

P.N. Wachege's PhD Thesis

Title: Jesus Christ Our *Mūthamaki* (Ideal Elder); A Christological Study Based Upon The Agĩkũyũ Understanding of Elder.

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By its very title, the present thesis is both anthropological and theological: anthropological in the sense that it investigates from oral, written and experiential material the traditional Agĩkũyũ understanding of elder; theological in that it is intended to examine the meaning and relevance of the Christ event from a new Agĩkũyũ perspective.

Various reasons motivated the subject matter. Among them is that Vatican 11 and other Post Vatican 11 Magisterial Documents and Directives/Instructions are quite emphatic in challenging us to make theological Inculturation a reality. In *Ad Gentes* Article 22¹ we are informed that no culture is totally satanic, and that every culture is imbued with some valuable elements. Hence the Document teaches us that all cultures, including the Agĩkũyũ culture, have their potential contribution to Christianity. This Document does not merely ask us to utilize our cultures for the purpose of the Church. It also maintains that the task of Inculturation is an obligation. According to it, theological investigations must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area.²This is what the theory of special and general revelation, which is among the ones guiding this thesis, is about.

Likewise, in his address to the bishops of Zaire- and indeed, to the whole of Africa- Pope John Paul 11 accentuates the same point as follows:

One of the aspects of this evangelization is the Inculturation of the Gospel, the Africanisation of the Church... That is part of the indispensable efforts to incarnate the message of Christ. The Gospel, certainly is not identified with the cultures, and transcends them all, but the Kingdom that the Gospel proclaims is lived by man deeply tied to a culture...³

¹ A. Flannery, *Vatican Council 11, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 839f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 256.

³ R. Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), p. 258.

He further stresses that in theologizing:

It is important to carry out a thorough investigation of the cultural traditions of the various populations and of the philosophical ideas that underlie them in order to detect elements that are in contradiction with the Christian religion and the contributions that can enrich theological reflection.⁴

The above and other magisterial teachings provoked us to choose our present subject so as to make Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, more meaningful and His Good News more fruitful to our people. As such, this is the main goal of the study.

We were also inspired by our strong urge to elaborate an Agĩkũyũ *Mũthamaki* Christology in response to our people's needs, aspirations, thought forms and mentality, thereby hoping to contribute to African Christology in particular and to the global Christology in general. Consequently, our kind of Christology is enabled to meaningfully dialogue with Karl Rahner's transcendental Christology and Leonardo Boff's Liberation Christology to avoid being fixed in parochial mindedness technically called force particularism. Moreover, since Christology is a central theme in theology, we are convinced that our choice is a good point of departure for further and deeper treatment of theological subjects and themes from similar African perspectives. This is thanks to the theory of inter-connection of Christian mysteries which the thesis employs especially in the area of implications of the study and further areas of related theological investigations triggered by the study.

The legitimacy of the endeavor and the basic approach in our thesis is further and explicitly supported by Edward Schillebeeckx. In his book entitled *Interim Report On The Books Jesus and Christ*, he provides very interesting reflections in which he spells out the theological legitimacy of looking for NEW TITLES for Jesus and the conditions for doing so.⁵ Schillebeeckx does not allow such an insight into Christology which he gives remain a mere abstraction. Neither does he let it be an idle speculation. He himself profoundly, critically, scientifically and systematically exemplifies its validity in another monumental monograph⁶ thus showing us how to go about it. Thanks to all these, our thesis explicates that we not only concur with the Magisterium but we also share the views of E. Schillebeeckx in the condition for such research.

The work is divided into **two main parts**:

Part One is anthropological and is subdivided into: **Chapter 1** which deals with historical and social contexts of the Agĩkũyũ useful or necessary for a better understanding of the Agĩkũyũ elder-hood; **Chapter 2** which visualizes elder-hood within the Agĩkũyũ world-view. The main

⁴ Ibid., p. 258.

⁵ E. Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report On The Books Jesus and Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1980), pp. 21-27.

⁶ Id., *Jesus In Our Western Culture: Mysticism, Ethics And Politics* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

thrust is the question: to the Agĩkũyũ, what makes an elder an elder?; **Chapter 3** which dwells on the relevance of the traditional Agĩkũyũ elder-hood for today and the future. A re-evaluation of the role and function of Agĩkũyũ elder-hood will verify that the traditional Agĩkũyũ elder-hood is still relevant for today and the future.

Part Two is, in a certain sense, the most important part of the thesis. This is mainly because our thesis is primarily theological in its intent. In this vital Part, an effort is made to scrutinize the Christian teaching on the Redeemer and Savior in the light of the Agĩkũyũ understanding of *Mũthamaki* (Ideal Elder). For this purpose, this Part is divided into Five Chapters namely: **Chapter 4** which examines the Biblical notion of elder and of the Biblical understanding of Christ within the perspective of elder- using the theory of redaction criticism of historical critical method. An explanation is arrived at that, basing ourselves on our perception of the Agĩkũyũ notion of elder, it is justifiable according to both the Old Testament and New Testament concept of elder-hood together with the other given characteristics in the Bible application to Jesus Christ, to call Jesus a *Muthamaki*, but in a higher and eminent sense; **Chapter 5** which examines Inculturation in the Church mainly from the point of view of the Magisterial Documents for guidance and support in our work in the first article. The article will illustrate that our kind of Inculturation is not only supported but it is also prescribed and given guidance in and by the Church authority thus legitimizing our **Agĩkũyũ Mũthamaki Christology**. In the second article of Chapter 5 will be an elaboration of Christologies in the Church. The article will show that each Church epoch understands, presents and concretely interprets the same Jesus Christ according to its needs, aspirations and thought-forms. The Chapter will further examine the important Magisterial teaching on Christ- a teaching which provides a fundamental basis for our **Agĩkũyũ Mũthamaki Christology**.

The kernel of our thesis will be **Chapter 6**. It's worth emanates from the understanding that it is here that an effort is made to create an **Agĩkũyũ Mũthamaki Christology**. We will endeavor to reflect systematically on Christ's mystery from the perspective of Agĩkũyũ sense of elder-hood. We will begin with a comparative analysis between the Agĩkũyũ elder-hood and that of Christ so as to find out the analogies between the two types of elder-hood. This will end with some further interpretation of the similarities and differences. Then we will tackle Christ's elder-hood in the light of other Christian mysteries.

Eventually, an explanation will be arrived at that, in view of the theory of interconnection of Christian mysteries, our **Agĩkũyũ Mũthamaki Christology** will have implications for our understanding of the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption and Ecclesiology. After that, the Chapter will strive to show the goal or finality of our Christology. The method to be followed is the one based on the teachings of Vatican 1 (DS 3016) and Vatican 11 (*Optatam Totius*, Art. 16) as the Chapter explicates.

Dialogue with others will be allotted to **Chapter 7**. For mutual enrichment and complementarity, an effort will be made to hold dialogue with other Christologies.

The above will be followed by pastoral relevance in our final **Chapter (8)**. The focus will be on the spiritual, catechetical and liturgical relevance of our **Agikūyū Mūthamaki Christology**. The Chapter endeavors to show that since our theological reflections have revealed Christ as the *Mūthamaki par excellence*, these facts have important implications for catechetical and theological purposes. The Chapter ends with the general conclusion of the whole thesis. It finally provides an appended Christianized elder-hood ritual which is of relative importance as a major consequence of the study. Thus this thesis not only builds on our related M.A. dissertation but goes beyond it profoundly.