

Charles Finch*

The Bible and the African Experience: A Response to Dr. Charles Copher

It is always a pleasure to listen to Dr. Charles Copher. Rarely do you find scholars of his completeness, thoroughness and vigor. And so all I can hope to do is to add some commentary or look at the question from a little different perspective. What I think we have to take as a given is that the Judeo-Christian experience has Africa as its crucible. That is the premise that I want to establish in the few minutes allotted to me.

When we say that Africa is the crucible of the Judeo-Christian experience, we need to go further and say that Africa is the crucible of the *human* experience. Humankind begins in Africa. That is today a scientific fact. There is no longer any debate about that. We really don't need to argue the point. From 4,000,000 B.C., all the way up to the appearance of modern human beings 200,000 years ago, Africa was the crucible of the human race. That is where humans and pre-humans emerged, evolved and obtained their final form as *homo-sapiens*, modern human beings of two hundred thousand years ago in East Africa. So all of the five billion human beings who live in the world today are in fact descendants of Africa. Once you understand that basic premise, much of what I will say follows as a matter of course. By definition, all the peoples who live in the world today are the descendants of small, common populations that left Africa and populated the rest of the world. That is what we call the mono-genetic

*Assistant Director for International Health Programs, Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, Georgia; M.D.; Associate Editor for the *Journal of African Civilizations*.

basis of the human lineage, the human family today.

Now it should not, therefore, come as any surprise that Africa is also the source of civilization. That is where civilization began. Civilization as we understand it; culture and civilization — because Africa is the oldest inhabited continent. It is the continent where human beings underwent the kinds of innovative experiences that eventually led to what we call culture. A culture that would, of course, also find its highest expression in what we call religion. Moreover, the first civilization of antiquity, the civilization that our own civilization is descended from, is the Black African civilization that we call Ethiopia and Egypt.

Egypt is the highest crown of African genius and is a Black and African civilization which is a combination of experiences, trends, and deeds that occurred in what we think of as Ethiopia, Cush, Nubia and Sudan. So when we look at Egypt, we are not talking about something outside of the Black experience, but fundamental to it. You cannot talk about the beginnings of Black or African history without discussing Egypt. Chiekh Anta Diop said that. He established it as a matter of scientific fact. Let us not even talk about African history or Black history until we dare to connect that history with Egypt. When we talk about Egypt, we are talking about people who today would be designated Sub-Saharan Africans. There is no debate about that anymore. The Egyptians called themselves, *Kmu*. *Kmu*, coming from a root *km*, means black or blackness. It is the strongest word in the Egyptian language for black or blackness. If one adds a “u” to it, it becomes plural — that means *they* called themselves black.

Herodotus who actually saw the Egyptians and spent seven months there, went up and down that whole country interviewing priests, common people, and noblemen, saying, and I quote him verbatim, “the Egyptians, like the Ethiopians are black skinned and woolly haired.” Diodorus said, civilization comes from the south, from Ethiopia, from Sudan, from Cush and eventually came to Egypt. Archaeological evidence confirms that. So

all the evidence from the internal language of the Egyptians themselves, refers to a Black sub-Saharan African people who came from the south. The ancestors of the Egyptians brought their civilization, their culture, their ideals, their cultural expressions from inner Africa (i.e., what we today think of as Ethiopia), down the Nile and set up or created a civilization which was the pinnacle of the civilizations of antiquity, the civilization we call Egypt.

Having established that, when Dr. Copher makes the point that there are 750 references to Egypt in the Bible, he's talking about 750 references to Black people; he is saying that Judaism itself, Hebrewism itself, in fact, comes out of the matrix of Africa. Now let's just think about this logically for a minute. We don't even have to get too erudite about it. Let's think about what happened when Jacob's clan comes into Egypt. It comes into Egypt, into Black Africa, as 70. These are 70 illiterate, uncultured shepherds who have no culture, no civilization, no learning. They come into the dominant civilization of the world at that time. Four hundred years later, they give rise to 600,000. How did 70 become 600,000? Seventy became six hundred thousand by intermarrying with the people around them. What happens to any immigrant group when it comes into a dominant country's civilization? Well, within a generation you lose your language. Within two generations you lose your cultural identity. So, I don't know what the ethnic identity was of the people under Jacob, but when they left they could not have been anything else but Black people. That is the logic to which the Bible leads us.

Once we establish the premise that the ancient Egyptians were black-skinned, woolly-haired people from sub-Saharan Africa—then by definition, the people who left during the Exodus, who came in as seventy and allegedly came out as six hundred thousand, or two million if you add the women and children—could have only gotten that way if they had intermarried, intermixed, or taken their spouses, as the Hebrews and children of Israel were wont to do, from the local population. So by definition,

the people who left Egypt, left as Egyptians; that is, as Black people who spoke Egyptian, read Egyptian, and were Egyptian by culture and ethnicity.

There's nothing particularly strange about that, once you understand the simple logic behind it. So, therefore, Diodorus, but also men like Tacitus and Plutarch, and Eusebius and the great historians of the classical period, said as a matter of course, that the *original Hebrews who colonized Canaan, were a group of Ethiopians and Egyptians*. This was the testimony of the classical writers of antiquity because this was the reality that they understood from their historical sources. That being the case, it should come as no surprise that Egypt, and therefore Africa, not only exerted a profound influence, it exerted a *decisive* influence, on what we call the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Now let's look at this from another point of view. As we said, the people who came out of Egypt in the Exodus, came out speaking a language that was essentially, fundamentally Egyptian. They could not have been speaking anything else. When they came in under Jacob, there was *no Hebrew*. Hebrew does not become a formalized language until three hundred years after the Exodus. They were not speaking Hebrew. There was no Hebrew. There was no written Hebrew. So, they had to have been speaking Egyptian when they left.

We understand that today there is what we call the "*Semitic*" languages: Arabic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Syriac, Ethiopian, etc. First of all, that word "*Semitic*" is a word we need to throw out of our vocabulary because it tells us absolutely nothing. The first people to inhabit Canaan, Western Asia, or what we today call the Middle East, were Black people: the so-called Nafatians in 8,000 B.C. Scholars found that their skulls were African skulls. Everybody can come into Africa, but nobody wants to believe that Black people can cross the Suez and inhabit other parts of the world besides Africa itself. They did so rather decisively, so that the first presence, the actual original people to live in what we think of as Western Asia, were also black-skinned, wolly-haired people.

Now a man by the name of Greenberg has said that we need to discard this word "Semitic" as a description of anything meaningful; certainly as it relates to language. Because what we think of as a Semitic language really belongs to what Greenberg calls the Afro-Asiatic group. That includes Egyptian, which is an African language, not a Semitic language; Cushitic, Chadic, Hausa, then of course, Amharic — which is Ethiopian. In addition to that there is Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac and Phoenician. All these belong to a single family of languages. Now, where does that single family of languages originate? It originates in one place, and one place only. It originates, according to Greenberg, in the highlands of what we today call Ethiopia. So Ethiopia is, in fact, the crucible of the languages we today call "Semitic." It shows you that what we think of as the Semitic languages are really children of African languages. They are *extensions* and part of African languages.

Therefore, the thing that I'm about to do next should come as no surprise. It should come as no surprise that if you look at the Hebrew Old Testament and the names, place names, words and concepts in Hebrew, they can be broken down in terms of the ancient African Egyptian language. They will give us meanings that are otherwise hidden from us.

The first person who showed me this was Cheikh Anta Diop, the greatest African intellect of the twentieth century, who quite tragically died two and a half years ago. He showed me something very interesting about the word Abraham. He said, in Hebrew, Abraham is Ab-Ra-em. If you break it down, Ab is heart, ra is the sun-god Ra, and em means of. So Abraham means, "of the heart of Ra." How do we connect that up? Well, let's look at Abraham. Abraham, after all, went into Egypt, where he tried to pass his wife off as his sister and Pharaoh wanted to take advantage of that relationship. But Pharaoh backed off after he found out what it was all about. He (Abraham) went into Egypt, and right after that what did he do? He made his covenant with God [a covenant by] circumcision. Ra is the Egyptian name of God, whose emblem or symbol is the sun. So Ab-

ra-em Ra is the God of circumcision in Ancient Egypt.

Now, let's look at the word Isaac who is his son. Isaac is Ysak. If you look at the Egyptian it is Ys-akh "Ys" means "place," "akh" means "burning," or "offering by fire," or "burnt offerings." Ys-akh means "place of the burnt offerings." Well, what do we understand about Ys-akh or Isaac? He was going to be sacrificed to God as a burnt offering by his father Abraham. God intervened, of course; there was a ram that was used as a substitute. But he is related to Ra, because he was going to be sacrificed as a burnt offering, and fire, of course, is linked to the fire of the sun god, Ra.

Let's look at Israel. Israel is who? Israel was Jacob's name when he wrestled with the Godly angel. Israel is Is-ra-il, or Is-ra-ir, ir and el are interchangeable. "Is" is "place," "ra" is Ra, "ir" means "created" or "to create;" "the place of Ra's creation." So again, all of a sudden when we look at these words, names, and place names in this fashion, and break them down from the perspective of the Egyptian language, all we look at is *the unique influence* that is completely closed to us if we take an orthodox or conventionally accepted view of the Bible.

All of a sudden our religion opens up dimensions to us that we didn't even know existed. Remember what Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I am." There is a sense in which Christhood is in fact co-eternal with the human race. Christianity, if you will, or "Christology" existed even before Jesus existed. Now, let's just take a few more of these and then we'll come to a close to this commentary on a brilliant lecture by Dr. Copher.

Let's look at the word "Adam." Adam is who? Adam is the first man in the image of God. He is also the one who completed creation. He is the completion of creation. He is the father of humankind. He is also identical with the Egyptian God "Atum." The root of that name Atum, *tm*, means "people," it means "completion." "At," which is the first part of Atum, means father, i.e., "father of the people." He is the first god *in the image of man*. Adam is the first man in the image of God. Atum is the man *in the image of God*.

Eve in Hebrew is Havvah. Now, the Egyptian form of that is *Hefa*. Who is *Hefa*? *Hefa* is the great mother serpent of the world. Eve wasn't really beguiled by the serpent; Eve *was* the serpent. She was the great mother serpent, cosmic serpent, who surrounded the egg of the world, the great cosmic egg, from whence came creation.

Immediately we begin to see symbols in the Old Testament that are sitting right in front of our very eyes and we have been completely oblivious to them, simply because we haven't had the keys, or simply because we are only looking at that which was handed down to us, and we accepted it without critically analyzing what was there. As we will find, all this comes out of the African matrix or out of the African womb, if you will. And it is a gift to the world from Africa.

To continue, Cain is Qayin in Hebrew. Cain in Egyptian is Qen. Qen means "to strike down," or "beat down," or "to kill." Who is Cain? Cain was the first murderer; he who struck down, he who beat down, he who killed. We're going to skip over Noah and Moses, because we could go on and on about this for the rest of the afternoon.

Let's think about David. David in Hebrew is *Dawood*. In Egyptian it is *Da-wd*. "Da" means "to strike," *wd* means "to fling" or "to sling," i.e., "to strike down by flinging." This, of course, relates to the episode of David and Goliath. Now what this means is that some of these things that relate to Africa as well as the Old Testament show that individuals, the patriarchs, and great personalities of the Bible often had names that reflected some outstanding event of their lives. So I would suggest to you that David was not his original name. He received that name after his episode with Goliath.

Solomon in Hebrew is Selmeh. In Egyptian that is Ser-meh. Ser means "cubit." Meh means "royal," "chiefly" or "princely," i.e., the royal cubit. Now what does that have to do with anything? The royal cubit was the *unit of measure* used by Egyptian architects to build all the sacred buildings of ancient Egypt. All the temples, all the sacred buildings were made by

using the cubit. So it was the emblem or the symbol of the architect, or the symbol of the builder, or the mason. What was the outstanding accomplishment of Solomon's reign? It was the building of the Temple. In fact, Free Masonry relates back to Solomon because he was the original builder. What did Solomon do? He went to Phoenicia to get Hiram to do the building of his Temple. We know that the Phoenicians were closely related to the Egyptians; they were the merchant marines for the Egyptians. So what I suggest to you is that Solomon was in fact a member of the guild of builders of Egypt in Ancient Africa. And he cemented that relationship by marrying the daughter of Pharaoh, who, as Dr. Copher said, may have been the person referred to in the Song of Solomon.

We could elaborate and continue this for sometime, but I want to stop there. All I hope I have done is given you a tid-bit of things that are in the Bible, right in front of our very eyes. With the proper keys we can unlock this Bible, open up the symbols, see layers, see meanings, see depths that we never believed were there. And once we do that, we will see that the source, the womb of the entire human race, of human culture, human civilization, and of all religion, is Africa. Thank you very much.

John Mbiti*

God, Sin, and Salvation in African Religion

There can be no balanced discussion of Christianity or the church in Africa without taking into serious consideration African religion, the religious heritage of the continent. African religion sprouted spontaneously without a founder. In course of time it provided working answers to the mysteries and problems of life and has been passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition, ritual, ceremonies, dance and a common memory. It colors all aspects of life.

In Christian history, this century could well be described as Africa's mass entry into Christianity. Of course Christianity is not a foreign religion in our continent, having arrived shortly after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 1900 there were only 10 million Christians, accounting for 9.2% of the total population in Africa (which in this paper includes Madagascar and other islands). Today in 1988, we estimate a Christian population of about 270 million, or 46% of the population. The southern two thirds of Africa has become predominantly Christian, while the northern two thirds is predominantly Muslim. One of the immediate questions which poses itself is: What are the reasons for this rapid expansion of the Christian faith in Africa today? African religion is one of the main contributors to its rapid expansion. Others include the work of foreign missionaries, the work of African Christians themselves, and the use of the Bible in local languages. It was as if African religion had prepared

*Kenyan theologian, former director of the W.C.C. Study Center, now a pastor and lecturer in Burgdorf, Switzerland.

the spiritual ground for the planting of Christianity. It was as if African religion said a big YES to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was as if the people heard Jesus saying to them: "I have not come to abolish...but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17).

Statistically, African religion has been on the decrease, as people convert to Christianity (and less so to Islam). In 1900 there were 63 million adherents of African religion, accounting for 58% of the total population. In 1988 there are about 68 million, or 10% of the population. What statistics do not and cannot show, is the strength of African religion. Conversion to Christianity does not mean that the people shed their traditional religiosity and go naked into their new religion. They take their world view, their culture, and their spiritual needs with them into Christianity. Translations of the Bible into African languages use the vocabulary which is loaded with traditional African religion. Furthermore, for African Christians the world of the Bible is not a world of two to three thousand years ago, but a world of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The impact of African religion is very great, and the statistics tell only a small part of it. It does not require much effort to find plenty of African religiosity in the churches. We can see parallels from the life of the African peoples who were cast into the diaspora in the New World by the rough and inhuman practice of slavery. In spite of their uprooting, in spite of the loss of their languages and loss of traditional setting, African religion has remained in their blood. How much more will this be the case for Africans who live in their own setting?

The Concept Of God

Every book that sets out to describe African religion says something or other about God. Here I wish to take up the first question of how missionaries and African theologians have considered the relationship between the concepts of God in Christianity and those in African religion. As the

new wave of missionary activity spread in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the question arose as to whether the God whom the Bible describes, and who is the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is the same God who is acknowledged in African religion. Many of the earlier missionaries were of the opinion that it could not be the same God, and that there should be no mixing of Christianity and heathenism (as many regarded African religion to be). Fortunately this attitude has largely evaporated, apart from some extreme evangelical missionaries who deny that African religion has a concept of the living God.

However, there are serious missionary writers who have admitted or acknowledged that African religion is talking about one and the same God as the Bible. For example, John V. Taylor, in his *The Primal Vision* (London, 1963) acknowledges that Africa has known God all these millennia. Another major missionary contributor to this debate was Edwin W. Smith who held the opinion that the same God is at work in the Judeo-Christian tradition and African religion. But while sympathizing with African religion, he sees it on a revolutionary ladder where Christianity is at the top.

African theologians themselves are more or less agreed that the God whom African religion acknowledges is the same God as in the Bible. At the first conference of African theologians in Ibadan, January 1966, on the same theme of *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, our final statement expresses clearly that:

We believe that the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...has been dealing with humankind at all times and in all parts of the world. It is with this conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African people and we have evidence that they know God and worship God. We recognize the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ...This knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of God.

One African theologian, Gabriel Setiloane, however, has the opinion that what the missionaries have taught was not the God of the Bible but of Europeans. So he presents this argument in his book, *The Image Of God Among The Sotho-Tswana*, (Rotterdam, 1976). Among other things he argues, that by using the name of God, *Midomo*, in the Sotho-Tswana languages, the missionaries "devalued" the traditional Tswana concept of God.

What shall we say to all this?

(a) God is keen to reveal God's self. God is turning to make God's self known to African peoples. They know God, each according to their languages. Their names of God reveal a deep set of visions and insights about God as Creator, Father/Mother of all, Giver of Children, Giver of Rain, the Glorious (Shining) one, the one [he/she] who is there now as from ancient of times (Tetekwaframua), the First, the Architect and Originator (Bore-Bore), the Wise One, Watcher of Everything, the Great Eye (Liisoddene), the Deliverer of those in trouble (Luvhunabaumba), the Besetting One (Shikakunamo), etc.

(b) God's revelation does not have boundaries. This knowledge and acknowledgement of God is the foundation of African religion. Within this traditional religiosity there is no atheist. Indeed, this knowledge is so fundamental, that the Akan say in a proverb: No one shows the child God — that means, even children know God.

(c) Naturally we cannot expect all African people to have identical ideas about God. Each people (tribe) has evolved its own concepts within the framework of its own life. The geographical environment, for example, plays an important role in shaping people's concepts. The Ngombe, who live in the thick equatorial forest speak of God as *Bilikonda* ("The Everlasting One of the Forest"). For African peoples, nature itself is an open witness to the being of God. So they see and depict God as the One behind the world of nature in all its wonders, mysteries and complexities. The social-political structure has also an influence on concepts of God.

Human relationships to God are expressed through prayer, offerings, sacrifices, and spontaneous invocations.

(d) When it comes to the encounter between Christianity and African religion, we affirm that there is only one and the same God who is acknowledged and worshipped in both. The encounter results in a two-way mixing of concepts for the enrichment of the people's religious life. As one African proverb says, "The river is made bigger by the small streams that flow into it." We acknowledge that because of Jesus Christ, Christianity has received a fuller picture of God than is otherwise possible outside.

(e) African Christians who are direct converts from African religion cannot understand the Christian teaching about God without the help of their traditional knowledge of God.

(f) There are gaps in the concepts of God in African religion which emerge in the light of Biblical faith. For example, in African religion there is virtually no notion of the eschatological concepts which are part and parcel of the Christian faith, and there is no talk about the Kingdom of God.

Sin In African Religion

This is another important theme, when we consider the presence of Christianity in Africa. There are practically no sermons which do not mention *sin* in one form or another. So the question arises, as to what this term means in the context of African religion, since people start from their understanding of this concept within their traditional setting. We shall handle this question briefly.

(a) Many scholars of African religion recognize that what we call sin has first and foremost to do with relationships in the community. In the African framework the community consists of the departed, the living, and those yet to be born. Any breach which punctuates this communal relationship amounts to sin, whatever words may be used for this concept.

(b) While **sin** is a breach of the individual against the corporate community, the community itself cannot commit a breach against God.

(c) In African myths of creation it is told how in one way or another, the paradisaical relationship between God and humans was lost. There are many explanations of how this happened, the result of which was humankind's loss of three important gifts: immortality, resurrection (in case death occurred) and rejuvenation upon becoming old. The separation between God and humankind was an ontological and not a moral separation. Humankind did not become a sinner by nature through these acts which brought about the loss of the primeval paradise. There is no *original sin* in African religion, neither is a person born a sinner. A person is a sinner by deed in the context of the community of which the person is a member. *Sinning* is that which injures the philosophical principal of: **I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.**

(e) The breaches of the moral, traditional and spiritual fabric of society have different weights and consequences. One of the most serious levels of relations is in the area of covenants. Breaches of covenants are the most serious forms of sin. We can only enumerate some of the many covenants which permeate African (and/or other) societies. Blood brotherhood and blood sisterhood covenants bind two people and their relatives into ties which are as strong as the blood ties between biological brothers and sisters. There is an exchange of blood from both sides, of which some drops may be sucked or drunk or rubbed into each other's body. This is done in the presence of the community, at which normally an animal is also slaughtered and communally eaten.

There are adoption covenants which create child and parent relationships, the child being already grown up or old enough to know what he is doing; land covenants, marriage covenants, and covenants which bind people together into the so-called "secret societies."

(f) *What happens when someone commits what amounts to a sin?* This is a big question which we cannot answer in detail. A number of measures

are taken by the community when someone commits an injury to the community. "Cleansing" ceremonies or rituals are performed by ritual elders, medicine-men, priests, or diviners. These usually involve the slaughtering of an animal (like chickens, sheep, goats or wild animals) and the use of blood. Thereby the offender is re-accepted, reconciled, brought close to the other party and to the wider community.

If the community itself experiences misfortunes like epidemics, locust invasion, drought, disastrous flooding or famine, it was customary in most societies to seek help from God. The commonest method was through communal sacrifices and offerings.

To my knowledge there is no concept in which ill-doings (sins) are dealt within the hereafter. Just as sin is committed in the present life, so must it be removed during the present life.

Some Concluding Observations on the Concept Of Sin

(a) This is an area which has received very little attention among scholars of African religion.

(b) It seems that sin in African religion refers almost exclusively to the area of relations between human beings, with spiritual realities and with nature.

(c) The question of language is extremely important. The English term "sin" does not always translate precisely into African languages. It is necessary to analyze these terms in order to penetrate their cultural and social meaning. For example in my language, Kikamba, spoken by about 4 million people in Kenya, the term used by the Protestants is *nai*. The word actually means fever, malaria, flu. The Roman Catholics use another term, *thavu*, which refers to the state of being ritually unclean, as for example when a woman has menstruation. So, when Christians use these two words, are they talking about malaria fever, menstruation or *sin*?

4. Salvation

A certain measure of attention has been given to the theme of salvation in African religion. Among other things, African words which designate salvation receive an analysis which helps to open up the meaning of this term within the African religio-cultural setting. Linguistically considered, the terms for salvation seem to indicate that the concept is intimately related to the physical welfare of life.

(b) Prayers of African religion concentrate on various aspects of *salvation*. The majority of them are petitions, requests, intercessions and invocations for health or healing from disease and barrenness, success (hence salvation from failure) in undertakings, and protection from harm, danger or death. Others are in quest of peace and blessings; there are prayers of thanksgiving for saving acts, such as harvest, childbirth, recovery from danger or sickness. Blessings are often invoked in African societies, generally appealing to God to actualize the contents of blessings.

(c) Sacrifices of domestic and wild animals, as well as offerings, are made in probably all African societies. The basic idea behind this practice is to acknowledge the saving activities of God. In some desperate situations human beings were (and still are) sacrificed, or offered themselves voluntarily to be sacrificed, in order that others may be saved.

(d) In many areas of Africa there are shrines, sacred mountains, woods or forests, rocks or caves which people set apart as places for safekeeping, of refuge, of salvation. People or animals found in such places may not be molested or killed; also nature itself in such places is safe and protected.

(e) God and Salvation: Ultimately, God is the savior of people and all things, since God is their creator. There are many names or titles of God as well as sayings which portray God in saving or salvatory activities. For example: God is the giver of Life, the Giver of Rain or Water, the Protector of the poor (Tutungaboro, as the Barundi call God); the Deliverer of those in trouble (Luvhunabaumba, as the Ila of Zambia call God), the Father

or Mother of the people. The Barundi and Rwanda say in a proverb: "A tree protected by Imana (God) cannot be hurt by wind." In some accounts of our oral histories it is also told how God saved people out of various situations of danger—war, calamity, captivity, famine, flood or other destructive forces of nature.

(f) Salvation in African religion has to do with physical and immediate dangers that threaten individual or community survival, good health and general prosperity or safety. Salvation is not just an abstraction, nor is salvation in African religion something to be realized at the end of time. It has been experienced in the past, and it is being experienced in the present.

(g) If we preach salvation according to Christianity in the African context, we have to take into consideration the meaning of this concept in its setting of African religion. The saving activities of African religion belong to the more cosmic saving activities of God. They are related to the ultimate salvation brought about by God through Jesus Christ.

5. Conclusion

There are very close similarities in the notions of God between African religion and the Bible, and both describe the one and the same God. We see African religion as part of God's revelation in the world and welcome it as a great religious heritage of African peoples.

African religion does not draw a distinction between secular and sacred, between physical and spiritual realities. It embraces the whole of life, integrates these different parts, and seeks to find harmony or balance between them. Existence is a religious participation, and the world is a religious phenomenon according to the world view of African religion.

Yet, African religion cannot remain isolated from the changes that are taking place in human thinking and life. Modern social and physical changes, modern technology and the encounter of peoples with one another in a global way, as well as the spreading of Christianity (and other religions and ideologies), all these are having a tremendous impact on African

religion. It asborbs the changes that come upon it, for better or for worse. Some of its concepts and practices become more and more obsolete or out of place. Others get changed to accommodate the changing situation. Some even become universalized through academic studies of African religion outside of Africa. Some of its values have been integrated into modern life and thought, and thus continue to serve a purpose in the lives of individuals and communities. To a great extent, contemporary African Christianity in the southern two thirds of the continent is benefiting from the religious foundation already laid down through the ages by African religion. It is one of the main sources of doing theology in the African context.