 2007:89). They were said to be led by illiterates "with an odd mix of pagan beliefs" (Langat 2007:89). Critics of African Pentecostal Independent Churches labelled them as a "dark spot in the evangelisation program" (Ndiokwere 1981:274). They found these new churches to be a "depressing and scandalous phenomenon" (Ndiokwere 1981:274).

The African Pentecostal Independent Churches are useful in society. They serve the needs of the people. They are "major forces" that work for the community's welfare (Kritzinger et al. 1994:152). In this situation, a minister is not simply a pastor. He is an innovator, a person searching for alternative ways to evangelise people. Pentecostals are searching for a "relevant theology" (Muzorewa 1985:38).

## **1.2 Types of churches**

There are different types of churches. The mainline churches are the results of Western mission effort and are also known as mission-founded churches. According to Bosch, mission is the "activities" employed in the extension of the "Western ecclesiastical system" into the world (Bosch 1991:228). In Nigeria, a question is being asked whether the Church's purpose is not to work as a "tool of imperialism", and whether the Church educators' aim was to "make Christians" or to "Westernize" the citizens (Idowu 1965:1). Nigerians suspect that Christianity might be a foreign institution imposed upon them to serve the interests of the colonisers.

There are different types of Christianity. Various types of Christianity are being practised in Africa. In his work, Mbiti claims that there are "four strands" of Christianity in present day Africa (Mbiti 1986:14). The first strand concerns both the Coptic Orthodox Churches in Egypt and Ethiopia.

The second strand has been produced by the missionary movement. There are two strands that are “widely represented” on this continent (Mbiti 1986:14). They have both common elements and they do interplay. This movement was initiated in Britain and Europe and later in America. Mbiti says that present day “Christian Africa” owes its being to this movement (Mbiti 1986:14-15).

Mbiti mentions that the third strand comes from the “independent church movement”. This Christianity is regarded as an offshoot of “missionary Christianity”. The indigenous movement is known as an “integral part” of the presence of Christianity in Africa (Mbiti 1986:16). In some instances, these churches clothed themselves in “local culture” as well as “traditional religion”. People are drawn to these churches through their “healing sessions” (Mbiti 1986:16).

The fourth strand of Christianity is smaller in comparison. It represents the European immigrants based in Southern Africa. Their Christianity is “conservative” and neglects the “realities” of Africa (Mbiti 1986:17). The apartheid system practiced in South Africa helped to sustain this “foreign” strand of Christianity. Mbiti says that this type of Christianity is not on par with indigenous African Christianity.

Migliore (2004:169) mentions that there is not a single type of Christology that should boast about having exhausted the “breadth and depth” of the mysterious nature of Christ. Both the African Pentecostal Independent Churches and the mainline churches are still grappling with this matter. The mainline churches believe that they have the answers to this mystery. The Western Christian missionaries were blind to the fact that “their theology” is “culturally conditioned” (Bosch 1991:448). They assumed that their theology was “supracultural” and “universally” applicable (Bosch 1991:448). The missionary approach “denigrated and negated” the African way of life (Turaki 1999:16). The reason for indigenisation was to make Christianity to “look more African” and rid it of its strangeness (Turaki 1999:17).

Christianity gave rise to Christian church worship. The Christian church, however, should belong to the environment in which it exists. The church should “dedicate” to God’s glory all things of value in the “culture” of the country (Idowu 1965:7). It must maintain “full allegiance” to an “Unchanging Christ”.

Missionaries were experts in establishing Christian churches of various natures in the world (Kritzinger et al . 1994:4). They set out to evangelise the world. In mission work, the purpose was to introduce the gospel. They also taught the converts to read and write. They used the Western method of education (Idowu 1965:5). However, their training and education method fell short of the African's expectations as it "enslaved the mind". It impressed upon their mind that the right way to "human dignity" and "full-grown personality" was to be like "Europeans" (Idowu 1965:5), and they had to reject their "own culture". God uses ordinary men and women to proclaim the gospel. Mission is, therefore, "missio Dei", God being the initiator of mission (Kritzinger et al. 1994:40).

The planting of the Christian faith in Africa was "culturally oriented" (Muzorewa 1985:26), but it was applied selectively. The missionaries did not consider the culture of the Africans when they introduced Christianity. Price said Africans had to meet certain standards to be declared "saved". They had to assimilate particular "elements of Western culture" (Muzorewa 1985:26). Thus, the African culture was regarded as irrelevant.

The missionaries thought that Africans did not understand anything concerning religion. Historically, sub-Saharan Africa had been characterised by "indigenous religious observances" and native peoples had their own beliefs (Plantinga et al. 2010:379). The missionaries failed to recognise these indigenous religions. To them the Africans who held on to their culture were like heathens. This led to a misunderstanding between the indigenous people and the Western missionaries.

The church had a message to deliver: a message about the coming kingdom of God. The kingdom of God referred to the "dynamic rule and realm" of God (Platinga et al. 2010:151). This rule of God is presently found in all parts of the world. It is evident in the "person and work" of our Lord (Platinga et al. 2010:151). It is a message of hope. Moltmann, in his *Theology of Hope*, describes a missionary church as that of "dialectical hope". It is shaped by the "death of Christ" including his resurrection and that of all people. Karkkainen adds that the church must "serve the world" .(Karkkainen 2002:126).

In the African view, the kingdom of God is what Jesus Christ ushered in during his lifetime. It entails the belief that God is always "on the side of" the poor; the people whose poverty is the

result of “exploitation and oppression” (Mugambi 1989:96). God is seen as identifying himself with the “suffering and oppressed”. Mugambi made mention of James Cone who articulated the conviction that God is identifying himself with “the suffering” of Blacks (Mugambi 1989:96). In South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu adds that God will not abandon those suffering under apartheid. In this approach we see the role of the gospel as more than the saving of souls. The “Beautitudes” reflect the relationship existing between “poverty”, “exploitation” and “poverty” (Mugambi 1989:97).

Jesus Christ is to head and lead us into this new dispensation. In this era the church has to replace the indigenous religious observances. Jesus was the Saviour and founder of the new dispensation. He announced that the kingdom of God is imminent. The missionaries started their own campaign of spreading the gospel.

The message of the kingdom concerns the triune God. The triune God is the power determining everything (Karkkainen 2002:117). Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the triune God. His earthly ministry demonstrated the intervention of God’s power “in the human situation”. He blessed his disciples with “gifts” to establish his church (Karkkainen 2002:207). He thus played a major role in the expansion of God’s kingdom on earth.

The twentieth century experienced Christianity’s dramatic development and growth with the emergence of Pentecostalism. In his report Hollenweger describes this movement as having grown to be the “largest single category” in Protestantism (Karkkainen 2002:69). Anderson sees Pentecostalism as basically and dominantly a phenomenon of the Third World (Anderson 2000:25). Its growth is phenomenal in sub-Saharan Africa. Lee says its origin can largely be ascribed to two pioneers, namely Charles Fox Parham and William Joseph Seymour (Lee 2002:3).

### **1.3 African Pentecostal churches**

The African Pentecostal Independent Churches are on the increase in South Africa. It is one of the fastest growing Christian movements in South Africa (Anderson 2000:26). These denominations emphasise the function of the Holy Spirit in their worship. The origin of Pentecostalism cannot be narrated separately from the “experience” of the Spiritual power (Lee 2002:76-77).

Anderson (2000:28) adds that the beginning of Pentecostalism is associated with the Negro slave religion in the United States. It has its origin in the black-initiated “Azusa street revival” held in a dilapidated area of Los Angeles. He declares that Pentecostalism was accommodating in the social and cultural settings it found itself. Its beliefs were easily transplanted in Africa. Its power lies in its capacity to combine itself into the language and music, including the religious beat of the context in which it lives (Anderson 2008: 28).

It seems that Pentecostalism’s “early manifestations” were evident in the religion of the North American slaves. The people exhibited much of the African religious culture of the countries from which they were rounded up as slaves. To be able to fathom black Pentecostalism its African origins and the nature of slavery in which the blacks understood their Christianity must be taken into consideration. Traces of African “religious ecstaticism” and “spirit possession” can be observed in subtle forms among black and white Pentecostals (Anderson 2000:28).

Anderson (2000:8) acknowledges that there is a significant element of continuity between the African traditional religion and the manifestations of the Holy Ghost in Pentecostalism. Among their members are “Zionist” and “Apostolic” churches (Anderson 2000:8). Opposition by historic churches to the doctrines of baptism “in the spirit”, the speaking “in tongues” and “divine healing”, is one of the factors which led to the establishment of Pentecostal denominations (Warrington 2008:14).

The African Pentecostal independent churches were born out of a need for divine protection amid social disintegration. During the apartheid era in South Africa, the Africans were uprooted from their places of origin. Mphahlele (1986:10) records that African traditions suffered irreparable damage due to enforced “migrant labour” laws. The cruel migrant labour system led to family collapse and suffering.

Whole communities were removed from their “ancestral ground” and so became landless (Mphahlele 1986:10). Those who came from apartheid’s homelands and other rural areas came to settle in urban areas. They hoped to find greener pastures. Verster (2012:25) mentions that these people had “no future” in the rural communities. Lack of facilities was a burning issue for their migration into cities. Verster (2012:25) claims that they struggled to help their children “to receive good education”. In his analysis, Verster says the people hoped to find skills

development training in town which could equip them to “do better work” (Verster 2012:25). In their desperate efforts to find work and other means of generating income, some of the breadwinners left their families alone in these squatter camps. This became the beginning of social disintegration. Social disintegration makes people feel lonely and rejected. Those who are mostly affected are women and children, who then struggle to acclimatise in a new environment, and the church is their only hope. Verster (2012:26) says “the church in all its different forms and relations” is to be found in this area. It plays a crucial role. People found a home in the Apostolic churches because they take their traditions into consideration.

The newcomers to urban informal settlements find themselves in a deep, dark hole from which they cannot escape. They are desperate. They need a platform to express themselves and to be recognised in their hour of need. Some are battle-scarred. They originate from war situations. It is in the African Pentecostal Independent Churches that they find hope. Amid their grief they find a compassionate God who is ready to intervene on their behalf (Anderson 2000:8ff).

African Pentecostal Independent Churches are welcoming homes for the destitute and the broken-hearted. They accommodate families who are desperate to make ends meet in a new and unfamiliar environment. They see their salvation in Jesus Christ. To Africans, salvation is a broad concept. An African sees salvation as an attempt by God to redeem him from all his problems. Salvation to the African is not just a matter of saving his soul. It is to remove all evil from him as well as to bless him. Jesus Christ is as a father to them. He is expected to take care of all of their needs. They come to the church for various reasons. Some come for financial blessings and physical healing. Others come to ask for prayers to be protected from evil spirits. The majority come with their different spiritual gifts to worship God (Anderson 2000:8ff).

Pentecostalism believes that a basic reason for the incarnation of Jesus Christ was to die in order to save mankind. A relationship with God which leads to an eternal life would then be experienced. To Pentecostals the atonement is meant for all people although it is only a “reality” for those taking “advantage” of it (Warrington 2008:35). This free act of God is motivated by his holiness (John 17:25), and his kindness as well as an everlasting love (Titus 3:4-5). Jesus Christ’s death on the cross at Calvary symbolised the end of this mission.

In the African Pentecostal Independent Churches the role played by salvation is about the deliverance of the congregants from their maladies in the here-and-now. As an example, the whole being of an individual is taken into consideration. There is a range of “views of salvation” in which the total being of man is transformed. There is salvation for a person who repents for his sins through Christ Jesus, and there is also salvation for an individual who is not able to make ends meet.

African Pentecostal Independent Churches have a holistic concept of salvation. In an African context salvation is not only about the liberation of the soul for the life hereafter. It concerns itself with all of man’s life’s problems (Anderson 2000:258). The author says that Africans expect the gospel to play a protective role. They view salvation as protection from dying at a young age or from being unable to conceive and give birth.

They see salvation as living a happy and prosperous life. For the African salvation is being safe from enemies and witchcraft, and protection from unemployment, ill health and poverty. Members of the church and the wider community come for counselling and prayers regarding marital problems, incurable illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and alcohol abuse problems. This study’s assessment – irrespective of material needs – is that most come to worship in order to prepare for the after-life, and the upliftment of their spiritual life.

#### **1.4 The role of the Spirit in the African Pentecostal Churches**

The power of the Holy Spirit is the *sine qua non* of African Pentecostal Churches. The Holy Spirit is credited for all work and activities that take place in the church (Anderson 2000: 240). In our daily lives as Africans we are influenced by the ancestors. The ancestors are part and parcel of our communal life. They do form an important component of our daily life. In his work, Nyamiti regards Jesus Christ as an ancestor. He says that Jesus Christ’s ancestorship is found “both in His divinity and humanity” (Nyamiti 1984:25).

Nyamiti elaborates that Christ’s ancestorship may be looked at from an angle of His divinity. His ancestorship seems to “appear as one with His eternal immanent Descendancy” (Nyamiti 1984:25). The author says the *Logos* turned us into his “brother-descendants by sharing his divine descendancy with us” (Nyamiti 1984:25). Christ’s ancestorship is therefore based in the “first and second processions in the Trinity”. To be rooted in the first procession implies “divine

Filiation on the part of Christ” (Nyamiti 1984:25). Lastly, he says it is attached in the second procession because “being Descendancy, it is essentially connected with the Holy Spirit”. Nyamiti indicates that the African people acknowledge that God in his spirit is active among his people. They see Him as the Spirit. He engenders transformation in the life of the congregation. Some ‘receive’ the spirit and begin to prophesy. Others perform miraculous healing and exorcism of demons. The Holy Spirit is one of the many features of the African Pentecostal Churches (Karkkainen 2002:198).

M.L Daneel (1993) from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa throws light on the work of the Holy Spirit in African traditional churches. He depicts four functions of the Holy Spirit as:

- Spirit as the Saviour of humankind

According to the testimony of The Apostle Johane Maranke vaPostori of the African Independent Church of Zimbabwe, the spirit transforms the lives of the poor and marginalised to serve the church of Jesus Christ. The apostle saw himself as the biblical Moses, one who led his disciples to a safe place. The “neglected” and “oppressed” African nations became the “exalted” and “elected” in their calling by the Spirit to preach the word (Karkkainen 2002:198).

In Pentecostal Theology the Spirit plays a number of roles. The functions include salvation of believers as well as transforming them into new beings. Believers are then empowered to do the work of Christ (Warrington 2008:47). The believer who is infused with the power of the spirit develops a consecrated “Christian lifestyle”. He further develops an active love for Jesus Christ, enjoys a greater experience of his presence, and performs more studies of the Bible (Warrington 2008:118). The believers are being transformed ethically and spiritually.

The Holy Spirit binds the disciples to Jesus Christ, thus establishing a “new life” as well as a “new community” in him (Migliore 2004:227). It is by this power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is availed to the believers. The Spirit is like a bridge between the past and the present. The one Christ we preach is not a distant event separated from us by an ugly ditch (Migliore 2004:227).

- Spirit as healer and protector

He made known that the Holy Spirit functions as healer and protector against evil forces. The Holy Spirit endows the believers with the gifts of healing. This gift can be given to any member of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7, 14). The African Pentecostal Independent Church's prophets are endowed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps to diagnose the illness of the sick. The Spirit enables believers to facilitate the healing of certain diseases (Warrington 2008:80). The healing ministry draws many people to these churches. Young and old consult the prophets and healers about their illnesses.

- Spirit of justice and liberation

The African Pentecostal Independent Churches are not restricting the action of the Holy Spirit to healing alone. The church is also encouraged to participate in politics. The church is not supposed to turn a blind eye when the nation is oppressed by its rulers. A person cannot claim to love God if he does not take care of his neighbour. Scripture exhorts us to love God and our neighbours (Matthew 22:36-40). This was demonstrated in Zimbabwe's political struggle against the colonial rule. The late Bishop Samuel Muteneli used the Spirit to mobilize the community to resist the colonial administration (Karkkainen 2002:199).

- Spirit and earth – keeping

The Holy Spirit inspires man to be conscious of nature and the protection of crops.

### **1.5 Economic aspects of the APC**

The economic climate is not always favourable for many African-initiated churches as some are located in the informal settlements. Most of the inhabitants of informal settlements are poor and unemployed. They are congregants of these African-founded churches. Some do not have money for church contributions. They actually look towards the church for assistance, bringing with them their socio-economic problems. Others earn low incomes and do not have the means to feed their families. Poverty is rife in the informal settlements. Van der Walt (2003:40) adds that poverty implies a lack of income to buy food, clothes, and to pay for the education of one's children.

There is a vast difference in the resources of Christian denominations. Some do have money allocated to them from their parent churches. The researcher is of the opinion that bodies which are funded stand a good chance of growth and development as opposed to those lacking funding. The Government used to support some of the missionary-founded churches and gave funds and land to those institutions. Due to lack of funding, African-initiated churches struggled to stand on their own feet. Even today the African Pentecostal Independent Churches are still struggling in South Africa with funds to build proper church structures. Van der Walt (2003:54) mentions that the government should be religiously neutral.

In comparison mainline churches are financially better off than the African-founded churches. The former are well-established, do have church buildings and some assets. They fortunately also have budgets. Most of the ministers of African Pentecostal Independent Churches do not even earn a stipend. These churches are maintained by their founders. This challenge impacts negatively on the leadership; nevertheless they must continue to do their work.

Fund-raising as well as donations do help in the day-to-day administration of the church. Churches do have schemes to raise funds. Some members of the congregation club together and contribute toward the schemes. Profit made is used to assist the church. Raffle is also encouraged among members of the church. The church also fast and pray that the Lord must send them donors. To assist the poor the church cultivates vegetable gardens. The employed members of the church, and those who have other sources of income, contribute to the church fund.

## **1.6 Identity of Jesus Christ from an African Perspective**

In this dissertation the argument revolves around the true identity of Jesus Christ. The mission-founded churches reject the doctrine of African Pentecostal Independent Churches concerning His true nature. The historic churches believe that Jesus Christ has two natures. The missionaries viewed African culture as a distraction to the proliferation of Christianity. They were “insensitive” to indigenous cultures (Appia-Kubi & Torres 1979:18). They regarded their own culture as superior. They assumed that “heathenish and pagan” religions were linked to other cultures. They had to be “destroyed” to facilitate the spread of Christianity (Appia-Kubi & Torres 1979:20).

The missionaries were convinced that Africans knew nothing about God. They believed in the “supremacy” of the Christian faith (Appia-Kubi & Torres 1979:18). Their true God came in colourful Western cultural clothes. They had a “Western worldview” (Turaki 1999:11). In contrast, Africans valued their religions. They were aware that there is a Supreme Being who might have created the world, a supernatural “force” beyond their comprehension. They called that Supreme Being by the name “Modimo”. In their traditions, a human was more important than all the other beings. Man was centrally situated in their daily lives. A person was supposed to consult with and given approval by the community to do certain things. In his community, man as an individual had no power. He did no work without consulting the elders in his community. In other words, “social relationships” establish an important “network” in Africa (Mphahlele 1986:9).

In Setswana “Modimo” means “He who is above all things”. The Africans worship God in a manner applicable to their situation. They knew their ancestors as their protectors. They used to consult their ancestors as mediators when confronted with problems in the family or community. Man asked the ancestors to help “restore harmony” (Mphahlele 1986:9). If such a problem was above the means of the community, then the community was obliged to consult Modimo. In other words, Modimo is consulted only as the last resort. The ancestors act as intercessors between Modimo and the community on “communal occasions” (Mphahlele 1986:9).

In the Christian religion, God is at the centre of all things. Man is seen as a sinful “fallen being”. He can be saved only “through Christ and grace” (Mphahlele 1986:6). In Christianity when you wrong a fellow being, you also sin against God. You are obliged to go to church and confess. In African society, you do not “rush to the church” to confess your crime. You talk to the aggrieved person, sometimes through the assistance of a mediator. You have to enlist the help of the ancestors to “restore harmony” (Mphahlele 1986:9). The Western missionaries disagreed with this African principle.

Tutu emphasises the beauty found in diversity. He mentions the “Godhead” as an image of “diversity in unity” (Tutu 2011:50). He says Christians believe that they are created “in the image of God”. In this image of God all the different nations are invested with “infinite worth”. There is therefore no “superior or inferior” race (Tutu 2011:50).

In his book, *God is not a Christian*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu pledges his support for the church to play an active role in politics. He says that the prophet Isaiah condemned religious practices which had no relevance to the political and economic arena in which it found itself. He regards such an institution as an “insult” to God (Tutu 2011:135-136). It is the Holy Spirit which inspired him to play a role in fighting for justice for all in South Africa.

Bosch was against the outlook of the missionaries. He tells us how Western churches made themselves the “referees” over “local theologies” (Bosch 1991:456). He questioned the Western church’s right to mandate to itself the power to be “an arbitrator” in regard to Third World theologies. He warned that all theologies “need one another” as they “enrich” and “invigorate” one another (Bosch 1991:456). The Western Christian church viewed itself as a holy cow.

Bosch, who quotes Walls, also warns against a “too local” church. A church of this nature may be of an opinion that its position on the good news is the “only legitimate” one (Bosch 1991:456). He mentions that the church must be a welcoming home for all. When a section of the congregation feels “unwelcome” and alienated then the church is unwholesome. In many historical churches, Africans felt unwelcome and mistreated.

African Theology accepts that in Jesus Christ is the “fulfilment of its teachings” about the human person’s “relationship” with Divinity (Setiloane 1986:35-36). In Him lies the future for humanity. In his work, Setiloane maintains that its reflections are those of the historical Jesus. African Theology accepts him as Divinity’s “confirmation” of its experience (Setiloane 1986:36). In conclusion, African Theology claims equality with any brand of Christianity in the interpretation of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ.

### **1.7 The task of the church in challenging circumstances**

The church has a role to play in the development of the people. As most communities in South Africa are presently living in informal settlements, the church is supposed to support them in their daily struggle for survival. Verster (2012:58) explains that the church has an important role to play in informal settlements. The church brings hope to those who feel ostracised. According to Verster, the church is fully aware of “God’s love and care” (Verster 2012:58). The church is therefore supposed to reach out to those in need. The author concludes that Christ is alive in the community in the church (Verster 2012:58).

The church must not underestimate the problem of poverty in urban settlements. In the researcher's opinion, the church ought to be practically involved in the daily struggle of the people. It is not enough to preach the Gospel to empty stomachs as that does not bode well with Jesus Christ's message of care and compassion. Verster notes that the good news of Christ is "not a Gospel of the pie in the sky" (Verster 2012:58). He says it is the good news of "radical hope" in the present situation. In his work, Verster mentions Van der Walt's Christian worldview. Van der Walt (2003:109) mentions that the good news of Christ is "involved with everything that concerns our lives" This Gospel touches "every aspect of our lives" (Verster 2012:59).

## **CHAPTER 2      The life of Jesus Christ**

### **2.1    The life of Jesus in Palestine**

Palestine consisted of a “largely agricultural and rural” community. It had towns and villages populated by peasants (Borg 1987:80). It was politically “part of the Roman empire” (Borg 1987:80).

The name Jesus is synonymous with the poverty-stricken people. He was associated with the poor and marginalised. Borg noted His deep involvement in the social and political life of his community (Borg 1987:79). Jesus was a “rural dweller” in His life (Mugambi 1989:91). Both his parents were also rural dwellers. Jesus enjoyed his youth mostly in rural towns of Galilee (Mugambi 1989:91). Most of his public ministry was devoted to the poor “rural society” in the countryside (Mugambi 1989:91). He did not seek status. He elected to minister in rural areas although the “seat of political and religious leadership” was in Jerusalem (Mugambi 1989:92). Matthew noted that Jesus’ first public ministry was in Capernaum.

Mugambi said that Jesus appointed the first four of his disciples among “petty fishermen” (Mugambi 1989:92). He did not opt for rabbis and scribes. He elected the uneducated fishermen. The four fishermen whom he chose were Simon, Andrew, and the two sons of Zebedee, namely James and John (Mugambi 1989:92). Jesus taught and preached “the gospel of the kingdom” (Mugambi 1989:92). He also healed diseases and infirmities among the people.

Mark indicated that Jesus began to minister publicly “in the province of Galilee” (Mugambi 1989:93). The evangelist affirms that Jesus and his first four followers went into Capernaum and entered “the synagogue and taught” (Mugambi 1989:92). The gospel of Mark placed on record that He “taught them as one who had authority” (Mark 1:22). The evangelist records his first miracle. It is the miraculous healing of “a man with unclean spirit”. The evil spirit recognised Jesus as “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:23-25). It is clear that even the evil spirits knew that He was the Son of God.

The evangelist Luke informs his audience that Jesus went to Jerusalem in his infancy. His parents presented him to God “according to the Law of Moses” (Mugambi 1989:93). He said:

“When the time of their purification according to

the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph  
and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to  
the Lord”

Luke 2:22

This ceremony of presenting the child to God demonstrates that Jesus was fully human.

Luke said Jesus “increased in wisdom and stature” and was favoured by God and man (Mugambi 1989:94). The evangelist said Jesus stayed a lengthy period in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. He remained in the temple “discussing with scholars” (Mugambi 1989:94).

John’s gospel differs with the version of the Synoptic gospels regarding the “place where Jesus began his public ministry” (Mugambi 1985:94). There is, however, unanimity concerning Jesus ministry that it commenced in rural areas. John recorded Jesus’ first miracle as the “making of wine” in Cana (Mugambi 1985:94). The miracle highlighted Jesus’ divine nature.

The Western mission churches were convinced that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine (Migliore 2004:178). He was not to be seen as half a man and half a God. Although fully man he had the attributes of a deity. Jesus Christ lived in this world as a human being. Numerous people verified this matter as a historical fact.

The synoptic gospels, including John, witness to His life and ministry. The gospels portray the life of Jesus of Nazareth as an “historical” fact. These gospels are not historical books. They are inspired books of faith. Kasper describes the Gospels as “testimonies of faith” (Kasper 1976:29). However, they do cover aspects of Jesus Christ’s life in detail. This aspect of His life is covered in an historical context.

Jesus Christ is the founder of the Christian faith. He is “an historical figure”. Kasper claims that he lived in the then Palestine between “7 BC and 30 AD” (Kasper 1976:26). The birth of Jesus Christ altered history. He influenced change in religious, spiritual, intellectual, and social spheres (Kasper 1976:26).

The evidence for the historical Jesus lies in the narratives of the evangelists. These New Testament documents were compiled within the community which “confessed” the lordship of Jesus (Bruce 1986:23). According to Bruce, the disciples of any great leader would study and record his “memoirs”. The gospels have been subjected to a more sustained “critical analysis” than other known comparable literature (Bruce 1986:23-24). These documents are viewed as reliable sources.

In the history of Jesus Christ we are mostly concerned about His life history. The important events in his life are his birth, the commencement of his ministry, the duration of His ministry, His death and resurrection.

In his gospel, Matthew records Jesus’ genealogy. His family roots could be traced back to King David (Matthew 1:1). His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph. She was a virgin but fell pregnant before her marriage. She had been impregnated by the “Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18). This scandal led Joseph to contemplate breaking off the engagement. As he was a “righteous” man, he intended to do that secretly to avoid disgracing Mary publicly (Matthew 1:19) (Guthrie 1972:12).

We learn that Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod (Matthew 2:1). His birth caused controversy among the people. It is recorded that “wise men” from the East came to enquire about him. They asked for the whereabouts of the newly born “king” of the Jews (Matthew 2:2). They intended to worship him. Their enquiry caused uneasiness for King Herod and the “whole of Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:3). He asked where the “Christ” was supposed to be born. They informed him that it was to be in “Bethlehem of Judea” (Guthrie 1972:30).

In Luke, we learn that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. It was during the time when Caesar Augustus had issued a “decree” that all citizens of the Roman world should be registered (Luke 2:1). This was the “first census”. The census was completed when Quirinius was a Syrian Governor. It was then that both his parents went to Bethlehem to be registered. They went to Bethlehem because of the necessity to take part in an official census (Guthrie 1972:18). While they were there Mary gave birth. In the nearby field, an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds. The angel brought them “good news”. (Luke 2:8-10). The good news was the birth of a “Saviour”, Christ the Lord.

In his gospel, John brings to us a Christ who is the Logos. Thompson says the Word became “flesh” (Thompson 1988:33). In him was life, and he was the light of the world. While the gospels do not give us a complete biography of Jesus Christ, there is no doubt that they refer to a “concrete human being” (Migliore 2004:174). Jesus was like us humans in all respects except that he was “without sin”, and born of “a woman” (Migliore 2004:174). The author adds that He was “fully human”. Like all other humans, Jesus grew and matured in all aspects (Migliore 2004:174). He experienced human emotions such as “joy”, “grief” and “compassion”. He suffered and died (Migliore 2004:174). He suffered thirst and hunger. Migliore further describes sin as an act of alienating one from and being hostile to the “grace of God” (Migliore 2004:174).

John the Baptist appeared on the scene when Caiaphas was the high priest in Jerusalem. He came to “testify” of the Light. He witnessed that all men should believe and adhere to it (John 1:6-7). John did not claim to be the Light. He was the messenger “from God”. Jesus was the “true Light” from God. This perfect Light was to illumine every individual (John 1:9). He had a unique relationship with the Father. He therefore, brings “light” and “life” from the Father (Migliore 2004:165). He was not only fully human but also “fully divine”. He is two “natures” that are united in one “person” (Migliore 2004:164). In Jesus, God reconciled the world to himself. In other words, what He “does and suffers” is simultaneously the “doing and suffering” of God (Migliore 2004:177).

Jesus’ family was well-known: Is he not the one whose parents “we know?” (John 6:42). The people knew them as Joseph and Mary. The Jewish community “murmured” that he is “the son of Joseph” (Thompson 1988:13). He grew up amongst his people, the Jews. Their culture and religious heritage influenced him (Migliore 2004:174). He hailed from Galilee. His coming from Galilee was the source of discontent concerning his claims. This place could neither be the home of the “expected prophet” nor that of “the Messiah” (Thompson 1988:16). Bruce (1986:31) maintains that he grew up in Nazareth.

Makhubu pointed out that among the African Independent Churches there are those who are under the influence of the evangelical tradition. They are more in line with other church formations. These churches acknowledge Christ as “the true Son of God and as Lord and Saviour” (Makhubu 1985:62). The African Pentecostal Independent Churches acknowledge Him as the latter. They believe that He was both human and divine.

Nyamiti intends to find out whether Christ is our ancestor. The author makes a broad comparison between African brother-ancestralship and Christ's relationship to mankind. He refers to Christ's relationship to us "in virtue of His being God-man and our Redeemer" (Nyamiti 1984:19).

Nyamiti indicated that African brother-ancestralship is established on "consanguinity and the supernatural status" of those recognised as ancestors (Nyamiti 1984:20). He mentions that Christ's relationship to humanity is "linked with consanguinity" based on His Adamite origin (Nyamiti 20). Christ's brotherhood, which is Adamite in nature, transcends all "family, clanic, tribal or racial limitations" (Nyamiti 1984:20). Christ's brotherhood "parallels that of Adam himself" who is regarded as the "father and ancestor" of all peoples (Nyamiti 1984:21). The author further describes a relationship between African ancestors and their surviving relatives. He claims that both are equally related "to their common immediate parents" (Nyamiti 1984: 21).

Jesus Christ's Sonship to his Father is far different "from our sonship to the same Father" (Nyamiti 1984:21). Christ's superiority to mankind is due to "His divine status" (Nyamiti 1984:21). His status renders Him closer to the Father in comparison to the African ancestors. This brings us to the point of why we should regularly have a sacred communication with Him (Nyamiti 1984:21).

The author further said Christ's hypostatic union is connected with His "salvific mediation" (Nyamiti 1984:21). His salvific mediation suggests that His brotherhood is inseparably connected with "redemptive, priestly, royal and prophetic connotations" (Nyamiti 1984: 21).

Jesus Christ is being compared to African ancestors. He is the "model of behaviour" to his followers and the "source of Christian tradition and its stability" (Nyamiti 1984:21). As God-man He is "infinitely more perfect" in comparison to the African ancestors. He is described as the "inner source and vital principle" of the lives of Christians (Nyamiti 1984:21). Scripture attests to the truth that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The gospels are the primary sources of the life of Jesus Christ.

## 2.2 Jesus and the religious leaders

Various religious groups were active in Palestine. Among these groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were one of the leading parties. Of all active movements, they were the “best known” (Borg 1987:88). The Pharisees were a pious people. They regarded themselves as disciplined upholders of “tradition and culture” (Guthrie 1972:128). They expected the Jewish law to be adhered to to the letter. They fought for the “scrupulous observance” of the law. Those who did not observe the Law would forfeit “all civil and religious” rites (Borg 1987:89).

In Capernaum was a paralytic whom Jesus healed. Jesus said to him that his sins were forgiven (Guthrie 1972:90). By merely mentioning that his sins were forgiven he caused a stir among the scribes and the Pharisees. Guthrie says that it was a “Pharisaic tenet” that only God could “forgive sins” (Guthrie 1972:90). In their minds, Jesus committed blasphemy. To them he was a person who purported to be God. They did not recognise him as their Messiah.

Jesus had a controversial relationship with the Pharisaic religious leaders. He cried foul over their hypocrisy. He saw them as people who outwardly “honoured God”, but “inwardly” men (Guthrie 1972:147). They appear in the gospels as a group of religious people who were against the teachings of Jesus Christ. He mocked their holier than thou attitude. They did not enjoy “table fellowship” with those who did not adhere to strict “laws of levitical purity” (Bruce 1986:36). They were most concerned with ritual purity.

The Pharisees were not in favour of what Jesus taught and uttered. They had been aware that a Messiah is to come, and the Messiah would be a descendant of David. He would be a person of royalty, but they knew where Jesus came from. They were convinced that he is not the Son of David (Guthrie 1972:132). They knew what type of friends he had. He associated with those whom the Pharisees labelled as sinners and outcasts (Guthrie 1972:92). In the calling of Levi to be a disciple, Jesus disgusted the Pharisees. It was during a banquet in his honour when they realised that he associates with tax collectors (Guthrie 1972:92).

The Pharisees intended to solve the Jewish problem. “Like Jesus” the Pharisees attempted “to deal theologically” with the distress of the Israelites (Bosch 1991:26), but they had a different approach than that of Jesus. The two formations did not adhere to the same principles and they

stood for their own religious goals. The Pharisees intended to “counteract the threat” faced by “Jewish social world”. Their strategy was to radicalise the Torah in the “direction of holiness” (Borg 1987:88). Jesus challenged their attitude and practices that “arbitrarily” excluded “potential members” (Bosch 1991:27).

The Pharisaic authorities marginalised those who were on the periphery of society. They did not associate with the commoners. They disassociated with the poor, the blind, the lepers and tax collectors, etc (Bosch 1991:27).

The Sadducees played an active role in the local politics. They were a “conservative” and “aristocratic” movement (Borg 1987:87). They did not aspire for renewal. This group had its followers among the rich. Bosch notes that they drew their membership among the “wealthy landed aristocracy” (Bosch 1986:128). They were wealthy people.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Guthrie 1972:283). They came to Jesus with a tricky question. They challenged him on the issue of resurrection. They quoted an incident of a woman married to seven brothers as her legal partners. Each of them passed away, and later the wife died. They asked Him to whom would she belong in the resurrection (Guthrie 1972:283). Jesus realised that the Sadducees were not thinking in spiritual terms. The resurrected would live on a “new level” (Guthrie 1972:284). They would be spiritual beings. “Marriage” is important on earth for the purpose of “continuation” of the human race (Guthrie 1972:283-284).

The Sadducees accept the Pentateuch as their highest authority. Guthrie notes that they “appealed” to the Law of Moses (Guthrie 1972:283). Jesus used the Pentateuch to answer their question. Jesus said He is God of “the living” (Guthrie 1972:284). In answer to the Sadducees he once more affirmed his divinity.

### **2.3 Jesus and the kingdom of God.**

Jesus Christ has been described as not a modern man (Kasper 1976:31). Instead of renewing the world, he proclaimed the heralding of the new one. Central to his message is the Kingdom of God. Mark said that He preached the gospel about the dawn of the “kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14).

This Kingdom of Heaven was initiated and ushered in by God himself. Tyndale Bible Dictionary describes Kingdom of God as the “sovereign rule” of God that is “initiated” by the ministry of Christ on earth (Tyndale Bible Dictionary). According to Kasper, it will not come through man’s own efforts as it is “the action” of the Lord (Kasper 1976:31). Jesus is not just a human figure, but one sent to deliver us from our own sins. His kingdom was for our salvation from the sins we inherited, and that which we have committed. Those who believe in his Messiahship would enjoy an everlasting life.

Implications of Jesus’ ministry are clear:

- Jesus as Saviour:

In the gospel of Luke he is declared to be the “Saviour of the world” (Migliore 2004:165). Jesus is seen to be concerned with the lives of the “marginalised people”. In the gospel of John the spotlight is on the “unique relationship” which exists between “the Son” and his “Father” (Migliore 2004:165).

According to Warrington, all persons possess “an inclination” to commit sin (Warrington 2008:35). Sin is rebellion against God. Jesus Christ came as a sacrificial lamb. He came to die in order to save mankind from perishing in his own sins. He was man’s only hope of salvation and reconciliation with God. The Christian God is “the saving” God. The Christian Bible as a whole forms a narrative of “salvation” (Plantinga et al. 2010:313). It is the narrative of God’ “salvific initiatives”. The storyline reach its highest point in the “provision of salvation” for “all nations” through Jesus Christ (Plantinga et al. 2010:313).

Salvation is not only about the saving of souls. It is multidimensional in nature. It is used in a “variety of ways” in reference to an experience of “forgiveness”, “righteousness”, and “wholeness”, and a way of relating Christ’s work to “soteriology” is to make use of the “distinction” between “accomplished” and “applied” redemption (Plantinga et al. 2010:314). The distinction’s purpose is to bring together the “work of Christ” to that of “the Spirit”. Reconciliation is accomplished by Christ and the Holy Ghost “applies” that salvation to the lives of the society (Plantinga et al. 2010:314). Due to redemption, believers enter into a new relationship with God.

- Sanctifier

In other instances, Jesus' role as sanctifier is emphasized. He died for us all, and his blood was shed to sanctify all who would believe in him. It is his blood which cleanses all our sins. The blood of the Son of God purifies from sin (1 John 1:7).

- Healer

Healing is part and parcel of Jesus Christ's ministry. He was recognised by the multitudes as a healer. He healed in a miraculous manner. Warrington notes that the Gospel authors present Jesus Christ as an exceptional healer (Warrington 2008:269). He demonstrated God's power in natural human settings. Matthew gives various accounts of Jesus Christ's miraculous healings.

He healed a man with leprosy (Matthew 8:2-3). Leprosy was an incurable disease. The disease might have been contagious, and thus lepers were banished from living with other people. Being a leper was a major catastrophe in one's life. Jesus' healing of this man was a divine act. Other miracles included the healing of a Roman officer's servant (Matthew 8:5-13), Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15), a paralysed man (Matthew 9:2-7), a bleeding woman (Matthew 9:20-22), etc. He used the word and other means to heal his patients. Jesus' love, mercy and compassion motivated his acts of goodwill.

- Baptiser of the Spirit

Faith is punctuated by the "believer's baptism" (Lee 2002:37). A primary distinguishing feature of Pentecostalism is spirit baptism. Jesus Christ is the one who revealed this new form of baptism. John the Baptist said He will baptise with the "Holy Spirit and fire" (John 3:16). To some of the Pentecostals spirit baptism refers to the moment when the believer is baptized into the church by the Spirit. They believe that it is Jesus Christ who initiates baptism of the believer into the Spirit (Warrington 2008:100). Baptism in the Spirit empowered some believers to manifest various gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- King

Jesus Christ was known as the king. He represented the kingdom of God. As our king, he brings us into a “realm of justice and companionship” with other people from whom we have been separated (Migliore 2004:160). He proclaimed and enacted God’s reign. Matthew declared that the Magi declared him king of the Jews (Matthew 2:2). Jesus also confirmed that he was the king. During his trial Pilate asked him whether he was a king. He replied, “Yes” (Luke 23:3). Jesus would be the king of all nations. They will serve him, and his dominion will be an everlasting dominion (Daniel 7:14). Jesus Christ was given the power to rule on earth as well as in heaven. He has “authority” in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He had the power to rule the world. All things are under his command.

## **CHAPTER 3      The humanity and deity of Jesus Christ**

### **3.1    The uniqueness of Jesus**

Christianity is unique. It is different from other major monolithic religions. To clarify how an individual can be man and God simultaneously is a complex matter. However, Christians believe that Yahweh, their God, does have a special relationship with mankind. They believe that God's involvement with humankind was enshrined in Jesus' birth, life and resurrection (Jordaan & Jordaan 2003:807). Major religions such as Islam and Judaism agree that Jesus was a great prophet. The Q'uran describes Jesus as a human being, a person led by God, a prophet. God's apostle. They differ with Christians about His deity. The Q'uran "holy book" of the Islamic religion declares that there is only one God and his name is Allah. The Q'uran is regarded by the adherents of this faith as God's "infallible truth" (Jordaan & Jordaan 2003: 808). They regard Mohammed as his prophet. They view the Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the "Son of God" as blasphemy. To Islam Jesus was only one of the outstanding prophets, as were Abraham and Moses. The religion of the Jewish people is known as Judaism. Their holy book is known as the Torah. To them there is only one God. They do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Jews accept Jesus Christ as a human, but they refuse to acknowledge his deity. Both Judaism and Islam believe that Jesus Christ was just a popular religious leader. They both acknowledge that God sent him, and that he was a great prophet. In Brown's words, on encountering the "true God, true man" dogma, they rejected the "true God" element (Brown 1994:25).

Jesus Christ is the one person who is universally misunderstood in this world. Muslims, Jews, atheists, secularists, and Christians themselves, misunderstand him. He is sometimes misrepresented by Christians. In Christian circles, He had a hypostatic nature: the doctrine that He had both divine and human natures, but that did not make him two separate persons. The union of his two natures in one is described as a hypostasis (Migliore 2004:178). In this union, there is no confusion or separation. A hypostasis is regarded as the very essence of the person of Jesus in which his humanity and divinity are united. The origin of this phrase can be traced back to scripture. John testified about the "Word" which turned into flesh (John 1:1,14NIV).

The Word existed eternally, and there was "no time when he was not". He was allowed to come down to earth. We have now known that Word that came down to earth as Jesus Christ. Authors

Hart and Thimmel explained that when he became human, “the divine Logos” turned into Jesus the Nazarene (Hart & Thimmel 1989:13). We found Him as our God in human flesh. The Council of Chalcedon saw him as having two natures, which do not manifest “confusion” and “change”. Moreover, there is no “division” and “separation” in the one person of Christ.

### **3.2 The identity of Jesus**

The identity of Jesus has always been a bone of contention. Theologians, religious leaders, secular leaders and common people have pondered this issue for ages. Jesus was aware of this problem. The people were confused about his true identity. They gave him various names. He then asked his disciples: “Who do you say I am?” (Luke 9:20). Peter answered that he is the “Christ of God!” (Luke 9:20). In order to solve this crisis, the “institutional church” formulated its authoritative doctrines. This “process” culminated in the early creeds (Plantinga et al. 2010:432). The ancient Creeds prepare us to give an authoritative answer to such a question.

The mainline churches affirm the doctrine of the two natures of Jesus Christ. He is regarded as being “identical” with the “pre-existent logos” (Plantinga et al. 2010:245). Jesus of Nazareth is the one person who possessed both a “fully divine nature” as well as a “fully human nature”. The authors add that this “two-natures model” has the “endorsement” of leading theologians. The traditions of the “Orthodox”, the “Catholic” and “Protestant” churches support this model (Plantinga et al. 2010:245).

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ indicate to us what kind of a person He was. From the time of his birth, up to the day of ascension, we learn a lot about him. From the information gleaned from the Gospels, the letters of the Apostle Paul and Old Testament prophets we learned about the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Other extra-biblical sources shed light on his two natures.

It is from his names that we learn more about him and can make sense of who he really was. He is known as Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary. He is also known as Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity confesses that in Jesus of Nazareth God revealed Himself uniquely and unmistakably (Kasper 1976:163). He is also well known as Jesus Christ. The Scripture named him Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:45), and he was also called the Christ (Matthew 1:1). In his time, a person had only one name. In other words, the name Christ is the title attached to him.

The Greek term for Christ (Christos) was used in the LXX to translate Hebrew “Messiah”, and it means “the anointed one” (Burkett 2002:61). The Hebrew Scriptures indicate that kings and high priests were anointed for their respective offices. In the New Testament this term is now almost the second name of Jesus Christ (Harper Collins Bible Dictionary 2009). The term “Christ” singled out Jesus as the person who fulfilled the Jews’ expectations of old (Romans 9:5).

Hebrew prophets were of the opinion that God would raise up a king among his people who would rule over the Israelites in future. They believed in an idea of an everlasting Davidic dynasty (Burkett 2006:61). The Samaritans were also aware that the Lord would send them a prophet like Moses. He was the man expected to deliver them from oppression and to “guide them like Moses”. They expected a great leader such as Moses who would perform signs and miracles.

### **3.3 Titles of Jesus**

The New Testament believes that Jesus Christ was a human being who lived on this planet. He was born of a woman like any other person. He knew the pangs of hunger and thirst like any human being. He went through difficult times in which he experienced sorrow, love, compassion, anger, pain and death (Kasper 1976:197). Jesus Christ was also called Prophet, High Priest and Son of man. To some he was the resurrected John the Baptist and to others the Prophet Elijah. He was also called a rabbi as he recognized as an outstanding religious teacher (Bruce 1986:49). Due to his mission of salvation on earth, Paul refers to Jesus as the “Last Adam”. The book of Genesis mentions that Adam was the first human being to be created by God. He was a good person created by God in his own image. He disobeyed God’s instruction and thus brought sin and death to mankind. Now Jesus Christ as the Last Adam came to conquer sin and death. The Last Adam became “a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

#### **3.3.1 Jesus as Prophet**

Jesus Christ is portrayed as being similar to the Old Testament prophets. He also announces the word of God to the people (Osmer 2008:135). Two disciples who came from Jerusalem and did see his crucifixion spoke about him as “a prophet powerful in word and deed” (Luke 24:19). Osmer regards him as more than a prophet. He portrays him as the culmination of the prophetic

hope. He is the Messiah (Osmer 2008:135). He was the end-time prophet, the one whom the prophets of old spoke about.

He had the “authority” to change the stipulations of the old covenant, the one to usher in the new covenant. He is the promised “agent of salvation” (Osmer 2008:135). Jesus Christ does not only function as the messenger of God.

In his work, Borg declared Jesus as an “eschatological prophet” (Borg 1987:11). He described the phrase “eschatology” as a branch of theology concerning the “end time” (Borg 1987:11). By the end time the author referred to the end of the world, including “last judgment, and the dawning of the everlasting kingdom” (Borg 1987:11). In his view, that type of a prophet announces the end time. Jesus, who was regarded as an eschatological prophet, proclaimed the “Kingdom of God” at the centre of his message (Borg 1987:11). In Mark’s summary Jesus’ mission is described as “the Kingdom of God is at hand, therefore repent!” (Borg 1987:11). He however, indicates that this image is dependent upon a “particular interpretation” regarding the phrase “Kingdom of God”. That Kingdom of God, is to be interpreted eschatologically, as meaning the “final Kingdom which would bring an end to earthly history” (Borg 1987:11).

### **3.3.2 Jesus as Second Moses**

During his life Jesus Christ was seen as a second Moses. He was not Moses or Elijah but someone greater than them. The Hebrew prophet Moses told the people of Israel that God would bring a prophet for them. God would speak to them through the mouth of that prophet (Bruce 1986:187). When Moses died no prophet of his stature came to the fore until the birth of Christ.

There were prophets who spoke on behalf of God, but did not reach the standard set by Moses. Bruce claims that Jesus’ contemporaries recognised the similarities of Moses in him. They declared that he is the one whom Moses spoke about. The people recognised him by the miracle he performed and words he uttered about those who are thirsty, as “indeed the prophet!” (John 7:40).

### **3.3.3 Jesus as Son of man**

The Lord was also known as the Son of man. It was Jesus himself who frequently used the term Son of man. The title is used eighty times in the New Testament (Kasper 1976:107). This phrase

appears as a reference to Daniel's prophecy. In his vision Daniel claims to have seen one "like a Son of man" who came with the clouds from heaven (Daniel 7:13-14), and he was given all authority and power and all nations worshipped him. One is obliged to ask for the real meaning of the Son of man. This is the one who represents God's "eschatological kingdom" and the "saints of the Most High" (Kasper 1976:107). The figure of one like the Son of man symbolises the "humanity of God's Kingdom" in the last days.

### **3.3.4 Jesus as High Priest**

One of Jesus Christ's many titles was that of High Priest. The author of Hebrews names Jesus Christ as a High Priest (Hebrews 2:17), and a High Priest used to mediate between the people of Israel and their God. It was God who made a covenant with his people. It was a sacrificial cult. It served a good cause in case they sinned against God (Burkett 2002:472). There was a sanctuary where the High Priest could approach God on behalf of the people.

According to Burkett, the new sanctuary is now in heaven where God is, and Jesus Christ is now the new high priest. Culmann confirms that Jesus was a High Priest (Culmann 1963:83). His priesthood is now according to the order of Melchizedek. In the priesthood of Aaron there were different high priests. New priests had to replace those who died. Jesus' priesthood is preferable as he lives forever and need not be replaced (Burkett 2007:472-473).

Scripture tells us that Jesus is now our lamb of sacrifice. He offered himself as an atonement sacrifice. He is the one who died once for us so that we may be saved from the penalty of our sins. Through his blood we have been cleansed of all our sins (1 John 1:7). This indicates that Jesus Christ was the only suitable candidate for the redemption of mankind.

### **3.3.5 Jesus as Teacher**

Jesus Christ was commonly known as a teacher or rabbi by his followers. He had the prowess of an intelligent teacher. He used to sit down with his disciples to teach them the Word of God. On a particular day he attended a religious feast where he took an opportunity to teach the people at the temple courts. His outstanding knowledge amazed the Jews. They questioned how he had acquired such knowledge "without having studied" (John 7:14-15). Jesus retorted that what he taught was given to him by the "one who sent him" (John 7:16).

The multitudes referred to Jesus as rabbi (John 6:25). They knew that he had answers to their difficult questions. They asked him the requirements for doing the work of God. Jesus taught them that they must believe in the one he has sent (John 6:29). Among his disciples he was also known as a rabbi. When Jesus was on a journey with his disciples he became hungry. He saw a fig tree that looked fruitful. He could not find any fig from that tree and he cursed it. The following day Peter saw the withered tree. He said, “Rabbi look!” (Mark 11:21) (Burkett 2007:472-473)

### **3.4 Jesus as truly God**

The Christian affirms his belief in the Son of God. The Son of God, he alone “begotten of the Father” who is of “the substance of the Father” (Heim 1991:109). He is co-existent with the Father, and the former is the second person of the Trinity. The Son is also God. The Lord said through His emissary that Mary shall give birth to a son, and He is to be named “Immanuel” which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:22).

The Church Fathers affirmed that Jesus Christ had a unique character. His personality was absolutely unique in history. He has an absolutely unique relation with the Father as well as with all of us (Heim 1991:108). He mentioned that he “Who sees me, sees the Father” (John 14:9). The Fathers unanimously affirmed the important role played by Jesus Christ in human history. He is the one who reveals the Father to us. He communicates the Father’s way of “thinking and feeling” and “reacting to things” (Heim 1991:108).

All the New Testament evangelists acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The witness of the New Testament is acknowledged as the truth. Bruce says the witness of this new covenant is “essentially the witness of Jesus” (Bruce 1986:156). It is Jesus Christ’s own witness which is then announced by those who worked and lived with him. In his own words the Lord mentioned that he is the Son of God. On the occasion when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he specifically referred to himself as “God’s Son” (John 11:4).

The miraculous conception of Jesus testifies to his divinity. During the time of John the Baptist, the divine voice declared Jesus to be the Son of God. During his baptism a voice from heaven cried out that “this is my Son” (Matthew 3:17). It was further mentioned that he is the beloved of God to whom respect must be accorded. During the trials of Jesus Christ by Satan, the tempter

called him “the Son of God”. When Jesus became hungry after fasting forty days the devil challenged him to prove that he is the Son of God by turning stones into bread (Matthew 4:3). (Collins 2001:115ff).

When Jesus assembled his first apostles he was recognised as the Son of God. He was also seen as the Christ. One of his earliest followers, namely Andrew, who, on meeting his brother Simon, told him that “we have found the Messiah”. During Jesus’ visit to Galilee he found Philip who also followed him. Philip in turn recruited the doubtful Nathaniel. When Nathaniel approached Jesus, He said: “Here is a true Israelite”. It was then that Nathaniel called out, “Rabbi you are the Son of God” (John 1:49). No doubt, Nathaniel was inspired by the Holy Spirit to recognise him.

In another instance Jesus was with his disciples. He then left them to go and pray aside. They went ahead of him on a boat to Bethsaida. Later during the night Jesus came back to join them, walking on the water. The disciples were struggling in a storm. Peter asked him if he could join him as he walked on the water. He allowed him to but Peter sank due to lack of faith. Jesus rescued him and also stilled the storm. The men in the boat worshipped him, saying “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33).

When Jesus died on the cross an earthquake struck unexpectedly. A Roman centurion who witnessed all that happened exclaimed that Jesus was the “Son of God” (Matthew 27:54). In another instance Jesus healed two demon-possessed men in the region of Gadarenes. They were violent men who could not be restrained because they were possessed by demons. When the demons saw Jesus they shrieked out in fear, “What do you want with us Son of God?” (Matthew 8:28-29). Even the demons knew well that he is the Son of God.

In his own words Jesus Christ called himself “God’s Son”. He defended himself from an accusation that he was blasphemous. The Jews wanted a reason to stone him. He used scripture to support his statement (John 10:36).

The Apostle John also referred to Jesus Christ as God’s only begotten Son (John 3:16). He used the word “begotten” to re-emphasise the fact that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God. In John 1:14 Jesus is described as the Word which became flesh. The word “incarnation” is used by theologians to explain the manner in which “God took on flesh” thus becoming a person without

shedding off “His divine nature” (Collins 2001:115). He is God who came down from heaven to live among his people. He has been the Son of God from the beginning.

Jesus Christ is described as our Saviour. As He was God, Jesus Christ had no sin. Because he was sinless He could then step into one’s place and carry one’s sins so as to appease God (Collins 2001:117). In the First Epistle of John it is written that God sent his Son to be “Saviour of the world” (1 John 14). He is thus the right person to save us from our sins. He is the one who brings salvation to the world. Through him one may enjoy an everlasting life. It is written that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will not die but shall have an everlasting life (John 3:16). He is always referred to as Lord and Saviour.

As man fell into sin his relationship with God was impaired. Man needed to be restored to his God. Through God’s divine love, and in order to please Himself, God, through Christ, substituted himself for mankind (Collins 2001:117). The sinless Jesus Christ was the ideal person to pay the price in order that man’s broken relationship with God would be restored. It is God who mended man’s relationship with him. Through his own divine plan we are now restored to fellowship with him. According to Collins, instead of “unbelief, distrust, and alienation” from the Almighty God and our neighbours, we now have reconciliation (Collins 2001:118).

Because we are now no longer in a state of rebellion against the Father, we are now justified and redeemed. Due to justification and redemption, the Holy Ghost makes it possible for us to experience self-control (Collins 2001: 118). The Holy Ghost helps us to appreciate the will of God for us and to avoid evil lustful desires.

### **3.5 Old Testament Perspectives**

In references in the New Testament regarding the Old Testament we find evidence about Jesus’ birth and the way he was to suffer for our redemption. The prophecies are interpreted in the New Testament as they were about the birth and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament abounds with prophecies concerning the coming of the Suffering Servant and in the New Testament those were interpreted as referring to Jesus.

In his prophecies, Isaiah introduces Yahweh’s Suffering Servant. He is “my chosen one” on whom I shall place “my Spirit” (Isaiah 42:1). He is to be a judge to all nations. The Servant is the

one to look out for the interests of the Master. He will be doing the will of God, the Master. The apostle Matthew identified our Lord Jesus Christ as “Servant” (Guthrie 1972:132). He was the one who has been with God from the beginning.

The Servant is the one who declares that before his birth, the “Lord called” him. As from his birth, his “name” was mentioned (Isaiah 42:10). The Servant will be “the light” to the Gentiles, his purpose being to bring God’ “salvation” to all peoples (Isaiah 49:6). The kings will show reverence to the God of Israel (House 1998:289). The nation would learn that God does not forsake his own people. This Servant is the person whom the New Testament scriptures acknowledged as the anticipated Messiah.

This Servant of God was to be a prophet of Yahweh. He was to be a servant to the nation of Israel, and he had to labour to bring Jacob back to His God. He had to “restore” the tribes of Jacob and Israel (Isaiah 49:5). The Servant would be known as the “Holy One” of the nation of Israel. He was to be seen as the “Redeemer” of the nation. He would be “despised” and “abhorred” by the very people he was supposed to redeem (Isaiah 49:7). He was not to be welcomed by his own people. They would reject him.

In his book Isaiah brings us to a Servant who is serving unwilling people who then decide to punish him. It is his desire to make known to the nation the will of the Sovereign Lord. He has been attentive to his instruction and commission, and he has not been rebellious to his word (Isaiah 50:4-5). The nation then decides to disgrace him. He suffered from the hands of those he was intent on saving. He did not hide or run away from those who “beat” him. He did not hide his cheeks from their beating (Isaiah 50:4-6). Although they mocked and spat at him he continued to do the will of his God. As he knew that his help comes from his God he kept his face hard as flint. They treated him as a rebel although he was obedient to God’s Word.

The Suffering Servant knew that he would be accused by an unknown person. He did ask, “Who is my accuser?” (Isaiah 50:8-9). He did not fear his accusers as they would all wear out like a cloth. His strength came from the Lord who sent him. The Servant is empowered by God’s presence (House 1998:289). He was in his hands and not those of the devil, and the Suffering Servant is to be a light to all those who accept him. Those who are afraid of the Lord are to be

obedient to the word of his servant. There is no separation between the work of Yahweh and that of the Servant.

The pain which went through the Suffering Servant and turned His face into something we would not like to see was a turning point in his life. He had been instructed in all the truth of God. And as the Suffering Servant was prepared to do what was right and just, he had been endowed with wisdom. He who was the victim would now be exalted as a hero. He who was ridiculed and rebuked would now be glorified. The blood which oozes from his wounds will “sprinkle” many nations (Isaiah 52:13-15). Even the kings will be silenced by his majestic deeds.

On whom had the message of the Lord made an impact? And to whom had he been so good and kind? The Suffering Servant had a humble beginning. He was as a “tender shoot” (Isaiah 53:2).

The hope of Israel was on him. For properly understanding our Lord Jesus Christ’s divinity one must refer to the Old Testament scriptures. In them is a hope for a better future. In his book, Brueggemann (2008:344) refers to hope as it is articulated in the holy scriptures of the Old Testament. The prophetic books of the old covenant clearly and distinctly pronounce hope as “the anticipation” of a liberator to complete YHWH’s promises (Brueggemann 2008:344). In these scriptures we are able to look at His personality from a biblical perspective. It now becomes clear to us who the person of the Servant of God would be. In the Old Testament he is envisaged as the future Saviour.

The Suffering Servant is the one who shall be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. A virgin will give birth to him. The prophet declared that “the virgin” will conceive and “give birth” to a boy (Isaiah 7:14). House says the Old Testament made promises that David’s descendant will “lead Israel” and the Gentiles (House 1998:1). House further mentions that the first covenant chronicles God’s willingness to “save and forgive” sinners. A virgin is a person who has not had sexual intercourse. This indicates that a miraculous conception and birth would take place. God was involved in the process of conception and birth of the Redeemer.

Old Testament canon mentions that a messenger will be extolling the people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. A voice called in the wilderness that the way of the Lord must be prepared (Isaiah 40:3b). Evidence proves that the Servant of the Lord was about to come, and he would live among the people. He had to suffer rejection (Isaiah 53:3a). The Servant’s suffering is

described as substitutionary. To some He appeared as though afflicted by God. The truth is that he suffered for others in order to heal them (House 1998:290).

He is suffering on our behalf. The pain meant for us is now carried by him. He redeems sinful creatures from their sins, and He reconciles them with God the Father. Prophet Isaiah mentioned that He will carry “our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4a). The Redeemer was the faithful Servant of the Lord who had to work for the salvation of mankind.

The death of the Servant would result in many being made righteous with God. When he ascended to heaven he became our mediator. He accepts all of our sins. He saves us by being our mediator-God. His love is expressed when sinners are given an opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven. God loves those who love his Servant. He fulfils his promises to them.

## CHAPTER 4      References in Scripture regarding Christ Divinity

### 4.1    Gospel of John

The gospel of John is quite different in comparison to the Synoptic gospels. The purpose of John is to prove beyond doubt that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The gospel indicates a number of people who recognized Him as the Son of God.

Those who gave testimony to Jesus as the Son of God include the following: John the Baptist, Nathaniel, and Martha.

- “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).
- Then Nathaniel declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel” (John 1:49).
- “Yes Lord”, she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” (John 1:27).

The message of John is that He was sent by the Father into the world to save man from sin. Guthrie notes that the “Father-Son relationship” permeates His words” (Guthrie 1981:312). The author claims that there are “more than a hundred occasions” where Jesus addressed God as his Father. Jesus claimed the title “Son of God” in a debate with his critics who accused him of blasphemy. He made an appeal to his works as a true evidence of his sonship (Guthrie 1981:313). He said, “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not” (John 10:37).

On four occasions, John described Jesus as “only Son”. Guthrie (1981:312) mentioned that Jesus’ uniqueness is demonstrated in the following scriptures:

- “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.  
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,  
Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”  
(John 1:14).
- “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at The Father’s side has made him known”  
(John 1:18).

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe, stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18).

Guthrie says the “uniqueness of the sonship of Jesus” is based on the statement of the risen Christ. In John 20:17, Jesus made a separation between “my Father and your Father” and “your God and my God” (Guthrie 1981:313). This separation is of cardinal importance as it rejects the view that “Jesus’ sonship was of the same kind as man’s” although it later developed in intensity (Guthrie 1981:313).

Although there are challenges to proclamation of the Divinity of Christ as it is explained in John there is great consensus on the glory of Christ as God in John. Barret (1976:130) writes: “John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse (*verse 1 Tsiane*). The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.”

Petersen (1993:10) explains that the language of John is not the regular language of the environment. This means that different implications may be accrued to his view on Christ in which there are some differences on whether he may see Christ as God. This may lead to relativism and the view of Barret is more acceptable.

#### **4.1.1 John 1**

John sheds more light on the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle John declares that Jesus Christ existed in heaven as the Word used by God the Creator to call all created things to life. The creative action of the Word was the activity of the Creator through him (Beasley-Murray 1987:11).

John declares Jesus Christ as one who exclusively created. He refers to Jesus Christ as “the Word” who has been there from the beginning. It was this Word that had been with God that

spoke, and all things were created and placed in order (John 1:1-3). John said the Word, being God's "creative agent", functions as "an extension" of God's being, and the person through whom the creative power of God became effective (Kostenberger 2009:179).

Kostenberger maintains that God the Creator and the Word are "inseparable" and share the "same identity" while being distinct. John sees Jesus Christ as a "unique" agent of God the Father. He is part and parcel of God's own "identity and deity" (Kostenberger 2009:179).

What God created was "not chaotic" (Collins 2001:77). His creation is orderly. Guthrie records that a learned Jew known as Philo of Alexandria lived at the same time as Jesus Christ (Guthrie 1972:1). According to this philosopher, God communicated with the world through the *Logos*. The word *Logos* means "reason or word" (Guthrie 1972: 1). John regarded Jesus Christ as "complete fulfilment" of what Philo suggested. It was out of love that God created. He created all things for his own sake. He thus found pleasure in creation.

In his gospel, John opens with a bold statement that in the "beginning the Word already existed" (John 1:1). Before the commencement of "human history", in times "before creation itself" the Word was with God (Tenney 1981:367). This *logos* was God. In this gospel we have seen the Word been sent to the world. The unique word that God "addresses to humanity" is the "incarnate" Son of God (Platinga et al. 2010:57).

According to Kostenberger (2009:179) the apostle argues that the Word as "God's creative agent" was composed of an "extension of God's own person". It is through him that God's "creative power became effective". The author views God the Creator and the Word used in creation as inseparable. In John's mind, creation is the first "inaugural act of salvation history". His account of the incarnation of Jesus is based on this primal act.

Kostenberger (2009:179) views the Son as "an agent" of God. The Son is God's self-expression of his own "identity and deity". God revealed his glory to his covenant community through him. In him God dwells "permanently in our midst" (Kasper 1976:198).

We have not seen God through our own physical eyes. In the prologue the superiority of Jesus Christ is demonstrated. Even though no man has seen God "at any time", Jesus has "made him known" (Tenney 1981:374). As believers, we know Jesus Christ through the eyes of faith. In his

gospel John mentioned that the “only Son”, who is now the second person of the Trinity, has an intimate knowledge of God (John 1:18). John claims that the Sanhedrin sent a delegation of priests and Levites to John the Baptist. They were to enquire whether he was the one they were expecting. To their amazement he was neither the Messiah nor the prophet. He was just a herald of the one they are expecting, the “voice” that cried out in the desert (John 1:19-23).

Jesus Christ is our new covenant sacrificial lamb. People of all nations and languages who believe in him as the Son of God will be cleansed of all their sins through his blood. John the Baptist claimed that he “existed before I was born”. John recognised Jesus when the Spirit descended on him as he emerged from the water. The sign of the Spirit was in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven. God told him that the Son of God will baptise with the Holy Spirit (John 1:30-34).

#### **4.1.2 John 5:18-47**

God created what he created in six days. It was on the seventh day that God rested (Genesis 2:2). It was in the beginning that God “created the heavens and the earth” (Migliore 2004:92). He called the seventh day the Sabbath. And God declared this day to be holy and it was to be respected as such. The provision is commanding “work stoppage from all productive systems” (Brueggemann 2008:49). The work stoppage asserts that man’s “existence in covenantal form is not defined by productivity”. It is not subject to “the quotas of an economy of demand” (Brueggemann 2008:49). In this day neither man nor his man-servant or maid-servant were to do any work as this day was consecrated to the Lord our God. Even the animals were not to be used to do any work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20: 10-11). It was written in the Law of Moses that this law must be observed by all the children of Israel, and the law was to be passed to their children as well as all future generations. According to Platinga et al., “law” is about “God’s created law”. The authors refer to law as the “expression of God’s righteous demand on all human beings” (Platinga et al. 2010:485).

The Jewish authorities decided to kill Jesus Christ, as according to them, He disrespected the Law by healing a man on the Sabbath day. Doing duty on this day was breaking the Law. When Jesus replied to their accusations as to why he healed a sick man on a Sabbath day, he mentioned that His Father “is always working” and he “too must work” (John 5:17). This enraged the

authorities. He had blasphemed by calling God his father. In this regard He “made himself equal with God”. Now the Jewish authorities had two reasons to kill him. The two crimes He committed were punishable by death.

Jesus claimed that his works are those of his father. He only does what his father is doing. In other words what Jesus Christ does is exactly what his father does. The Son as the Second Person of the Godhead is inseparably united to the Father. Both the Father and the Son depend on each other when it comes to performing any tasks. The logical conclusion is then that both the Son and the Father had broken the Law of the Sabbath. They both healed on a Sabbath. And Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity is equal in status and authority to the Father.

In support of what he previously mentioned when paying tribute to his Father who “shows him all” his works, He made mention of the fact that the Father will show him “greater things than this”. The Father has the power to give life back to the dead. And, in the same manner, the Son can impart life to those he wants to. They both have equal power.

God bestowed all honour upon the Son. On judgment day it shall be the Son who judges the world. He has the “full right” and honour to judge (John 5:22). This act will bring glory to the Son. The Son, like the Father, deserves honour. If a person does not honour the Son, he disrespects the Father. This makes clear what God mentioned earlier that the father does not act not without the Son and vice versa.

Jesus Christ emphasised that whoever “hears my words” and believes in the Father who sent me would enjoy life in eternity. Those who hear His doctrine and believe in the One who sent Him, shall “not be judged”. They will be exonerated as those who heard well and respected the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such believers have already won their crowns. They have “passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

God the Father is the source of all life. He is the giver of life to all creatures in heaven and on earth. He manifests life to the dead. He promises an everlasting life to those who believe and accept Jesus Christ as his only begotten Son. As the Father and the Son are in union and they cannot be separated. He also made him to be life unto the nations. By empowering the Son, the Father made him the Messiah. He shall also be a judge of the living and the dead (John 5:27-29).

He will not exercise his own right but the will of the Father. His judgment is “right”. He does only what the Father wants.

Jesus declared that he came in his “Father’s name”. He, however, is rejected by the Jewish religious leaders (John 5:43). They are religiously naïve in that they praise one another but fail to “obtain the praise” given by “the only God”. Jesus Christ acknowledged himself as a deity. The Jewish leadership boasted about being the disciples of Moses. They claimed that they knew and understood the Law of Moses to the letter.

Jesus said that he is not the one to accuse them “before the Father”. He once more refers to himself as God’s son. It will be Moses who lays a complaint against them (John 5:44-45). It was Moses who spoke about Jesus Christ. In the book of Deuteronomy, he wrote that God will raise up for them a “prophet like him”. They were to listen to his word (Deuteronomy 18:15). The Jews failed to see him as such. Here he is acknowledging his humanity. His own people did not honour him as the one Moses wrote about (Beasley-Murray 1987:79).

#### **4.1.3 John 6: 22-59**

The crowds sought Jesus for their own sake. They had not come to him to hear the gospel. They did not recognise Jesus as their Messiah who had to teach them the way of salvation. They worked for that which “spoils” (John 6:27). He needs them to work for that which lasts forever. They failed to surrender their lives to him, on whom the Father stamped his “seal of approval” (John 6:27). In everyday life man seeks the Lord for his own selfish reasons. He does not want Jesus Christ for reasons of the kingdom of God.

Jesus then disputed the assertion that it was Moses who gave them manna. It is my Father who gave you the manna. He is now giving unto you the “true bread from heaven” (John 6:32). He mentioned that the “bread of God” is the one who descends from heaven and gives life unto the people (Tenney 1981:444). The people then asked him to give them his bread. Then Jesus answered: “I am the bread of life, and anyone who comes to me will never hunger”. (John 6:35). It is in the nature of people to eat bread when they feel hungry. And they thus satisfy a physical need. This bread sustains life. But, he who accepts Jesus Christ as his saviour eats of the spiritual bread that sustains the soul. Jesus said to them that they have been with him but they still did not believe (John 6:36).

Jesus told them that all that the Father gives to him he accepts with open hands, and any person who willingly comes to him is rightly his. He is to do the will of the Father who sent him (John 6:38). His will is about his flock. It is Jesus's will that all who believed in Him as the Son of God be accounted for at resurrection. He said that it is the will of the one who sent him that "each individual believer who looks to the Son and believes in him" shall have life in eternity (Tenney 1981:446).

Jesus mentioned that although their forefathers ate manna in the wilderness, they died. But he who eats of his body shall not perish. He is the "living bread" (John 6:51). The bread symbolises his "flesh" which he gives for the world. Jesus told the rowdy Jews that those who shall eat of the "flesh of the Son of Man" and partake of "his blood" will have eternal life (Tenney 1981:448-449). The person who follows the instructions fully by eating the flesh and drinking the blood will have eternal life and shall be raised from the dead (John 6:52-54).

He made it known that he was more than a prophet when he called himself true bread from heaven: the bread that gives those who eat it an everlasting life. Those who ate his flesh and drank his blood shall be raised from the dead. He is the one who shall be responsible for the resurrection of the dead, and that God is his father who sent him to do His will. By being the Son of God he is regarded as a divine being. He mentioned that he and his Father are united. This proved his divinity ( Beasley-Murray 1987: 93).

#### **4.1.4 John 7:25-30**

Jesus Christ's identity brought a crisis among the Jews. Some believed that he was the Messiah. He spoke with authority when he addressed the masses and the Jewish leaders. Some of the Jews wanted to kill him. They feared to manhandle him when he taught publicly.

The general populace knew about the authorities' plan to execute him. He is the one they were "trying to kill" (John 7:25). The citizens of Jerusalem were not sympathising with Him "over against the Sanhedrin" (Beasley-Murray 1987:110). They had their own misgivings about Jesus Christ. They suspected that the authorities might have admitted that He is the Christ. In other words, the authorities may have made a mistake.

They claimed to know where Jesus came from. Not a single person shall know “where the Messiah comes from” (John 7:27). They knew both his parents and place of birth. The messianic dogma was a puzzle. The citizenry seems to have ignored “Bethlehem” and the instruction that the Messiah hails from the “presence of the Ancient of Days (Beasley-Murray 1987:110).

Jesus Christ knew what they were thinking and saying. He admitted that they know him, and where he comes from. They were correct in as far as knowing that Jesus Christ was “reared in Nazareth” and was of Joseph and Mary’s family (Word Bible Dictionary). He said that even though they claim to know him, he was not here on his own. The one who “sent me is true”. That did not dawn on their minds. He added that his mission to Israel started elsewhere. He once said that he was from his own Father. Jesus Christ came from “the Faithful and True One” (Beasley-Murray 1987:111).

His adversaries “do not know God”. If they knew God they would realize that Jesus was from him and they would know God by listening to him (Beasley-Murray 1987:111). In many instances Jesus Christ emphasises that he is a messenger sent by God. He concluded that he knows him because he is “from him” and he “sent me” (John 7:29). Jesus Christ came from God and had been sent by God. The Jewish men intended to seize him on that occasion but failed because “his hour had not yet arrived”. God did not allow anyone to bring his mission to an abrupt end before the appointed time.

#### **4.1.5 John 8:48-59**

The divinity as well as the state of mind of Jesus Christ had been placed under the spotlight by the Jews. They thought that some of his deeds and utterances were the result of being demon possessed (John 8:48). They declared him a Samaritan. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as “heretics”. They view the association of Jesus with them as derogatory. The Samaritans dishonoured the “worship at Jerusalem”, and they “asserted their own” as it was appointed by God (Beasley-Murray 1987:136). In Him the Jews found nothing in common with their religion.

The Lord portrays a court appearance in which He and his accusers stand before God the Judge. God will provide justification for “the truth of his testimony” (Beasley-Murray 1987:136-137). He is honoured and glorified by his own Father. The Father, who is a judge is “one who seeks it” (John 8:49-50). He reiterated his previous statements that the one who keeps his word shall

“never see death” (John 8:51). The recipients of this promise are those who will abide by his word and so live by it. Jesus Christ expects from us respect for his doctrines and adherence to his word.

The Jews once more made their allegation of demon possession. They questioned his doctrine of immortality. They mentioned that outstanding leaders such as Abraham and the prophets of old had died. The Jews misunderstood Jesus’ utterance as referring to “physical death”. They then found in it a reason to corroborate their “charge of madness (Beasley-Murray 1987:137). They knew that death is inevitable. “Why will we not die if we believe in you?” Whom then is He “making himself” (Beasley-Murray 1987:137). They cited, as an example, their forefather Abraham as having died just like all human beings. Is He greater than this saint? (John 8:52-53).

Jesus Christ is not in favour of self-glorification. If he glorifies himself, his “glory means nothing”. His Father whom they accept as their God honours him (John 8:54). His Father is unknown to them, but he knows him. He shall not lie to them about these things. He is not a liar like them (John 8:55). He has the responsibility of keeping his Father’s word. Jesus mentioned that Abraham “rejoiced” as he witnessed his day. He anticipated Jesus’ arrival (Kostenberger 2009:222). The dawn of that day brought happiness to Abraham. And Abraham “saw and was glad” (John 8:56).

#### **4.1.6 John 10**

In this parable, Jesus is the door through whom the sheep enters. “I am the Door”. According to Hoskyns, when Jesus Christ “brings us to the Father” he names himself a Door (Beasley-Murray 1987:170). The Jews who came before him with accusations were like thieves and robbers. His followers did not like what they said. Those who followed him and did accept his word would be saved. He is the Door that leads to “the life of the Kingdom of God” (Beasley-Murray 1987:170). We have access to the Father only through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Shepherd. He regards himself as the “good shepherd” (John 10:11). He is the one who leads and guides his flock. He is not leaving the sheep to fend for themselves, and the sheep will not follow a stranger (John 10:5). He correctly sums up the Jewish leaders as self-centred greedy thieves. In Jesus Christ they have a Messiah, He who cares for his congregation.

According to Hoskyns, he calls himself a shepherd when he “takes care of us” (Beasley-Murray 1987:170). He blesses his congregation.

Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd knows his people (John 10:14). If a leader knows his people well, he understands their struggles and needs. In the same breath, Jesus knows his church, its struggles and its successes. As Jesus Christ expressed his relationship with the Father as that of mutual knowledge, his own relationship with the people reflects the same trend. The manner in which the Shepherd and the “sheep” know each other mirror the “fellowship of love” between God and Christ (Beasley-Murray 1987:170). The same fellowship of love is reflected between Jesus Christ and his congregation.

Jesus Christ’s willingness to die and to reclaim his life again was the culmination of his mission. It is of his “own free will” that he gave up his life (John 10:17-18). He has the authority to surrender it as ransom and to claim it back again. It was his father’s will that he should “lay down his life” (Beasley-Murray 1987:249). The Father and Son’s mutual love culminated in love of the world.

#### **4.1.7 John 14:1-14**

John proves again in this discourse that Jesus Christ is both a human and a divine being. He told his disciples not to be “worried and upset”. He exhorted them to believe in him as well as in his Father (John 14:1). Jesus Christ spoke about his death, resurrection and ascension. The disciples’ hearts and minds are not to be troubled by his impending departure from this world. He will be preparing a mansion for them in heaven. There are rooms for them to stay in (John 14:2). Jesus viewed his own position of weakness as a human being when he learned about his friend’s death and as he “faced the cross” (Beasley-Murray 1987:249). The disciples could be ensnared in the same “turmoil”.

When one in whom we trust and believe dies, we find ourselves in shock and confusion. The leader gives guidance and confidence to his followers. In this sense, we understand Jesus’ reassurance to his followers. They would fall into distress due to their loss through the death of Jesus Christ. He alone is able to take them to where he is. He would be preparing a “place” for them to stay with him in heaven (John 14:2-3).

Jesus Christ said that as they know him, they will know his Father too. He then added that they do know the Father as they have “seen him” (John 14:7). In another exposition, Jesus Christ as “the Way” is depicted in his role as mediator “between God and man”. As “the Truth”, our Lord Jesus Christ is regarded as a mediator of God’s revelation, and, Jesus as “the Life” is now the mediator of the “salvation which is life in God” (Beasley-Murray 1987:253).

The doubting Phillip demanded to be shown the Father. The Apostles demand nothing less than that. Jesus persisted that he is the image of the Father. Claiming to have been with them for a long time, he found it strange that they did not know him. He reiterated that to “see him is to see” his Father (Plantinga et al. 2010:115).

He is the Son sent from heaven by the Father. Dunn said he makes his Father “visible to mortal eyes” (Dunn 2009:60). Philip was astonished. He could not realise that it is in Jesus Christ that the “glory, grace and truth” of the Almighty God “stands unveiled” (Word Biblical Commentary 1987:253). Jesus Christ’s intention was the revelation of God.

#### **4.1.8 John 17**

As Jesus Christ came as the Word incarnate, he was prepared to return to His Father. The only way to return to heaven was through death. In his prayer, Jesus was again referring to God as his Father. He said that the “hour has come”. That hour He spoke about was his sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of human race (Tenney 1981:161). He asked the Father to “give glory” to the Son so that he might glorify him (John 17:1). In his prayer, Jesus expresses an intimate relationship which he used to enjoy with the Father. He once more declares an intimacy “grounded” in his “pre-existence” (Dunn 1989:57).

#### **4.1.9 John 20:26-31**

A week later, after Jesus appeared to his disciples (Gk. “eight days”, taken inclusively) the doubtful Thomas was in the company of other disciples (Tenney 1981:195). Jesus Christ reappeared to them while they were behind closed doors (John 20:26). He appeared to the disciples in the same fashion on Easter evening. He said, “Peace unto you” (John 20:26). He hailed them as people who deserve his consolation. He did not embark on a tirade of accusations against them. He wanted them to feel comfortable in his presence.

Jesus made Thomas believe by first showing him the marks of the nails on His hands and the wound on his side where the spear had pierced him. Jesus' "admonition is strong" but necessary and "appropriate" in this matter (Tenney 1981:195). He knew him as one of the twelve who stood by him. He was pleased to see him as one of the lost sheep who has been found. Jesus once said he would leave ninety-nine sheep to seek the lost one first. He then advised him to be "not faithless" (John 20:27). The tradition arose that Thomas did "extend his finger and hand" to satisfy himself (Beasley-Murray 1987:385).

Thomas, who now believed that it was truly his Master, retorted: "My Lord and My God" (John 20:28). Thomas, who is now convinced of Jesus' resurrection, believes that he is truly the Lord who led him faithfully with a promise of an everlasting life. God who has the power to defeat death. Thomas' utterance acknowledges the rise of Jesus from the dead and expresses what it means, i.e., "revelation of who Jesus is" (Beasley-Murray 1987: 385).

## **4.2 Philipians 2**

In his epistle to the Philipians, the Apostle Paul encourages the congregation to struggle for unity in the church. His love for this congregation is prompted by the love of Christ for them. In their pursuit of unity, they will bring his "joy" to completion (Guthrie 1984:115). He exhorted the community to be of "the same mind" (Philipians 2:2). The Apostle spoke of "Christian like-mindedness" which brings about a "common basis" (Guthrie 1984:117-118). He urged them to imitate the life of Jesus Christ.

It is clear that Paul's intention is not to teach doctrine. He emphasises instruction in living a Christian life. Paul's hymn sketches out "an exemplary" form of behaviour (Holladay 2005:375). He successfully does this by appealing to the behaviour of Jesus Christ. His appeal presents Jesus Christ as a model to all Christian believers. According to Osmer, he became part and parcel of human conditions. He expressed God's self-giving love. This love was manifested through "service, obedience and self-humiliation" (Osmer 2008:188).

The coming of God's Word in the form of a suffering servant humbled himself to the point of death on the cross (Migliore 2004:178). Paul remarked that he made "himself nothing" (Philipians 2:7). In the incarnation Jesus "emptied" (*ekenosen*) himself (Warrington 2008:34). "Emptying" refers to an act of "free self-limitation" as well as "free self-expenditure" (Migliore

2004:181). In his crucifixion we are now able to see both his humanity and deity demonstrated. The cross is a symbol of salvation to mankind. In this instance, the cross demonstrates Christ's "perfect obedience" to the Father (Guthrie 1984:121). Jesus Christ took the form of a man in order to do the will of the Father. In his incarnate state, the Lord does not entail a lessening of God's nature.

Paul remarks that although Jesus Christ was God he did not compete with his Father. The Father sent him to be the Saviour of the world, and Jesus Christ did not clamour for his position. He did not "snatch at equality" with the Father (Guthrie 1984:120).

The Apostle Paul links humility to the life of Jesus Christ. He makes us aware of the self-humiliating love of the one who existed in the form of God (Philippians 2:8). According to the Hawthorne 1983:70) Paul understands "humility" not as self-disparagement but as an attitude inspired by the example of Christ, an attitude of love within the church, the antithesis of pride, self-conceit and selfishness.

The story of Jesus Christ as depicted by Paul moves from the time of His "pre-existence" up to his descent (Holladay 2005:375). In the Son of God, humanity and God are intricately bound in "mutual self-giving" love (Migliore 2004:181). Migliore said that in the whole process, the "Word of God" lives "in loving unity" with that person, and that humanity lives "in loving unity" with God's Word. We see Paul in this passage (Philippians 2:6-11) depicting Jesus Christ as an example of the humble, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving service. Paul had been encouraging the congregation to practise these virtues in their relations with one another (Hawthorne 1983:79).

In his work, Migliore describes the union of God's Word and humanity as a "dynamic" and "kenotic union" (Migliore 2004:180). The dynamism is not simply identifiable through his "conception or birth". Jesus Christ's "ministry", "passion", and "death" are to be taken into consideration (Migliore 2004:180).

### **4.3 Colossians 1:15-20**

In the letter to the congregation at Colossae, which is attributed to Paul we vividly find him exposing the truth about the real nature of Jesus Christ, His true identity.

Paul calls Jesus Christ the exact likeness of “the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). He claims that God is revealed in Christ in a manner “otherwise unknowable” (Guthrie 1984:178). In the gospel of John, the Son of God said whoever sees him knows the Father (John 12:45). In this bold statement of Paul, our Lord Jesus Christ is depicted as the real being of God. God is “invisible”. Man cannot see him with his own eyes. Paul actually gives us an indication that Jesus is God in his physical nature. All the attributes of God could be discerned in him. In his work, Guthrie adds that Jesus is in essence the same “as God himself” (Guthrie 1984:180).

#### **4.4 Hebrews 1:5-14**

Faithless Jewish people might have regarded Jesus Christ as just as a good rabbi who lived during their time. They disengaged themselves from the idea that he was God. In the book of Hebrews the author claims that Jesus Christ is a deity. Brown (1982:29) confirms that Jesus is “the Son of God”. He is not just a human being but someone from heaven. The author of Hebrews asserts: God spoke to man “through his Son, Jesus” (Brown 1982:27). In his work the author highlights the superiority of Jesus Christ above the angels. It is to Christ that God said, “You are my Son” (Hebrews 1:5). God openly declared Jesus Christ to be his son. He has been with God from the beginning of time, the only begotten Son.

The honour and respect bestowed upon Jesus Christ had been reserved for him alone. He is above all other created beings including the holy angels. Those angels are mere “messengers” (Brown 1982:40). God never mentioned to any angel that he would be their Father. In God’s own words, He said that he will be a Father to Jesus, and He would then be his Son (Hebrews 1:5). When God decided to send his Son into the world, he said all his angels must “worship him” (Hebrews 1:6). In other words, it is their duty to “exalt the Son” (Brown 1982:40).

God made a distinction between Jesus and his angels. The angels are as winds. They are “flames of fire” who serve Him (Hebrews 1:7). In his book, Brown describes the work of Christ as “salvation”. Without the recognition of the work of Jesus, “there is no salvation” (Brown 1982:29). The Father referred to his Son as “God”. The One whose “throne” will be everlasting (Hebrews 1:8). This again indicates that Jesus Christ’s office and authority is above that of the angels.

He is the only one whom God allowed to sit “at his right side”. Brown mentions that “no angel” ever received an invitation to sit “at the right hand” of the Father (Brown 1982:43). God promised to make his adversaries “a footstool” for his feet (Hebrews 1:13). Not a single angel has been honoured in this way. Jesus Christ was held in much higher esteem than the angels. All the angels are but “ministering spirits” in God’ service (Brown 1982:44). They are servants who assist those earmarked to “inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). They are messengers.

## CHAPTER 5      Jesus Christ and the Creeds

A creed is a statement of faith acclaimed by both the Eastern and Western churches. Creeds describe the beliefs shared by religious groups. The commonly used creeds are the Nicene and the Apostles' Creeds. The Apostles' Creed that is widely used in Christian Western churches originates from "the Old Roman Creed" (Plantinga et al. 2010:433). The creeds also shed light on the Godhead. They are about the Trinity. By the Trinity we are referring to God, the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and the three make up the Godhead. It does not imply that there are three Gods. The doctrine implies that there is one God in three persons. All are equal. Migliore (2004:427) describes the Trinity as: "mystery of love" manifesting in "three eternal persons" who are related. Pentecostals put emphasis on "experiential Christianity rather than doctrinal confession" (Warrington 2008:15). They explore doctrines by referring to "biblical narrative" and through the testimony of those who are affected (Warrington 2008:15-16). Warrington highlights that in the beginning, Western world Pentecostalism was an ecumenical movement that claimed "common experience rather than a common doctrine" (Warrington 2008:20).

In the early church, there was a need to protect scripture against heresy. There was a necessity to "clarify Christian beliefs" (Plantinga et al. 2010:13). In response to that, creeds were formulated. They were to challenge the attacks of the heretics. Plantinga et al. note that there are three important universal creeds that are acceptable in most "Protestant and Catholic circles". They are the "Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed" (Plantinga et al. 2010:14).

The authors add that Christian traditions further formulated "formal writings or confessions to guide their doctrine and life" (Plantinga et al. 2010:14). As an example, the Catholics respect the writings of "the Council of Trent", Lutherans honour the "Augsburg Confession" and Presbyterians adhere to the "Westminster Confession" (Plantinga et al. 2010:14).

The commonly used creeds are the Nicene and the Apostles' Creeds. A brief summary follows:

- The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed was formulated by the “the Fathers of Nicea (325)” (Heim 1991:108). The creed was completed at Constantinople (381). According to Heim, the formulation is insistent, and resolute in its declaration, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God” (Heim 1991:108). The Fathers took a clear stand against the position of Arius and his followers in relativising the “relationship between Jesus and God” (Heim 1991:108).

The Fathers’ position was absolute. They concluded that Jesus was the “Son of God, alone begotten of the Father, that is to say, of the substance of the Father, not created but begotten, of the same substance as the Father” (Heim 1991:108). They affirmed the uniqueness of Jesus event, history, relation to God and to all of us (Heim 1991:108). The Fathers affirmed the important role played by Jesus in the history of mankind. The Council of Nicaea took a stand on the doctrine of the Trinity in relation to us (Heim 1991:108-109).

- Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed was also used in the Western churches. Platinga, et al. declare that this creed was not written by Athanasius. The creed is said to be a “fifth-century Latin document” that reflects the Augustinian tradition (Platinga et al. 2010:433).

The Athanasian Creed maintains that the church is in possession of all “necessary religious truth” (Platinga et al. 2010:367). The creed emphasises that to be saved, believers “must confess” important doctrines concerning the “Trinity and Christ”. The creed emphasises that any person who wishes to be saved is to hold “the catholic faith” (Platinga et al. 2010:367). The creed declares that “the Father is God, the son is God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three gods, but there is one God” (Platinga et al. 2010:111).

- The Nicean and Chalcedon Creeds

The creeds were regarded as a guide and standard in which we could understand the position of the church concerning the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. The Nicean and Chalcedon Creeds set the “direction and provided the standard” (Migliore 2004:174). The Christian

community emphasises the continual nature of their faith with the ancient orthodox creeds and confessions. These are the creeds and confessions of their Christian predecessors.

What was important to them was the apostolic truth embedded in the tradition, and the creeds had to be faithful to the tradition. These early confessions declared about the nature of Jesus in the following manner: “Jesus is the Christ” (Mark 8:29) and “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). Migliore recognises Jesus Christ as fully human and as having a special relationship with God as our only means of salvation (Migliore 2004:174). There are various creeds. They are used to interpret scripture.

Heick (1973:85-92) explains how the early baptismal formula from the early baptismal formula into the creeds of the early church. Originally baptism was only administered in the Name of Christ, because the new converts were from the Jewish faith. From the testimonies of Tertullian and Irenaeus it is clear that the baptismal formula had become Trinitarian during 130-140 AD. The church struggled early on with two aspects, namely firstly) Father and Son and yet one God and b.) Jesus the Son of God and yet the Son of Mary.

- Apostles’ creed

In the Apostles’ creed this is already evident. In this statement of faith, “I believe...” is pivotal. Christianity affirms: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (Migliore 2004:92). An understanding of this article is more important in our present time to counter the theorists’ positions regarding evolution. The phrase “I believe” has several meanings. Some pertain to how one perceives a situation. Some come with a conviction of a certainty that a thing has happened. To some it comes with uncertainty. He does believe because you have said so. However when we say “I believe in God,” we are actually affirming that there is a “God”, and we trust this God with our own lives. We say he is the creator of the universe. Thus we like many other Christian denominations “affirm the doctrine of creation”.

The Christian affirms his belief in the Son of God. The Son of God, he alone is “begotten of the Father” who is of “the substance of the Father” (Heim 1991:109). He is co-existent with the Father, and He is the second person of the Trinity. The Son is also God. The Lord said through

His emissary that Mary shall give birth to a son. And He is to be named “Immanuel” which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:22).

The Church Fathers affirmed that Jesus Christ had a unique character. His personality was absolutely unique in history. He had an absolutely unique relation with the Father as well as with all of us (Heim 1991:108). He mentioned that he “Who sees me, sees the Father” (John 14:9). The Church Fathers unanimously affirmed the important role played by Jesus Christ in human history. He is the one who reveals the Father to us. He communicates the Father’s way of “thinking and feeling” and “reacting to things” (Heim 1991:108).

The name of the Son is Jesus. He was from Nazareth. When Christians refer to him as “Christ” they found in him their long-awaited “messiah”. Christ is Jesus’ name in his “heavenly function” (Gonzales 2007:29). Christ is messiah in its Hebrew meaning. The relationship between God and Son is extended to show further relations. He is not only Jesus Christ, but furthermore “His only son”. This relationship expounds Him beyond the initial claim of birth.

To be the son of God makes him a unique being. He belongs to God, the Father God who is the Creator of the heaven and the earth. He is known as “the only Son” due to the fact that he was the only one chosen by the Father to be his sole representative on earth. He affirms that the Son and the Father are one. “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NIV). Kasper mentions that Jesus’ divine sonship marked God’s self-communication (Kasper 1976:163).

In his further exposition, the Son is “our Lord”. Gonzales spells it out that calling Jesus “our Lord” was radical. It was to compare him to Emperor Domitian who was the supreme ruler (Gonzales 2007:31). One who pretended to be emperor would be seen as seditious. That particular person would be sentenced to death, and his followers would be severely punished.

Jesus was Lord (*Kurios*) as he was to usher in and rule over the kingdom of God. His kingdom was not contestable. It was a spiritual kingdom. He would not be a threat to any secular leader. He would rather be a blessing to them. He would guide them properly. His love was to save a man from his sins, and in his lordship we are all committed; he is God the Saviour.

He who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was Holy and without sin. He had to be a perfect sacrifice, one who would be a sacrifice for the redemption of sinners. As sin came into the world via man, so man had to expiate.

There is nothing impossible for God (Luke 1:37). He will do what he wants to do with one. God will be able to use one as His instrument even though one finds oneself in a compromised position.

In the Apostolic Creed we refer to conception and birth. The Apostles were ready to show that Jesus was a person born by Mary. Although in secret they knew that Joseph was not the biological father, but they acknowledged him as a father. The apostles were eager to fight heresy. It was known that Marcion preached heresy. Marcion denied the birth of Jesus (Gonzales 2007:37). In conclusion, Gonzales makes it clear that the miraculous conception intends to prove “not the divinity” of Jesus but “rather his humanity” (Gonzales 2007:38). I agree with the humanity of Jesus Christ.

He who suffered under Pontius Pilate was Lord, God. The apostles affirmed his lordship, and he was seen to be God. He who suffered was human, born of Mary, and worked among the people. He had the two natures ascribed him by the Apostles. He was both God and man and as such he suffered pain, thirst, rejection and death.

Gonzales notes that Pontius Pilate’s name was being used to date “the events” about Christ’s suffering and death (Gonzales 2007:41). In the ancient Creed we observe how Christians worldwide affirm their belief in the Son of God who suffered, died and was buried.

He is man who came to suffer for us as well as to die on our behalf. He is suitable to die for humanity. He went to hell on our behalf and now we are elated to announce that He died for us all so that we may be accepted as God’s children.

The notion that Jesus Christ “descended to the dead” or “into hell” has been affirmed throughout the world. We believe that he was carried into a hellish place where death reigns supreme. He went there to experience death on our behalf. In his book Gonzales exclaims that God descended to earth and became one of us. During his death on the cross he once more descended into the lower echelons.

The third day after the death of Jesus Christ was the most important for Christians. He rose from the dead, and we still believe in the risen Lord who has conquered all evil including death. He rose in accordance to the scriptures. Now at the centre of the Christian faith is the resurrection. It comprises the “heart” of the good news (Gonzales 2007:55).

In Moltmann’s work, *Theology and joy* the church is celebrating the “festival of freedom” expecting the joy of “new creation” (Karkkainen 2002:126). The resurrected Christ is known as the “firstborn of creation” (Colossians 1:15-20). As a result thereof, the New Testament has been changed into “new-creation theology” (Plantinga et al. 2010:151). The new creation will become the central “soteriological hope” yearned for by the whole creation (Plantinga et al. 2010:151-152). The authors add that what is envisioned is the “redemption” of the whole universe (Plantinga et al. 2010:152).

The victory of the resurrection still reverberates throughout the Christian world. When evil people were celebrating his death and it had become apparent that evil and death had been victorious, He rose again. This depicts Jesus Christ’s liberation from hell. He did not free himself only from the power of the devil, but freed all others who followed him (Gonzales 2007:56). This makes the day of his resurrection very important to all Christians. It is the start of a “new era”. The dawn of the kingdom (Gonzales 2007:59), that signalled the dawn of the era of the church. Even today Christians all over the world celebrate Easter Sunday. The risen body of Christ in its new form makes Christianity unique among other religions. It is not like any other religion which claims authority and inspiration from God or any other source of power. The angel had uttered, “He has risen” (Matthew 28:6 NIV).

Jesus Christ had no sin. He was a fully human being but had no sin. Jesus did not to pay any penalty for his own sin. By being sinless He stepped into sinful man’s place to bear his sins. As he was human he was “able to make amends for us”. The human nature of Jesus was without a blemish, thus he could stand up for us so that justice could be done. We would be forgiven all our sins. (Collins 2001:117).

Faith in Jesus Christ is linked with the action of the Holy Spirit. In other words, faith in our Lord Jesus is the result of the work of the Holy Ghost. According to the Apostle Paul, no person can

claim “Jesus is Lord” except by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:3). The church is gathered by the power of the Holy Spirit. He brings us together as the Lord’s people.

The Holy Spirit is God. If a person does not possess the Spirit of Christ then he “does not belong to Christ”. And if the Spirit of God “is living in you” then God will give us life (Romans 8:9, 11), and God has the capacity to do as he wills. By the time of Pentecost all believers, including his own disciples, were anointed with the power of the Spirit. In effect, the Lord called his church together. The Christian concept of salvation needs to be reinterpreted if we agree that the “African Trinity implies the presence of Christ within the African culture” (Muzorewa 1985:85). Salvation is known to be a “build-in concept” of the Trinity. Muzorewa says salvation works through any agent “to rescue or save an endangered life” (Muzorewa 1985:86). In the African context, we perceive salvation in a holistic manner. It is “not only spiritual” (Muzorewa 1985:86). In other words, God used Christ to save us from our sins and to “enhance human survival” (Muzorewa 1985:86). In the African context, salvation is attributed to the ancestral spirit. Muzorewa adds that it is through the ancestral spirit that a person is “saved, or rescued, or redeemed” (Muzorewa 1985:86). He however, acknowledges that the “total event of salvation is God’s plan” (Muzorewa 1985:86).

We believe in the church as a holy institution under the direction of the Holy Spirit. As an integral part of the church, we are therefore “believers within the church” (Gonzales 2007:76). It is in the church itself where we “experience faith”. Gonzales claims that faith is not only a private affair. Faith is “always communal” (Gonzales 2007:76).

## **CHAPTER 6      Research concerning Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church**

The research was done to ascertain more about the identity of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the African Pentecostal Independent Churches. To fulfil this obligation, a questionnaire had to be prepared to assist the researcher. He had to consult his study leader for assistance in making the right and relevant decisions concerning questions to be posed. A qualitative method was seen as appropriate. This gave the opportunity to arrange a relevant questionnaire. A questionnaire was supplied to a cross section of members of Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church for their response. This denomination serves as our case study.

The role of the church is to provide a service to the community. Members, particularly refugees, look upon them as homes away from home. In times of need, people look toward the church for help. The church carries a responsibility to nourish the congregation spiritually. It is also part and parcel of the community in which it found itself. Jesus Christ, who is acknowledged as head of the church, is seen as the provider of all their needs.

Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church is an African-founded church based in Bloemfontein, Free State. The majority of its members are Africans who live in the informal settlements, although some are from the sprawling townships of Mangaung. The church does not discriminate on the basis of colour or nationality. The church uses translators during its services. There are translators for Sesotho, Xhosa, English and Afrikaans. This church has a capacity to grow in numbers as it is relevant to the needs of the African majority. It attracts members from the middle-class areas.

Services are held on a daily basis. Members are required to pray three times per day. The prayer times alternate from alternate from 07h00, 11h00 and 19h00. They are short prayers. The Sunday worship service commences at 11h00 and continues up to 13h00. The bishop, ministers, deacons or elders are responsible for worship services.

Most of the members feel comfortable in the church as they found it to be relevant. Their situation is taken into consideration. The members are encouraged to bring the sick to the church.

Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission practices faith healing. Prayers and the laying on of hands play a major role in the church. The church helps in various manners. It helps those who suffer spiritually as well as physically. They regularly give an account of how they are progressing. They do understand that healing is a process.

Some members of the church are blessed with Spiritual gifts. These members are being encouraged to use their gifts for the edification of the church. The Holy Spirit and the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) guide the church in all its work. All functions of the church are scripturally based. In other words, the Bible is the highest authority in the church. In many occasions, the prophet has been inundated by people who want to be saved from the demonic forces. In other instances, members would ask the church to pray for them in order to protect them against witchcraft. Some happen to be at loss about the real functions of the church. A sinful man would like to be cleansed of his sins through bathing only. He is not aware that he needs to repent of his sins and accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Those who suffered misfortune consult the prophet in order to find out whether the ancestors are not angry with them. People who are unemployed are in the majority. They mostly ask for help to find employment.

In our parish we have come across people who are socially isolated due to mental illness. They have been sleeping in the field and next to buildings in town. They are dirty and in tattered clothes. They come with their smelly clothes but they are accepted as people who are also created in the image of God. The church first starts with hygiene and then initiates a process of healing and rehabilitation.

In the healing process, the church uses holy water and holy ash. Baths are also prepared to cleanse a person who suffered misfortune or lost a loved one. Members also use holy water and sea water to protect their homes against witches. When members are from the grave yard or had contact with a corpse they are not allowed to enter the church before being sprinkled with holy water. Those people are regarded as ritually unclean.

New members are to be baptised through immersion to become full members of the church. The church approves of the use of sprinkling for the baptismal of infants. Other designated places of baptismal are natural dams, man-made pools and rivers.

Hymns are sung in a vibrant manner and people sing and dance freely. When some become ecstatic, they are possessed by the Spirit of prophecy. The church has a number of prophets. They are the strong pillars of the church. Some of them are women.

The research problem is about the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ in the African Pentecostal Independent Churches. In the mainline churches, He is seen as having two natures. The researcher set out to find more about the identity of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the African Pentecostal Independent Churches. Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church was then used as a case study.

A quantitative method was seen as appropriate. This will now give us an opportunity to arrange a relevant questionnaire. A questionnaire will then be supplied to a cross section of members of Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church for their response. This denomination serves as our case study.

In this case study survey, 300 questionnaires were distributed to some members of Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church in the Free State. Members were required to complete and return all the questionnaires on time. The questions posed were about Jesus Christ's humanity and divinity as seen by African Pentecostal Independent Churches. This case study was undertaken and completed in 2012.

The main reason for this research study was to find out the views and opinion of members as regard the nature of Jesus Christ. They had to answer questions relating to whether he was God as well as a human being. His position and role in their church and personal lives had to be explained. They also had to say whether he was an ancestor. Lastly, they had to give a reason for their worshipping him.

Questions posed were directed to a cross-section of a congregation, which included the youth, members of the women's league, elders, deacons, lay preachers. They are male and female ranging in age from 12 to 61 years. The congregation consists of mainly African and Coloured groups.

Of the 300 questionnaires distributed only 90 were filled in and returned. The rest of the questionnaires were completed on the spot by the researcher or two of his agents. In order to reach the deadline set for the return of the completed questionnaires, the researcher was obligated to enlist the help of the agents. The agents went to homes and areas where some of the agents lived. They then filled these questionnaires in in South Sotho. This language is the predominant language in the Free State.

It became necessary to assist in the completion of the questionnaires, as some of the members are illiterate or semi-literate. In addition, some elderly people needed the assurance that this was necessary for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. The researcher had to work around the clock to ensure a timeous return of all questionnaires.

The mainline churches believe that Jesus Christ has two natures, one being a human and the other divine. He was fully human and fully God (Migliore 2004:177). They are of the opinion that the African Pentecostal Independent Churches are incorrect in their assessment of the true nature of Christ.

However, most of these apparent deviations are contradicted by the fact that African Pentecostal Independent Churches originated from the mainline churches and the mainstream Pentecostal movement. The African culture is one of the aspects added to Western Christianity. This is to make it representative and acceptable to African people.

In this questionnaire, most of the questions posed referred to Jesus Christ. He is the one who is discussed in connection with his relationship to the African Pentecostals. The first question was whether they saw Jesus Christ as a divine being. They had to give reasons for their answer.

The following table indicates a response to a question whether Jesus Christ is divine or not.

5. Jesus Christ Divine		Frequency	Valid Percentage
Valid	Yes	297	99.0
	No	3	1.0
	Total	300	100.0

It is noted that 99.0% of the respondents believed that Jesus Christ is a divine being. Only 1.0% disagreed. To the latter Jesus Christ was an ordinary human being. He had no divine nature.

The following table indicates reasons given to support the statement that Jesus Christ was divine.

### 6.1 Reasons – Divine.

	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Thomas called Him this	8	2.7
Peter called Him this	6	2.0
John the Baptist called Him this	12	4.0
He is the Son of God /Divine/ Almighty/ Christ/ Messiah/ Emmanuel/ Lamp of God/ Alpha and Omega/Lord	121	40.3
The Roman Centurion referred to Him as the Son of God	7	2.3
Valid He was conceived by the Holy Spirit/ He is part of the trinity/ He is God	75	25.0
He was crucified for our sins and rose again from the dead	37	12.3
He performed many miracles/has healing powers	24	3.0
Nathaniel call Him this	5	1.7
He was a normal person who lived among people	5	1.7
Total	300	

From the given response, 40.3% understands that Jesus Christ is a divine Son of God. He is also called Christ the Messiah. Their hope and trust is in him as their “Saviour”. Appiah-Kubi and Torres claim that Jesus Christ is the “object of devotion” in Indigenous African Christian Churches (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:118). People worship God as their creator, and Jesus Christ as the Son of God is therefore worthy of our worship.

Jesus Christ is also known as Immanuel. In the Gospel, the name Immanuel means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). This refers to the incarnation. God became man in order to save humankind. In African theology, the salvation of the “human person” is equated to “the universal” salvation (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:193). In the incarnation the Lord takes the “totality of the human” and that of the cosmos.

It is noteworthy that some respondents agree that He was the Lamb of God. They see him as the one who came to shed his blood to redeem them.

## 6.2 Reasons – human.

In the following table, respondents give reasons why they believe that Jesus was human.

Valid	6. Was Jesus Christ a human being?		Frequency	Valid percentage
	Yes		258	86.0
	No		42	14.0
	Total		300	100.0

Out of a total of 300 respondents, 86.0% answered in the affirmative. 14.0% disagree that Jesus Christ was a human being.

The response shows that most of the respondents knew that he was human like them. In his work Mbiti says that Jesus was a “rural dweller” (Mugambi 1989:91). He came as a human being to live among humans. If he was something more than a human being he would have been rejected by the people as an alien. He had to speak their language and share common characteristics to be accepted as one of them.

## 6.3 Reason - Human.

He watches over us and protects us	2	0.7
He is the Son of God.	4	1.3
He is the Son of Man/He was born of a human woman.	79	26.3
He sacrificed himself for our sins.	12	4.0
He showed human characteristics e.g. anger/ pain/thirst/ fatigue/temptation/fear/sadness.	78	26.0
He is holy and spiritual/He is God/He is part of the trinity.	27	9.0

He is the word turned flesh.	10	3.3
He lived his life among the disciples/humans/sinners/sick people/Jews.	72	24.4
He lives in our hearts.	8	2.7
He is God and Man at the same time.	5	1.7
He was conceived by the holy spirit	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

In the above table 79% of respondents declared Jesus Christ as the Son of Man who has been born of a woman. Jesus used to refer to himself as the Son of Man. In so doing he reinforced the perception that he was human.

In other responses, 78% qualified him as a human by citing his human characteristics. He also had emotions such as anger and sadness.

It is noteworthy that 72.0% of the respondents highlighted his personal life. He was a Jew who lived among his own people. He lived with his disciples and took care of the sick. He befriended the despised sinful people.

The various respondents reflect knowledge of his social life. How he lived among those whom society as well as religious leaders rejected. How he came to seek the lost was shown by his association with the people whom the religious leaders condemned as sinners. He even healed social rejects such as lepers.

It is disheartening to observe that only 1.17% could boldly declare him both “God and man” at the same time. This gives me an impression that the concept of his two natures is not yet well understood by the congregants.

#### **6.4 Jesus Christ in church.**

7. Jesus Christ's position in church.		Frequency	Valid Percentage
	Founder of the church.	21	7.0
	Head/Leader/Guide.	72	24.1
	Saviour/Liberator/Messiah/Redeemer.	66	22.1
	Cornerstone/Pillar/Foundation/Church/Bridge.	43	14.4

Valid	God/Lord.	15	5.0
	Son of God.	15	5.0
	Shepherd/Father.	5	1.7
	God as well as man.	24	8.0
	Prophet/Healer/Teacher/Helper.	17	5.7
	Centre/Life/Light/Truth/Way.	18	6.0
	Brings Peace/Inspiration/Hope/Unity/.	7	2.3
Missing	Total	299	100.0
	N/A	1	
Total		300	

From the given responses, it is clear that the congregants acknowledge Jesus Christ's role in the church. Of the total responses received, 24% acknowledge him as head of the church. It is so important to receive him not only as one's Saviour, but also as the leader of the church. From the given responses, 22.1% believe that he is the Messiah and Liberator.

In my own opinion, those who belong to the African Pentecostal Independent Churches are aware of this salvific role. He came not only as a saviour of souls, but can also play an active role in people's daily lives.

The congregants are aware that the church belongs to Christ. He is the saviour to mankind. Without Jesus Christ then is no church. He calls the church and unites it.

In another response, 5.7% revealed that he is a Prophet, Healer and Teacher. It is clear that the respondents are aware of his multiple functions.

### 6.5 Jesus Christ's role.

8. What is Jesus Christ's role in the church?	Frequency	Valid
Head of the church/Leads/Guides/Protects/Custodian.	71	23.7
Teacher/Counsellor/Prophet.	22	7.4
Blesses/Cleanses/Heals the sick/Feeds the poor.	45	15.1
Strengthens the church/Strengthens our faith/Inspires.	41	13.7
Saviour/Redeemer/Brings salvation/Mediator between people and God.	37	12.4
Way to God/Truth/Life/Hope/Understanding.	35	11.7

	Facilitates peace and harmony.	2	7
	Holy God.	1	3
	God of Son	2	7
	Holy Spirit	3	1.0
	United the church/believers	19	6.4
Missing Total	Builds the Church/Expands the Kingdom of God/Brings knowledge of God.	21	7.0
	Total	299	100.0
	N/A	1	
		300	

### 6.6 Jesus Christ's role.

In our research, 23% of the respondents indicated that Jesus Christ as Head of the church guides and protects the adherents as a shepherd protects his flock.

### 6.7 Jesus Christ Ancestor.

	9 Is Jesus Christ an ancestor or not?	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Valid	Yes	58	19.3
	No	242	80.7
	Total	300	100.0

	9. Reasons: ancestor	Frequency	Valid percentage
	Jesus is God/Lord.	44	14.7
	Jesus is the Son of God/ Christ/ Messiah/ Saviour.	58	19.3
	Jesus was a human being/Son of man/His lineage is written in the Bible.	28	9.4
	Jesus is both God and man.	12	4.0
	Jesus is worshipped, while ancestors are deeply respected.	3	1.0
	Ancestors have died, while Jesus lives forever/Is immortal/has risen again.	73	24.4
	Jesus is the mediator between God and man.	12	4.0

	Jesus is God in the flesh.	1	3
	I do not believe in ancestors.	2	7
	Jesus died like any other man/He was declared dead.	15	5.0
	Jesus is the Holy Spirit.	4	1.3
	He did not have children/son who could carry on his name.	1	3
	Total	299	100.0
Missing	N/A	1	
Total		300	

In their response to a question whether Jesus Christ is an ancestor or not, 80.7% said that he is not. On the other hand, 19.3% believed that he is an ancestor. The ancestors hold positions of “pre-eminence” in traditional communities (Turaki 1999:34). Turaki said that if they are sometimes worshipped or highly revered.

The extreme percentages of the divergent responses show beyond doubt that the position of Jesus Christ concerning the ancestral cult is relatively unknown. To some he is like their deceased parents whereas others place him in the hierarchy of God. In another interesting analysis, 3.0% mentioned that as he had no children of his own, he did not qualify to be an ancestor.

### 6.8 Jesus Christ: Reason for being in World.

10. Jesus Christ's reason to be in the world	Frequency	Valid Percentage H
He died for our sins	42	14.0
To show us God on earth	5	1.7
To bring us salvation from our sins	178	59.3
To defeat the devil/Destroy sin.	13	4.3
To teach people the way of God	21	7.0

To gather the Apostles and send them out to make new disciples	2	0.7
To reconcile man and God	25	8.3
To protect us in the world	2	0.7
To establish the church	2	0.7
To demonstrate God's love for us	3	1.0
To collect believers and lead them to God	1	0.3
He is the founder of Christianity/To establish a new covenant	6	2.0
Total	300	100.0

From the given responses it is obvious that the congregants are clear on the issue of Jesus Christ's descent into the world. 59.3% of those respondents claim that he came to save us from our sins. It is obvious that the majority believe that He will save our souls as well as guide us to eternal life. In another response from the congregation, 25.0% supported a view that his duty was to reconcile man and his Creator.

### 6.9 Reason for being a follower of Jesus Christ.

11. Reason for being followers of Jesus Christ	Frequency	Valid percentage
To enjoy everlasting life/life after death	36	12.1
He is the way the truth and the life	52	17.4
He died for my sins	44	14.6
He brought salvation for my sins	42	14.1
He loves me/us/mankind	37	12.4
I love Jesus Christ	3	1.0
I trust him/He is faithful	10	3.4
He is my strength	3	1.0

	He brings me blessings/hope/peace/happiness	11	3.7
	To meet Him/be with Him one day	8	2.7
	To live life abundantly	3	1.0
	To go to heaven	3	1.0
	The Christian faith helps me to grow and be a better person	3	1.3
	Inspired by the Holy Spirit	2	0.7
	I was born in the Christian faith	3	1.0
	I feel at home/comfortable in church	7	2.3
	I can worship in my own culture	1	3
	I am a Christian	1	3
	Jesus Christ is my creator	1	3
	He answers my prayers	3	1.0
	I believe in him	2	0.7
	He protects/Helps me	7	2.3
	He is kind/Caring/compassionate	14	4.7
	He is God almighty	1	3
	He called me	1	3
	Total	298	100.0
Missing	N/A	2	
Total		300	

From the above table, it is evident that members of Bethesda Apostolic Church do understand how Jesus Christ describes himself in the gospel. 17.4% described him as the Way, the Truth and the Life. 14.7% follow him so they do believe that he died for their sins.

### 6.10 How do I see Jesus Christ in own life?

	12. How I see Jesus Christ in my own life	Frequency	Valid percentage
Valid	Through him I have eternal life	20	6.7
	He gives meaning to my life	27	9.1
	He is my saviour/redeemer/liberator	59	19.9
	He brings me strength/protection/guidance	77	25.9
	He brings me blessings/ hope/ joy/ love/ grace/ peace/ happiness	36	12.1
	He is my friend	6	2.0
	He answers my prayers	6	2.0
	He is my provider/fulfils my needs	23	7.7
	He is my creator	2	0.7
	He is my father	6	2.0
	He is my God	7	2.4
	In Him I trust	12	4.0
	He is the son of God	2	0.7
	He prays for me	2	0.7
	He changed my life	12	4.0
	Total	297	100.0
	Missing	N/A	3
Total		300	

In 25.7% responses, the congregants accept Jesus Christ as a person who brings strength and protection to their own lives. He also leads or guides them in the right ways. In other responses, 19.7% recorded that he is their Saviour, Redeemer and Liberator.

## CHAPTER 7 Conclusion

The Africans were sceptic about Western Christianity as their faith. They therefore espoused to establish “a truly African Church” (Ndiokwere 1981:276). This phenomenon is “a revolt against European domination” in matters of Church and State. It is a revolt against the limiting of “spontaneous expression in worship” (Ndiokwere 1981:276). The African Independent Pentecostal Churches are admired as “protest churches”. These churches symbolise protest against the rule that appeared on the African arena. Domination appeared in different ways. It was apparent in “colonial, ecclesiastical and social” spheres (Bediako 1999:305). Africans wish to practice Christianity as Africans. They need to apply it to their day to day lives.

Africans wish to apply Christianity to healing as well as the curbing of witchcraft. Setiloane explains that in Sotho/Tswana tradition, *go lwala* which translates as “to sicken”, is in most instances translated as “illness” (Setiloane 1975:44). Setiloane pointed out that the translation is misleading. In his analysis, *bolwetse*, (illness), describes symptoms of a particular physical disease that requires treatment with medicines. It also describes the state of man whose “family, stock and crops” suffer as a result of ill-luck (Setiloane 1975:44).

Witchcraft is not the sole source of illness. In many instances, people who are called to practice as prophet-healers or sangomas suffer various illnesses. They do consult prophets or sangomas to find out about the cause of their illnesses. If their illnesses are diagnosed as a calling, they are taken in to be groomed as future prophets or healers.

*Badimo*, that is ancestors, are capable of blessing or meting out punishment to their living relatives. Disobedience to their instructions might lead to various kinds of punishment. One may not be able to be successful in one’s ventures, including getting married or giving birth to children in marriage. *Badimo* can also make one prosperous in life. They are also able to protect one against many dangers. *Badimo* plays a role of mediation between God and people. Nyamiti observes that Jesus Christ does the same work of mediation. He referred to Christ as “Ancestor par excellence” (Nyamiti 1984:9).

Man is also concerned about *bolwetse* as it harms not only his health but also his whole being. Man’s own relations are affected. *Bolwetse* implies a “dis-ease” or breakdown in the harmony between man and *Modimo*, including inanimate stones (Setiloane 1975:44). *Modimo* is the

Protector and Sustainer of all creatures (Setiloane 1975:21). *Modimo* is numinous in nature. He is capable of causing calamity and denying people of wealth. *Modimo* is capable of bringing “drought, floods and locusts” (Setiloane 1975:45). He may also contain these natural disasters. In my observation, *Modimo* stands parallel to the Christian God. In *Modimo's* nature, we also observe similarities with the attributes of God. In other words, God is translated into the Sotho/Tswana *Modimo* who provides blessings and rains for his people. An African expression of Christianity should be viewed as a “response of the Holy Spirit to the questioning spirit of man” (Ndiokwere 1981:276).

Appiah-Kubi and Torres find that spiritual experience plays a central role in African religions. The experience of the spirit is “the pivot of most African religions” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:118). Spirit possession is an integral part of worship. In many of these churches, “healing, prophesying, and divining” spins around the “idea of spirit possession” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:118). The goal of these churches is to worship in a manner that satisfies both the spirit and the body. The followers of African Pentecostal Independent Churches claim that these denominations “fulfil all human needs” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:118). In the African Pentecostal Independent Churches, Christianity is supposed to integrate cultural elements and find means “to unite Christianity and daily life” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:118). In worship, these churches are “free, emotional and to some extent fanatical”. The churches see the divine as “transcendent and immanent at the same time” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:118). The followers of these churches believe that the kingdom is to “appear on earth”. The belief is things ought to happen in this world and not the other world (Appiah-Kubi 1979:118).

The members of these Moya Churches are channels through whom “gifts of the Holy Spirit may be transmitted” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119). The supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit help other people “at their moments of greatest need (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119). People are endowed with different gifts of the Spirit. Some are blessed with the “word of wisdom”, others with knowledge, faith, the working of miracles et cetera” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119). There is a strong belief among the followers of African Pentecostal Independent Churches that their experiences are “part and parcel of the normal life for all Christians” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119).

All members of the church are encouraged to be actively involved in the evangelisation effort. They are to engage their neighbours and friends (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119). It is the duty of

believers to enter the valley “of sin and suffering” in order to bring supernatural help to those facing problems. They are to bring help to those people facing problems and who do not know that “God loves them” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119).

In his explanation, Ndiokwere sees Moses as having a rank “above every prophet in Israel”. He was special in the eyes of God as Yahweh spoke “mouth to mouth” with him (Ndiokwere 1981:147). He even enjoyed the privilege of beholding the shape of God (Numbers 12:8). Moses was the prophet of the exodus. The leaders of some of the African Pentecostal Independent Churches are seen in the light of the historical Moses. Just like the prophet Moses, they are also founders of new communities.

Jesus Christ as King is regarded as an “Exemplar of all humanity” (Nyamiti 1984:40). The reason is that we are all “called to share in His kingship (kingdom)” and are supposed to behave according to its demands (Nyamiti 1984:40). The Lord Jesus Christ is also our archetype in spiritual life. To participate in His kingship involves “taking part in His own eternal Descendancy” (Nyamiti 1984:40-41).

Through the Incarnation, Jesus Christ is “both Mediator and Priest”. In His priestly function God chose Him “among men and delegated Him to offer up sacrifice for us” (Nyamiti 1984:41). The offering of sacrifice including ministry of sacraments “is the Priestly function”. Christ’s par excellence priesthood is “associated with His prophetic and royal offices” (Nyamiti 1984:42). This association is clearly discernible in the ministerial priesthood (Nyamiti 1984:42).

The paschal mystery is seen as the epitome of “our Saviour’s ancestral activity”. Mass is regarded as “the Sacramental actualisation of that mystery”. This is not only to be seen as “Christ’s ancestral activity par excellence, but the climax of His ancestral actions” (Nyamiti 1984:52). The goal of Christ’s “ancestral mediation” was realised through the Mass (Nyamiti 1984:52).

In view of what has been mentioned, the African Pentecostal Independent Churches are aware of the two natures of Jesus Christ. His humanity and divinity is well articulated by various authors of books about African Pentecostal Independent Churches. Some of these authors are members of these African Pentecostal churches.

Appiah-Kubi and Torres claim that Jesus Christ is the “object of devotion” in Indigenous African Christian Churches (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:118). People worship God as their creator, and Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is therefore worthy of our worship.

The African Pentecostal Independent Churches are real Christian denominations. They honour the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible remains central to “their religious life” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119). Their followers regard the Bible as the “blueprint for life” (Appiah-Kubi 1979:119). The Bible is recognised as “a primary source” (Muzorewa 1985:92). In all situations, the Bible is regarded as a necessary tool. It is in this light that Biblical theology is supposed to reflect the “African situation and understanding” (Muzorewa 1985:92).

Asamoah-Gyadu (2007:128) says Africans normally gather “many religious resources” that respond to physical and spiritual needs. The author mentions that mainline churches are losing membership to African Pentecostal Independent Churches. The African-founded churches’ spirituality “appeals to African religious sensibilities” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:128). Spirituality means “the cluster of values, beliefs, and practices” determining the religious lifestyle of a particular religious formation. This is evident in African Pentecostal Independent Churches’ “worship” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:129). The churches are innovative and bring forth liveliness in worship. The Western missionaries however looked down on these churches.

The missionaries failed to understand the rituals and festivals of the Africans they were evangelising. They believed that African rituals and festivals were “signs of heathenism” (Setiloane 1975: 92).

Ndiokwere pointed out that African Pentecostal Independent Churches are not just sects. The spreading of these African denominations is criticised in some circles as a “dark spot in the evangelization programme” (Ndiokwere 1981:274). He believes that they are not just “mushroom churches” (Ndiokwere 1981:274). They bring solidarity and joy to the congregation. Helping them to survive the harsh realities in which they find themselves.

Mission work in Africa was not all negative. The Africans benefited a lot in their contact with Western missionaries. Top on the list was “reading and writing” (Uzukwu 1996:5). The author clarifies that this skill carries “the seeds of cultural continuity, development and revolution” (Uzukwu 1996:5). He claims that colonialism, “by default” brought about unintended

consequences. Mission work established Missionary Institutions. The Missionary Institutions later became the first places of “Higher Education for Africans” (Setiloane 1975:150). The Africans were trained in various professions, including teaching and evangelic work. Missionaries promoted a “spirit of industry” among the natives (Setiloane 1975:153). The natives were encouraged to improve their own situations.

In the researcher’s own assessment, the respondents from the Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church have full confidence in Jesus Christ as their God. Jesus Christ is related to Africans “in virtue of His being God-man and our Redeemer” (Nyamiti 1984:19). Nyamiti says in virtue of Christ’s “hypostatic union”, He is as “our Brother and mediator”. He adds that His Brotherhood is based “in the mystery of the Trinity” (Nyamiti 1984:21). The Africans are able to trust Him with their own lives. They find Him to be not only a person who will lead them to an everlasting life but who will also protect them from the evil of this world.

Africans are not able to understand the life and work of Jesus Christ without referring to their ancestor worship. Turaki claims that ancestors “hold a place of pre-eminence” in many traditional communities (Turaki 1999:34). He adds that the ancestors are either worshipped or revered (Turaki 1999:34). Some African theologians agree that “ultimate worship” is for God (Turaki 1999:34). It is in this relationship that Africans found Christ to be associated to them. According to Nyamiti, Christ is regarded as “the Brother and Mediator” of all humans (Nyamiti 1981).

Mashau (2009:122) explains that God is a personal God and that the concept of God who is near should be emphasised in proclaiming that He is Emmanuel God with us. This message should be told to the people of Africa without making the same mistake as the missionaries did by considering all of the culture of Africa as evil. All culture is good in the eyes of God because of the creation and all evil bad because of sin.

Nyamiti indicates that both Christianity and African Christianity recognise the humanity and divinity of Christ. He claims that Africans keep contact with their ancestors “through prayer and ritual offerings” (Nyamiti 1981:33). Through these prayers and rituals, the Africans inspire ancestors “to act favourably” towards living family members. He noted that “the mutual contact between Christ and His brother-descendants” appears to be similar to that found in Africa

(Nyamiti 1981:33). In their paper, Akper and Smit note that Nyamiti's "ancestral Christology" intends to explain "the nature of Jesus Christ's relationship to Christians" (Akpel & Smit 2005:44). Nyamiti's ancestral Christology is based on the relationship between the ancestors and their living family members. However, he acknowledges that there is a difference between "the African ancestor/living relatives and Christ/believers relationships" (Akpel & Smit 2005:44). The notion of humans acquiring "supernatural powers after death" informs him in his conviction that the fundamental structure of "African concepts of ancestorship" is the same as ancestral Christology (Akper & Smit 2005:44).

Healing was one of the most important duties of Christ's on earth (Makhubu 1988:77). He was always among the outcasts preaching and healing. Healing is therefore the most important ministry in African Pentecostal Independent Churches. These "churches of the people" are located among the people (Makhubu 1988:77). The most diagnosed illnesses are spiritual and mental in nature. This affects the lives of many poor and marginalized people. They then go to African Pentecostal Independent Churches in their "time of need" (Makhubu 1988:77). The prophet prays to the sick. In other instances, those with the gift of healing pray for the sick. Prayer for healing the sick is to "God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit" (Makhubu 1988:83). It is mostly done by the laying on of hands.

The prophets have more power than the rest of their followers. The believers are hopefully looking to them for prophetic revelations. The people go to these churches to seek help from the bishop. They ask for protection against witches who are capable of harming them and their families. Protection against witchcraft is done through prayers and the use of elements such as holy water, sea water, ashes and cleansing. He was popular for performing all functions attached to known offices known in Israel (Ndiokwere 1981:148). He is said to have occupied various offices such as that of "Priest, Judge, Intercessor, Healer and miracle-worker" (Ndiokwere 1981:148). In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is also seen as Prophet, High Priest, Judge and Intercessor. He is by far greater than Moses in stature. Jesus is known as a prophet from God. Nyamiti describes Christ's prophetic function as meaning "His Office as Teacher" of all humanity (Nyamiti 1984:36). This function is ancestral because through it "the Saviour exercised His ancestral (redemptive) mission" (Nyamiti 1984:36). The violation of the "contract between

God and men” is ignorance. This ignorance deprived us of the important contact with Him (Nyamiti 1984:37).

It is the intention of Christ’s prophetic function to bridge the gap and “restore primitive union through knowledge” (Nyamiti 1984:37). Through his teaching, Christ exercises his redemptive (hence ancestral) duty because as a “Redeemer he was sent to destroy the works of Satan”. If Christ is “our Archetype of nature and conduct” and if He lived an exemplary life, then His kingship is supposed to have a “prophetic function” (Nyamiti 1984: 41). It became apparent that the Messiah is a prophet “in all that He did and was” (Nyamiti 1984:41). He was to free people from slavery by bringing to them “liberating truth” (Nyamiti 1984:37). The teaching gave them divine light which “is Christ Himself”. Christ being the eschatological “Mediator and our Brother-Ancestor” (Nyamiti 1984:37).

Jesus Christ’s pastoral office comprises His kingship “over mankind and the rest of creation” (Nyamiti 1984:38). It includes “His legislative, judicial and punitive power”. Christ “redeems” the human will through this power. He inculcates in it “the demands of the divine law” (Nyamiti 1984:38). Jesus Christ pastoral duty intended to “extend the kingdom of heaven”. Christ’s kingdom enables men to have a “share in it” (Nyamiti 1984:39). It thus enables Christ to “bridge the gap caused by sin” between God and mankind (Nyamiti 1984:39).

Nyamiti indicated that in Christ’s “juridical and punitive power” parallels exist between the characteristics of “Christ’s Ancestorship and that of the African” (Nyamiti 1984:39). Christ’s nature of kingship has all characteristics that are proper to His Ancestorship. A brother-ancestor has blood relation with a person with whom “he has a common parent” (Nyamiti 1984:39). In virtue of Christ’s kingship to us, through his own Descendancy, He makes us “sons of his own Father and Ancestor” (Nyamiti 1984:39).

Nyamiti discloses that one of the qualities of “brother-ancestorship is mediation” (Nyamiti 1984:39). It is said that Christ’s ancestorship is “mediative, and consequently, priestly and redemptive” (Nyamiti 1984:39). Christ’s kingship is also “mediative, sacerdotal and redemptive” (Nyamiti 1984:39). This kingship is practiced through His “sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection” (Nyamiti 1984:39).

In his concluding comment, Nyamiti says that Jesus Christ, by exercising His kingly office, makes us “partakers of His own protological and eschatological kingship” (Nyamiti 1984:40). As a result He manifests the two natures of “His pastoral function and thereby its ancestral character” (Nyamiti 1984:40).

Jesus Christ as King is regarded as an “Exemplar of all humanity” (Nyamiti 1984:40), the reason being that we are all “called to share in His kingship (kingdom)” and supposed to behave according to its demands (Nyamiti 1984:40). The Lord Jesus Christ is also our archetype in spiritual life. To participate in His kingship involves “taking part in His own eternal Descendancy” (Nyamiti 1984:40-41).

Through the Incarnation, Jesus Christ is “both Mediator and Priest”. In His priestly function God chose Him “among men and delegated Him to offer up sacrifice for us” (Nyamiti 1984:41). The offering of sacrifice, including ministry of sacraments, “is the Priestly function”. Christ’s par excellence priesthood is “associated with His prophetic and royal offices” (Nyamiti 1984:42). This association is clearly discernible in the ministerial priesthood (Nyamiti 1984:42).

The research established that the Bethesda Apostolic Faith Mission Church does align herself to the main ideas of the African Pentecostal Churches and fully acknowledge Jesus Christ as Divine and human. This church proclaims this truth in a truly African way.

## Addendum 1

Dear Friend, Bishop Petrus Tsiane is conducting research concerning the views on Jesus Christ in the church regarding his MA study in Missiology at the University of the Free State Your cooperation will be highly appreciated. Please supply us with your views on the questions. The information will be of great benefit to the church.

DEMOGRAPHICS						
<b>1. Gender</b>	Male	Female				
<b>2. Age</b>	>12 years	12–18 years	19-30 years	31-50 years	51-60 years	<61 years
<b>3. Population group</b>						
<b>3.b Position in the church</b>	Youth	Women's league	Elder	Deacon	Lay Preacher	Preacher

### CONCEPTIONS ON JESUS

4. Do you regard Jesus Christ as a Divine being?

Yes	
No	

4.1 Please provide a reason or more detail for your answer in the above question

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5. Do you regard Jesus Christ as a true human being?

Yes	
No	

5.1 Please provide a reason or more detail for your answer in the above question

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6. Describe the way in which you regard Jesus Christ in your church?

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7. What is Jesus Christ's role in your church?

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8. Would you regard Jesus as an ancestor?

Yes	
No	

8.1 Please provide a reason or more detail for your answer in the above question

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8. In your opinion, what do you think was Jesus Christ's main reason to be on this world?

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9. What is your main reason why you are a follower of Jesus Christ's?

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10. What is your outlook concerning Jesus Christ in your own life?

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION !**

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