THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN AFRICAN EVANGELICALISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract: It is not accidental that the cross is used as the symbol for Christianity. The cross actually epitomizes the execution of God's salvific plan for humanity through the life, ministry and crucifixion of Jesus, the Christ. As the African church strives to contextualize the Christian faith and make it more meaningful and relevant to the existential realities of the African society, there is the need to develop and promote a Christian theology of the cross from both biblical and African religio-cultural perspectives. This paper addresses this theological need by exploring how an understanding of the theology of the cross from an African evangelical Christian perspective might function to decolonize Christianity and consequently, facilitate the spiritual growth of African believers. A literature-based research methodology was used to analyze data obtained from books, journal articles and theses/dissertations related to the subject matter. The paper concluded with implications of the theology of the cross for the ecumenical Christian community.

Keywords: *Africa, Christianity, Cross, Evangelicalism, Theology*

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INTRODUCTION

Defining "Evangelicalism" is not an easy task because of the variety of ways and contexts—including political, social, ecclesial, theological—in which it has been used. The word "Evangelicalism" can be traced to the New Testament Greek word *euanggelion,* meaning, "the gospel or good news." The adjective "evangelical" denotes being committed to the good news of Christ (the gospel). Used as a noun, the term "evangelical" refers to a person belonging to a community of people committed to the gospel of Christ (Olson, 2008). Evangelicals committed to New Testament Christian traditions and apostolic faith, rather than to later ecclesiastical traditions. In this sense, one may say that Evangelicalism is as old as the Christian church.

Evangelicalism is a shifting movement with no clear boundaries of membership, leadership, and structure (Noll, 1994). Despite its amorphous nature, Evangelicalism has few key characteristics that make it a vital movement and a self-conscious tradition. Bebbington (2003) identified a quadrilateral of priorities—namely; conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism and activism—as the basis of Evangelicalism in any given context. Bebbington used the term "conversionism" in reference to the belief that humans need to be converted, coming to personal faith in the finished work of Christ. Evangelicals stress the need for everyone to go through the process of being "born-again" and then, to live this lifelong transformation following Jesus. Conversion, according to classical evangelicals, is a personal acceptance of Jesus as one's Savior and Lord; this response leads to justification and initiates one's lifelong process of sanctification (Harris, 2008, p.202). In line with this thought, McGrath (1995, p. 72) stated that "Christian faith is not, and cannot be allowed to become, passive assent to propositions. It is a living and dynamic personal relationship with the crucified and risen Christ." In this sense, Evangelicalism goes beyond mere Christian

orthodoxy to include a living personal faith in Christ. Evangelicalism is more than creedal religion; it is experiential—the experience of the transforming encounter with Christ. Therefore, every evangelical preacher must urge his/her audience to avail themselves for the life-changing encounter with Christ (Bebbington, 2003). Evangelical preaching therefore convicts people of sin rather than entertain them.

Evangelicals are also characterized by activism, the belief that the gospel message need to be expressed in effort. Evangelicals argued that being a believer is inseparably connected with activism. Activism flows from conversionism in that after conversion, people commonly express great desire to make converts for Christ. The radical transformation that accompanies conversion bestows on the believer the quality of activism, which makes the believer an active participant in the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20 and its parallels) in an attempt to get others to experience a similar assurance of salvation (Harris, 2008). To recognize Jesus as Lord is to proclaim him as the Savior and Lord of others. Evangelism is, therefore, an integral part evangelical Christianity. Activism, from an evangelical perspective, must yield both spiritual and social ramifications.

Biblicism means having a particular regard for and commitment to the Bible (eg. all essential spiritual truth is to be found in the Bible) or "belief in the supreme authority of Scripture for faith and life" (Oslon, 2008, p.24). Over the years, Evangelicalism has been characterized by the priority of biblical authority in theological and ethical formulations. As the final authority in matters of faith and practice, the Bible must be "the source for the symbols, stories, teachings and doctrines that form the cognitive framework for the worldview of the believing community" (Grenz, 1993, p.88). The Bible derives its authority from its inspiration. There is however, divergent views as to the meaning of inspiration and

its effects on the biblical text (Bebbington, 2003). Some evangelicals subscribe to verbal inspiration of the Bible and a literal interpretation of its text; others have different views. Evangelicals are devoted to the study of the Bible. They read it diligently and constantly, and apply it religiously. Early evangelicals were more concerned about the devotional use of the Bible than doctrinal use (Bebbington, 2003).

The final defining feature of evangelicals is crucicentrism, which refers to a strong focus on the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In other words, crucicentrism is the belief that the doctrine of the cross is the focus of the gospel. Without the cross, there is no gospel; a cross-less gospel is no gospel at all. Crucicentrism highlights the reconciliatory purpose of Christ's atoning death on the cross. God is considered the author of salvation because the cross is his own plan for the salvation of sinful humanity. From an evangelical perspective, the cross is more significant than the Incarnation. One sees the thematic centrality of the cross being expressed forcefully, and explicitly in relation to the Incarnation, toward the end of the 19th century. In the Bampton Lectures of 1891, Charles Gore inaugurated what was to quickly become a tradition among Anglican theologians when he made the doctrine of the Incarnation the fulcrum of Christian theology. The Methodists responded the following year with a strong warning in relation to Gore's attempt to background the atonement.

> We rejoice in the prominence which is being given to the doctrine of the Incarnation, with all its solemn lessons and inspirations. But we must be careful lest the Cross passes into the background, from which it is the glory of our fathers to have drawn it. Give to the *death* of Christ its true place in your own experience and in your Christian work — as a witness to the real and profound evil of sin, as an overwhelming manifestation of Divine love, as the ground of

acceptance with God, as a pattern of sacrifice to disturb us when life is too easy, to inspire and console us when life is hard, and as the only effectual appeal to the general heart of men, and, above all, as the Atonement for our sins (cited in Bebbington, 2003, p. 15).

As noted earlier, evangelicals proclaim the gospel message of salvation from sin and death through Jesus Christ as an invitation to all persons and whoever believes and expresses faith in Christ comes into personal encounter with God through Christ, and this personal encounter results in a personal transformation. A few observations can be made about the evangelical gospel. First, the message is "good news"—it is "news" because it was not heard or experienced in its full sense before Christ and it is "good" because it bestows on its recipients many (spiritual and physical) benefits (Balcomb, [2016]). Secondly, the evangelical gospel is "proclamation" (Greek: *kerygma*), suggesting that the message is usually (though not exclusively) spoken or declared (Balcomb, [2016]). The noun "proclamation" (from the verb form, *kerysso*, meaning "to preach" or "to proclaim") may also refer to the content of the Christian gospel, the message of one's preaching or the preaching itself. The agents and means of the proclamation may be varied but the source of the message is one, God himself. Thirdly, Evangelicalism emphasizes personal conscious and intentional free-will decision to follow Christ and to experience his salvation (Balcomb, [2016]). The personal aspect is that even though a whole community may respond to the gospel, each person belonging to that community needs to make his/her own decision. Africans have a communal worldview of life and so the communal dimension of sin and salvation is crucial to the African audience. Therefore, African Evangelicalism must highlight both the communal and individual aspects of the gospel call. Entrance into God's kingdom is an individual affair; but live in the Kingdom is has a communal nature. Finally, the

gospel has a transformative effect in that it brings change both to individuals and societies who respond in faith (Balcomb, 2016). The extent of transformation, however, varies from person to person and from community to community. Evangelical Christianity is, hence, more about living a changed life and witnessing to Christ than agreeing to a set of doctrines. To sum up, evangelicals are people "who believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God; individuals need conversion to Christ; God provided forgiveness through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and Christians should encourage non-Christians to become Christians" (Brown, 2015, p. 49-50).

Historical roots of evangelicalism

Although Evangelicalism is seen as a contemporary movement, its teachings and beliefs can be traced to the early church. The apostolic tradition, patristic tradition, early monasticism, medieval reform tradition (Cluniac, Cistercian, Franciscan and Dominican), the Reformers, the Wesleyan Holiness movement and others have all expressed remarkable evangelical commitment, discipline and missionary zeal (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). However, the evangelical zeal that characterized the early church reduced gradually in the late patristic period. After the apostolic era, the reformation period became the next most important period in the development and spread of evangelical ethos. The medieval church experienced a wave of liberalism, though a few people still stood for Evangelicalism. Before the Reformation, the church had equated its traditions to Scripture; there was no room for the involvement of the lay in ministry (no recognition of the priesthood of all believers), and the church taught that salvation was partly by grace and partly by works, among others.

Reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli were highly evangelical. The Reformers were determined to enforce biblical authority, and preach and apply the core gospel, which in their view, had been neglected by the medieval Catholic Church. They emphasized five *solas*, namely; *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone)—God's objective truth is primarily revealed in the Bible and hence biblical teachings must always take precedence over reason, tradition, church authority and individual experience; *solus Christus* (Christ alone)—the finished work of Christ alone (without any human efforts) is sufficient to save to the uttermost; *sola Gratia* (by grace alone)—salvation comes by God's grace and not on the basis of human efforts; *sola Fide* (by faith alone)—God, having taken the initiative in salvation elicits human response through faith to justify and save us; *soli Deo gloria* (glory of God alone)—all aspects of salvation is to the glory of God alone (Veverková, 2021; Ellison, 2020). In short, the Reformers argued that forgiveness and reconciliation with God come by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed in Scripture alone, and to the ultimate glory of God. To some extent, Protestantism became synonymous with Evangelicalism. The Lutherans were nicknamed "evangelicals" (*Evangelische Kirche*, or Evangelical Church) because of their distinguishing strong passion to redirect Christianity to its evangelical roots (Brown, 2015). Unfortunately, much of the spiritual vitality was later lost due to the onset of Lutheran orthodoxy and the domination of many churches by civil ruler (Pierard & Elwell, 2001).

After the Reformation, spiritual deadness set in such that by the seventeenth century the church had virtually lost its evangelical fervor. The spiritual deadness that characterized the church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prompted the emergence of three evangelical movements—namely, German pietism, Methodism and the Great Awakening—that sought to recover the church's evangelical heritage handed over from its inception to the Protestant Reformation (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). Pietism paid more attention to individual piety and vigorous practical Christian life than formal ecclesiastical structures and theological formulations (Noll 2001). Methodism emerged from the Bible-study group that was formed at the Oxford

University and led by John Wesley. The Great Awakening—the First Great Awakening (1690s–1770s) and Second Great Awakening (1780s–1840s)—was a religious revival movement that exerted enormous influence across Europe and North America. The movement responded adequately to secular rationalism that was being emphasized in those days.

These three movements were deeply rooted in Puritan traditions of biblical authority, divine sovereignty, human responsibility, and personal piety and discipline. Pietism's intensive study of the Bible, preaching, personal conversion, sanctification, evangelism, and social action not only contributed to the socio-economic and religious development of America and Britain but also triggered a religious revival in Germany (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). The Methodist revival of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield in the Britain and the Great Awakening in America countered the negative effects that the Enlightenment had had on the church. The Enlightenment (that started in the last seventeenth century and continued until the early nineteenth century) was an intellectual and philosophical movement that placed so much value in human reason (philosophy), challenges the authority and inspiration of the Bible, among others (Brown, 2001). Though the Enlightenment led to a critical study of the Bible and prompted many Christian apologetic researches, it had a negative effect on Christian spirituality.

The new revival movements spread throughout Britain and America fighting social evil and prompting the formation of Bible and missionary societies, both home and abroad (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). Revivalists such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield and John Wesley developed further, re-contextualized and popularized the *solas* of the Reformers and placed a strong emphasis on new birth, assurance of faith, and personal and societal holiness. These Christian leaders strongly contended that the assurance of salvation is an integral pattern of Christian experience; this assurance is what urges evangelicals to actively participate in evangelism and social action. They distanced themselves from churchmen who placed church traditions and sacraments above Scripture, and also from rationalists who gave reason precedence over "heart religion" (Brown, 2015, p.49).

Nineteenth-century British society was characterized by Evangelicalism with such personalities as Lord Shaftesbury and William E. Gladstone of the Anglican Church demonstrating their evangelical convictions in the public sphere while others like Charles H. Spurgeon and the Christian (Plymouth) Brethren spread the gospel message everywhere (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). Other evangelical activities were carried out by the George Williams' YMCA, Catherine and William Booth's Salvation Army and the social ministries of George Mueller and Thomas Barnardo (Pierard & Elwell, 2001).

Evangelicalism lost its spiritual fervor again in the early twentieth century due to worldliness, emphasis on material prosperity, loyalty to nation-state and individualistic tendencies that discouraged social concerns (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). Orthodoxy was negatively affected by the flood of ideas that came from German higher criticism, Darwinian evolution, Freudian psychology, Marxist socialism, Nietzschean nihilism, and the naturalism of the new science (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). All these movements attacked the authority of the Bible and the existence of the supernatural. Again, the postmillennial hope of ushering the kingdom of God soon through the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the transformation of the human society was lost due to the evil that accompanied World War I (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). In the 21st century Evangelicalism still remains an influential movement in Christianity.

Evangelicalism and african christianity

Kaptein (2006) traced the history of Evangelicalism in modern African Christianity to the Christian Education Strategy Conference that took place in Limuru, Kenya 1973. Participants at this Conference expressed varied concerns

about the lack of theological framework designed specifically for the African church (Kaptein, 2006). The participants further noted the need to train African theologians to address African concerns. Nigerian theologian Byang Kato[1] was a key advocate for the need to raise African leaders with higher theological expertise for attending to Africa's theological concerns like polygamy, family structure, liturgy, and the spirit-world. Kato challenged his fellow African leaders to formulate African-brewed theology based on evangelical ethos. This challenge marked a significant "turning point in evangelical theological development in Africa" (Tite cited in Kaptein 2006, p.61). Kato's 1975 publication *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* became a model for doing evangelical theology in Africa. His theology had an apologetic and anti-heretical character, hence protecting the church against false teaching and anti-biblical traditions. Though Kato was a great scholar, his theology grew "within the life of the church rather than in some religio-philosophical realm of distant academic departments at universities" (Kaptein 2006, p.71). Other African theologians who have also contributed to Evangelicalism in Africa are Tite Tienou (Burkina Faso), Kwame Bediako (Ghana), K. A. Dickson (Ghana), John S. Mbiti (Kenya) and Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nigeria).

Today, Evangelicalism is growing rapidly in Africa. Of the 500 million Christians in Africa (in 2019), 182 million of them were Evangelicals (Ngala, 2019). African nations with the most evangelicals are Nigeria (58 million), Brazil (47 million), India (28 million), and Kenya (20 million)

(Earls, 2020). In Africa, Evangelicalism attracts and retains its followers because it resonates with African spirituality. Evangelicalism in Africa must therefore "be understood more by what it does for its adherents than by its doctrinal formulations" (Balcomb, 2016, p.117). In other words, Evangelicalism in Africa focuses more on what evangelical Christianity does for its followers than what its belief system is.[2] Africans traditionally have a transactional approach to religion. In Africa, one's devotion to a deity is informed by the benefits one hopes to get from the deity in question. People, therefore, easily abandon one deity for another when the first fails in providing the worshipper's needs. Coming from this religious background, Evangelicalism appeals to Africans because it offers social, economic, and political interventions in addition to the spiritual benefits it offers. Balcomb (2016, p. 120) rightly contends that in African Evangelicalism is informed by "the unique transaction that takes place between each individual believer and God through Jesus Christ." Obviously, Evangelicalism is growing rapidly in Africa because it addresses both the spiritual and physical needs of its adherents.

African evangelicals experience the transformative power of the gospel. Having accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, African evangelicals begin to chat a new path of personal and societal transformation. They consider themselves are people who have are new creatures in that their old nature has passed (2 Cor. 5:17). Most (African) evangelicals tend to be theologically and ethically conservative due to their high regard for the Bible as God's inspired word for humanity (Brown, 2015). The conservative nature of conservative evangelicals to their determination to safeguard the truth of the gospel against dilution. African Evangelicalism makes efforts at transforming the evil cultural beliefs and practices. In the process, African

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[1] Kato was born Nigeria in 1936; he became General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) in Nigeria in 1966, General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa in 1973. Soon after this, he became the Executive Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa Theological Commission. In 1974, Kato became the Vice-President of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) and in 1975, the Chairman of the WEF Theological Commission.

[2] This does not mean that African evangelicals show no interest in theological/doctrinal formulations.

beliefs and practices that contradict the gospel are acknowledged as such and discarded while those that can facilitate African understanding of Christianity are used as bridges to connect Africans to the gospel message. There are, however, some group of African evangelicals who maintain an uncompromising dualism between African culture and Christianity. Like, early missionaries to Africa, such African Christians elevates the Western culture above the African culture (Balcomb, 2016).

Earlier, the point was made that Evangelicalism appeals to Africans because it addresses African needs. In the next section, the paper considers how African evangelicals theologize the cross to address African existential realities.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN AFRICAN EVANGELICALISM

Theology refers to a discourse about God and his dealings with humanity. The theology of the cross has to do with what the cross reveals about God and his dealings with humanity. One cannot theologize the cross without adequate understanding of the identity of Christ. For this reason, the subject of Christology—the study of the person and works of Christ—serves as a good starting point for examining the theology embedded in the cross. The question "Who is Christ?" is very important to African evangelicals because one's answer to this question defines the person's life—view on such issues as sin, suffering, sinners, and salvation—and at the same time determines his/her eternity. This Christological question needs consideration by every Christian. Any strand of Christianity that that fails to emphasize the centrality of Christ is an acceptable form of Christianity. Therefore, a Christ-less Christianity is no Christianity at all. For evangelicals, the historical Jesus of Nazareth is the standard by which every Christian affirmation has to be scrutinized and in the light of which it stands or falls.

The question of the true identity of Christ is not new. The early church struggled with the question of who Christ is, as evident in the many Christological controversies (eg. Docetism, Gnosticism, Arianism) that emerged in the first few centuries of the existence of the church. It is important to note that the earliest debates about Christology started in Africa. For example, the Arian controversy—which is one of the greatest doctrinal controversies in the history of the church—began in Africa in Alexandria, Egypt (318AD) (Martin 2020). It was an African theologian, Arius (256–336 AD) who argued that Christ is not God but the first of God's creation. For Arius, Christ began to exist at a point in time; hence, there was a time that he did not exist. Arius further argued that after creating Christ, God used him as his agent to create other creatures. To safeguard orthodox Christianity against this and other heresies, modern African evangelicals make every effort to articulate clearly their beliefs about Christ and his works.

African evangelicals know Christ as being at one and the same time true God and true man. The dual nature of Christ was made possible through the incarnation. The union of Christ's humanity and divinity in one individual existence is referred to as the hypostatic union. The Council of Chalcedon formulated this idea saying in Christ, "there are two natures, each retaining its own properties, and together is united in one subsistence and in one single person" (Bish, 2011, p.125). The evangelical commitment to Christ's divinity is vitally significant in safeguarding (African) Christianity against teachings that undermine Christ's divinity. One, therefore, agrees with McGrath (1995, p. 66) that "whatever grasp we have on the knowledge of God and whatever hopes of salvation we may possess are totally dependent on the identity of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, the only Son of God, God incarnate."

Christianity is often symbolized by the cross. This is not accidental at all. The cross actually epitomizes the execution of God's salvific plan for humanity through the life, ministry and crucifixion of Jesus, the Christ. In this sense, the cross is a form of symbolic theology. Symbolic and oral forms of theology are key to the development of African Christianity

because these forms of theology makes the Christian message accessible to the masses, hence enhancing grass-root participation. In the following section of the paper, the author considers how African evangelical make meaning of the cross and how this understanding helps to decolonize Christianity and consequently, facilitate the spiritual growth of African believers.

The Cross as Salvation from Sin

African evangelicalism places special emphasis on the centrality of the cross (atonement) in God's salvific plan. The Fall of humanity through the sin of Adam, placed humans under God's wrath (Gen. 3:1-15). God and humanity were separated. God, being holy and just could not accept humanity back to himself without punishing sin. Human limitedness, however, made it impossible for humans to bear God's infinite wrath in order to be mend the broken divine-human relationship. While in their state of helplessness, God expressed his love toward humans by sending his only Son to die in their stead in order to save them (Rom. 5:8). On the cross, God poured his anger on Christ and made him suffer for the sin of the world. Christ is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, NIV). Thus, the cross is the means by which God covers and shields humans from his righteous anger against sin, reconciles humanity to himself and ushers humans into his kingdom where they enjoy freedom in Christ. The cross then is a demonstration of divine love towards humanity.

The cross secured salvation from sin by providing the once-for-all and perfect sacrifice of Christ that provided propitiation, expiation, redemption, justification and reconciliation (Stott, 2011). Propitiation means the act of appeasing a deity, thus incurring divine favor or avoiding divine retribution (1 John 4:10) while expiation refers to the act of making amends or reparation for guilt or wrongdoing (Rom. 3:25; cf. 1 John 1:9). Redemption pictures the sinner as being bought back from slavery (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18); justification means God's righteous act of removing the condemnation, guilt, and penalty of sin, by grace, while, at the same time, declaring the unrighteous to be righteous, through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:1). Reconciliation has to do with God's action of restoring the world onto himself again (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:19). Christ, through his death, dealt adequately and completely with human sin and its consequences.

From the African Christian perspective, Christ's ability to atone for sin, and hence reconcile humanity with God means his sacrifice as superior to and more efficacious than any African traditional sacrifice offered for the remission of sins. Sacrifices are not new to Africans. Sacrifices are commonly made during traditional festivals. For example, during the Odwira festival celebrated by the Akuapem people of Ghana, animal sacrifices are made to purify the people in the community. The traditional understanding of such traditional sacrifices is used as a link to bridge the gap between the biblical and African worlds. The superiority of Christ's sacrifice is based on his dual nature. Being a perfect human, Christ perfectly represents humanity; being God, he not only offers a perfect and highest sacrifice for human sin but also bears God's full wrath due to human sin. Therefore, Christ's death on the cross satisfied God demand of justice. One of Africa's foremost theologians, Bediako (2000, p.28), pointed out that "The quality and achievement and ministry of Jesus Christ for and on behalf of all people, together with who he is, reveal his absolute supremacy. As One who is fully divine, he nonetheless took on human nature in order to offer himself in death as sacrifice for human sin." As human who has also identified himself with human predicament, Christ is able to transform the human heart through his Spirit. Bediako (2000, p.29) further argued that "Jesus Christ is unique not because he stands apart from us but because no one has identified so profoundly with human predicament as he has, in order to transform it...This unique achievement renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness."

Therefore, African evangelical Christianity frown upon all forms of traditional sacrifices meant to maintain the divine-human relationship.

The Cross as Victory over Satan and his host

The cross is also seen as victory over Satan and his hosts. African evangelicals believe that a spiritual battled exists between God, his angles and Christians on the one side and Satan, his hosts and unbelievers on the other side. This battle began in heaven due to the attempt Lucifer and other angels made to take over God's rule and position in the world (Ezek. 28:12-19; Rev. 12:9). Given this understanding, African evangelical Christians consider themselves as being in a constant battle against unseen forces of the wicked kingdom of Satan. Scripture identifies some of these forces as rulers/principalities (the highest-ranking spiritual entities), authorities (subordinate to principalities and act like regional heads), world rulers (who rule various villages, cities, or nations) and spiritual hosts of wickedness (wicked spiritual beings who serve as Satan's errand boys) (Eph. 6:10-11; see Dua-Agyeman, 2011).

Activities of demonic forces may include oppression, suppression (subjugation or subjection), obsession and possession (Dua-Agyeman 2011). A person oppressed by demons usually experiences frustrations in life due to poor financial management, frequent illness, failure to receive business contracts, among others. Demonic possession usually changes the victim's states of consciousness through the invasion of the victim's mind, will and body by a strange spirit (Dua-Agyeman 2011). Demonic suppression (subjugation or subjection) is the situation whereby a person's life is controlled by demons. The suppressed person becomes a slave to the suppressing spirit and therefore has no will-power to be free (Dua-Agyeman, 2011). Demonic obsession is the situation where evil spirits bind, blind and confuse a person's mind, filling the victim's mind with fear, false ideas, scenes, and mental imageries that make the person distressed,

insecure and uncertain about life (Dua-Agyeman, 2011).

Among others, traditional African religious worldview holds the existence of lower spirits which may be malevolent or benevolent (Dua-Agyeman, 2011). There is also the belief in the existence of ancestral spirit, that is, spirits of dead people who lived exemplary lives, and died naturally at a ripped age (of 70 years or more). The ancestors are believed to possess supernatural powers and the ability to punish or reward the living based on their deeds (the deeds of the living). Aware of the biblical and traditional worldviews of the existence and activities of (evil) spirits, the African Christian constantly searches for security.

African evangelical Christians find solution to this need in the cross. On the cross, Christ won victory over all evil forces. As Agyarko (2009, p.41) rightly noted, "viewing Jesus as victorious over the spiritual realm and particularly over evil forces, answers the need for a powerful protector against these forces and powers." Thus, for the African evangelical, the cross is "not a sign of shame and humiliation, but a symbol of might and power" (Mbiti, 1986, p.78).

Paul dramatized Christ's victory over Satan and his forces in Colossians 2:15, saying, "He [Christ] disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him" (RSV). Paul's use of war imagery from the Roman world is explained by Adria (2006, p.1479) as follows: In the Roman world "when a city surrendered to a victorious general, the conquerors would stage a victory parade at which they would display their conquered enemies and all the goods they had plundered." Paul is, therefore, giving a picture of how rulers and authorities, having been defeated in a battle, are dragged along in Christ's procession. The Bono-Twi (Ghana) version of Colossians 2:15 is "*Na waatu mpanyinnie ne tumidie agu ayi bɛ adi akyerɛ pefee ya badwam adi bɛ so nkunim asennua he so.*" Literally, the text translates into English as, "And he has

uprooted principalities and powers and has revealed them clearly in public as means of having victory over them." The use of the metaphor of uprooting a tree underscores the powerlessness of demonic forces after their defeat by Christ. The demonic forces have been disarmed, defeated and a lifeless like a tree without roots.

From African evangelical perspective, Jesus did not only overpower and overthrow Satan but also "killed" death itself through his resurrection (Akan Bono: *Wuo nso awu*, "death too is dead"). Satan thought death could take hold of Christ; however, Christ overcame and overpowered death and resurrected triumphantly. The death of death in the death of Christ, therefore, serves as a great source of encouragement for evangelical believers. Physical death is Satan's greatest weapon against sinful humanity. People fear death; but through his death on the cross and resurrection, Christ defeated death and rendered it powerless. It is as though death itself died when Christ died and conquered it, hence the expression "the death of death in the death of Christ." An African evangelical oral theologian, Kuma (2011, p.31) underlined Christ's power over death when she described Christ as "[t]he first-born Child who knows Death's antidote", "the wall which bars Death from entry and makes many hearts leap for joy" and "one who shouted at Death, and death ran from his face." Kuma's point is simply that Christ's death made Satan (who is the lord of death) powerless.

African evangelicals place a very high value on the blood of Jesus. Many African evangelical Christians use the atoning blood to overcome evil spirits. According to Duncan-Williams (2012, blurb) Jesus's blood is "efficacious", "redeeming", "sanctifying", "cleansing", "justifying", "prevailing", "overcoming", and "triumphant." It is common to hear African evangelicals make such declarations as "I cover myself and my family with the blood of Jesus", "I sanctify this food with the blood of Jesus", "I cover my properties (car, house and others) with the blood of Jesus." For Oyedepo (2006, p.119), once a person

declares "I cover myself with the blood of Jesus" he/she becomes "no trespass" territory to Satan because "[t]he blood is a devastating weapon against Satan; he hasn't got an answer to it and never will." Against this backdrop, African evangelicals sprinkle their cars, houses, furniture, shops, and other possessions with the blood of Jesus, believing that evil will pass over them in a similar way the angel of death/destruction passed over the Israelites in Egypt their households were marked by the blood of a lamb (Exod. 12:23-36). They also partake the Eucharist, believing that the blood of Jesus (symbolized by the Eucharistic wine) will heal, protect and empower them. To sum up, African evangelicals place a high value on Jesus' victory over Satan and his hosts as well as the power in the blood of Jesus for healing and protection.

The cross as means to prosperity and good health

Socio-economic issues such as poverty, high inflation, high budget deficit, increased fuel prices, lack of social amenities, lack of accommodation, frequent labor unrests and high unemployment rate are not uncommon in African. Many Africans live below the poverty line. In most African communities, poverty manifests itself in "bad roads, women and children walking barefooted and trekking long distances to get water and firewood, pupils studying under trees, dilapidated and ill-equipped health centers and scores of [other] poverty-driven problems" (Aderonmu, 2010, p.201). Living in harsh economic situation, many Africans look up to religion for their freedom from poverty and other economic problems. African evangelicals find the solution to their economic predicaments in the cross. It is believed that on the cross, Jesus took their poverty and hardship and secured their material success.

From the broad evangelical viewpoint, Jesus serves as the door to eternal life, meaning no one can access to salvation without passing through Christ (John 10:7). For the African evangelical, Christ is not door only to salvation but also

to success, good health, wealth, favor with God, and so on (Munyao, 2020). The African evangelical view that the cross provides the way to prosperity also draws on Isaiah 53:5 where the suffering of YHWH's servant (identified in the New Testament as Jesus) is said to have brought peace (Heb. *Shalom*); the Hebrew noun *Shalom* includes not only the enjoyment of good health and longevity but also material prosperity.

The economic security that Jesus provided is also noted by Kuma (2011, p.37) in her reference to Jesus as *Kwaeɛ Kɛseɛ* (big forest) "which gives us tasty foods." Here, Kuma underlines the economic provision that Jesus provides for his followers. Kuma's description of Jesus as the "Big forest" needs some commentary. In the African setting, the forest is a sources of livelihood for many people. Meat, foodstuffs, herbal medicines, water and other human needs are all found in the forest. Kuma's metaphor of the big forest therefore means that Christ is the source of one's life needs. As a big forest, Jesus provides shade to ease the burning effects of a hot mid-day sun. Here, it is the economic hardship that people go through that Kuma depicts as the heat of the sun. Kuma's description of the food that Jesus provides as "tasty" means Jesus is the supplier of perfect gifts (James 1:17). With this in mind many African evangelicals rely on the cross for their financial breakthrough.

African evangelicals also place much emphasis on the healing efficacy of the cross. Kuma (2011, p.34) highlights Jesus's healing power in the following quote: "Jesus is the one who fills his basket with sicknesses, and dumps it into the depths of the sea. He has been here already and taken sicknesses away. He stands on the sea with outstretched arms, while the devil walks the forest in agony." This means that all diseases were gathered and poured on Christ who, by his death on the cross, provides healing for his believers. Having gone through this, Jesus now serves as the great healer of all sicknesses. He is therefore superior to any African traditional medicine man.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY
The cross and work-based salvation theology

Jesus's work on the cross (together with his subsequent resurrection) forms the basis for Christianity and the Christian life. The Christian life begins immediately one accepts Christ as Lord and personal Savior. Salvation is made possible because of the atonement made on the cross. Though, freely given by grace (Eph. 2:8-10), the repentant sinner has to express faith in Christ's salvific work in order to be saved. It is important to note that the atoning sacrifice alone is the basis for salvation; no works are attached to it. Unfortunately, the history of the Christian church has records of some Christians who demanded (or still demand) works as a requirement for salvation. A biblical example that comes to mind is that of the Colossian church (Col. 2:8-23). This church had made circumcision (vv. 11-14), association with defunct principalities and powers (vv. 15), observance of dietary laws, New Moon festivals and Sabbaths (vv. 16-17), voluntary humility and the worship of angels (v. 18), and ascetic lifestyle (touch not, taste not; vv. 19-23) as spiritual supplements needed to make one's salvation complete.

The triumph of Christ (on the cross and in the accompanying events including the resurrection) dethroned the Law and delivered humanity from its dominion. The Bible is clear about the adequacy of Christ's atonement and the fact that observance of the Mosaic Law does not make one righteous before God (Rom. 3:21-25). The righteousness of Christ which is imputed on the repentant sinner comes apart from the Law. As noted earlier, Christ's once-for-all atoning sacrifice alone is capable of saving humanity from the penalty and power of sin. Therefore, the contemporary church must desist from work-based salvation theology. There are some contemporary preachers who consider the

payment of tithe as contributing to one's salvation. Adeboye (2003, p.44), for instance, once asserted that, "Anybody who is not paying his/her tithe is not going to heaven. Some people have taught you that if you do not pay your tithes, God will not give you blessings. This is true, but a little more serious, you do not pay your tithes, and you do not go to heaven." With such a theology, people can go on sinning and still have hope of salvation as long as they are able to pay their tithes. This is a key reason why Atiemo (2016, p.7) has observed that an increase in sin despite an unprecedented rise in Christian revival activities in Ghana. The author considers work-based-salvation theology not only as theologically unsound but also as culturally unacceptable.

There are also many evangelists in the streets of many African societies whose messages place works in between the sinner and Christ. They preach sanctification to the unbeliever who has no ability to live godly life, forgetting that the unbeliever cannot do good works because they (unbelievers) are not Spirit-filled. These evangelists end up ignorantly pushing sinners farther away from Christ. Christian denominations which require Sabbath observance, abstinence from certain food, among others, as a requirement for salvation also makes the cross ineffective for saving humanity from sin.

The African evangelical theology of the cross espoused in this paper demands a holistic reassessment of the doctrinal positions of the various Christian denominations in the light of Christ's salvific work to know which part needs to be discarded, replaced or modified. Since, salvation is a gracious gift from God, it is important that Christians avoid considering themselves as worthy of their salvation. In other words, no believer should consider himself/herself as having being saved because he/she is better than the unbeliever. It is just by grace that one is saved, not by merit. Good works must, however, be evident in the believer's life because the faith that saves produces good works through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (James 2:14-24).

The cross and the power of sin

On the cross, Christ poured out his blood not only "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28) but also as a means of liberating humanity from the power of sin. Therefore, sinful desires and deeds must no longer have control over the life of the Christian. The Christian life must be one which is marked by holiness because sin has no dominion over the believer. The salvation that the cross (atonement) brings has three stages, namely, the past (salvation from the penalty of sin), the present (salvation from the power of sin) and the future (salvation from the presence of sin).[3] The first stage occurs at the instance one accepts Christ as Savior and personal Lord while the last stage will be realized in the *Parousia* when the believer is glorified. The period between one's acceptance of Christ and death (or the *Parousia*, if one is alive at the time Christ returns) must be characterized by the believer's control over sin. This corresponds to the Christian doctrine of sanctification, the process of becoming holy. Sanctification is a gradual process aimed at ensuring that believers will mature in faith. One is expected to show consistent growth in this process. The power of the cross empowers the believer to overcome sin by providing him/her with a new ability to live in accordance with God's will and purpose. Salvation results in some form of ethical rigor that has no place for moral relativism and permissiveness.

Sin itself has no power over the Christian in whom Christ lives (1 John 4.4; 5.4, 18). This is what Paul alludes to when he says that the rule of sin is broken in the life of the believer (Rom. 8:1-11). The freedom that the cross (atonement) brings must be evident in Christian living. The ransom paid on the cross must liberate every Christian from inner desires of the fleshly nature including hypocrisy, sexual

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[3] It is not possible to categorize these three aspects of salvation into neat straight-jackets because they tend to overlap. Therefore, these categories are for the purpose of this paper.

immorality, covetousness, witchcraft, drunkenness, backbiting, and the like. For this to be achieved, one has to win the battle over the devil in the mental field because the believer's battle is a battle of the mind; that is, a battle which takes place in the mind. Commitment to Christ and personal determination are required to win this battle. Once one is living a holy life, God's covering is already available and so there is no need to resort to any imprecation which is both unbiblical and ineffective.

The Church must therefore make disciples who live victoriously over sin. Instead to boasting about numbers. The church must advance the Kingdom of God through a holy minority rather move on with a compromised majority. That is to say, the church should be more interested the quality of the life of its members rather than their numbers. This can be achieved by developing and promoting biblical principles regarding the life of the disciple. This study offers a useful resource in this regard.

The cross and social relations

Earlier, the point was made that the cross reconciled humanity to God. In this section, the relevance of the reconciliatory function of the cross for human-human is noted and examined. In African cosmology, where the peaceful, prosperous, and successful human existence relates closely with the relationship that exists between humans and the benevolent spirits, the theology of the cross is expected to promote the love for one another, resulting in a peaceful co-existence. The cross/atonement is therefore expected to bring believers into full union and harmony with the entire human society. The reconciliatory function of the atonement is not only meant for the divine-human relationship but also for the human-human and human-environment relationships. Christ died so that the believing community would be reconciled to one another. Therefore, the cross (atonement) is meaningless if one's vertical relationship with God does not inform his/her horizontal relationship with other humans and the environment. Christians

must, therefore, remove enmity from their lives. Imitating Christ, Christians must exhibit agape love toward one another.

The cross/atonement dethroned all divisions, whether between slaves and masters, Jews and Gentiles, whites and blacks, men and women, circumcised and uncircumcised, and so on. The issue of tribalism and ethnocentrism is crucial in Africa where people value their ethnicity so much that they find it difficult to associate themselves with other groups. Tribalism makes people fight about their traditions and interests which eventually leads to ethnic wars, underdevelopment, loss of lives and properties. Ethnocentrism makes people treat those of other tribes unfairly. The cross negates all these negative ideologies, and perceptions.

Denominationalism that leads to division is also unacceptable because it does not promote the unity that Christ's death intends to bring. The New Testament concept of salvation eventually results in the formation of the *ecclesia*, the church or the body of Christ. The universal church is neither built out of a particular race nor made of people of one denomination. In view of this, Christians must not allow denominational affiliations to weaken the bond between them.

The Christian community must oppose any form of excessive individualism. The command to love God and neighbor supports the need for communal significance of the atonement. It is for the purpose of restoring harmony with God and hence avoiding death and other consequences of sin that atonement becomes important in both Christianity and African primal religion. All people must converge at the cross as one people who have been saved and yet depend on Christ and his works for the completion of their salvation. The African communal worldview is a relevant tool that can enhance the required togetherness, interdependence, solidarity, among all people. Sharing and interdependence whereby people with abundant resources share with those who have less is very important in Africa where people's survival

is the responsibility of the entire community. Promoting this African value will go a long way to reduce the poverty situation in Africa, so that at the end, no one will have too much while others have too little. The theology of the cross is relevant in promoting unity, interdependence, sharing and interconnectedness.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered how African evangelicals make meaning of the cross and its associated events. It was shown that the cross epitomizes how God executed his salvific plan for humanity through the life, ministry and crucifixion of Jesus, the Christ. From the African evangelical perspective, the benefits of the cross goes beyond providing salvation from sin to include salvation from harsh economic condition, salvation from ill health, salvation from Satan and demonic powers. As the African church strives to contextualize the Christian faith and make it more meaningful and relevant to its existential realities, the findings from this paper will serve as a useful tool to bridge the gap between the African worldview and the biblical worldview. The paper will also serve to correct wrong notions about the relationship between salvation and good works. Good works do not commend one before God; only faith in Christ does. However, the faith that saves is not alone; it is a root which produces good works. Thus, good works is required from a saved person, though it does not commend the sinner before God. The paper also highlighted how the cross empowers the believer to overcome sin. Lastly, the theology of the cross espoused in this paper promotes good social relations. The vertical part of the cross symbolizes human relationship with God. The horizontal part signifies one's relationship with other humans and with the environment. Therefore, the cross suggests that one's vertical relationship with God must have a corresponding impact on his/her horizontal relationship with other humans and with the environment. It is hoped that the theology of the cross from an African evangelical Christian perspective will serves to catalyze the spiritual growth of African believers.

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