

Christ the Supra-Ancestor: Reassessing African Ancestor Christology in Dialogue with Biblical Orthodoxy

Christ the Supra-Ancestor: An Integrative Review of African Ancestor Christology and Its Biblical-Theological Foundations

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>This review article critically examines the development and theological significance of the concept of Christ the Supra-Ancestor within African Christology. It argues that the Supra-Ancestor model represents the most comprehensive synthesis of the ancestor-Christology tradition developed by Bénézet Bujo, John S. Pobee, Charles Nyamiti, and Kwame Bediako, culminating in the formulation advanced by Chesosi Bonface Kimutai. Employing a qualitative theological review methodology, the study analyses primary theological texts alongside contemporary scholarship on African Christology, biblical theology, and contextualization. The article explores the historical evolution of ancestor Christology, evaluates its theological rationale, and critically examines its compatibility with orthodox biblical Christology. Particular attention is given to the relationship between African concepts of ancestry and the New Testament witness concerning Christ's incarnation, pre-existence, mediation, atoning work, resurrection, exaltation, and universal lordship. The review argues that while ancestor categories provide a valuable contextual framework through which African Christians may understand Christ's nearness, mediation, communal identity, and redemptive mission, the ancestral paradigm cannot exhaust the fullness of Christ's divine-human identity. Rather than functioning as a replacement for biblical Christology, the Supra-Ancestor model serves as a contextual theological bridge that enables African cultural categories to illuminate the gospel while remaining subject to the normative authority of Scripture. The article concludes that Christ the Supra-Ancestor constitutes a legitimate contextual Christology when understood analogically and christocentrically, affirming both the universality of Christ's saving work and the theological integrity of African Christian reflection. Consequently, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on inculturation, contextual theology, and African Christian identity by demonstrating that authentic African Christology can remain simultaneously culturally meaningful and biblically orthodox.</i>
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1. Introduction

The question of Jesus Christ's identity has remained central to Christian theology since Christ Himself asked His disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Throughout the history of Christianity, every cultural context has sought to answer this question using conceptual categories familiar to its own worldview while remaining faithful to apostolic revelation. The early Church

articulated Christ through Jewish messianic expectations and Greek philosophical terminology; medieval theologians interpreted Him within scholastic frameworks; Reformers emphasized forensic and covenantal categories; while contemporary theologians continue to express Christology within diverse cultural contexts. African Christianity is no exception.

The rapid growth of Christianity across Africa during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has intensified the search for a Christological language capable of speaking authentically to African religious consciousness. Although missionary Christianity successfully proclaimed the gospel throughout the continent, many African theologians have argued that its presentation of Christ frequently relied upon European philosophical and theological categories that insufficiently engaged African cultural realities. John S. Mbiti's observation that developed indigenous African Christological concepts were largely absent became an important catalyst for subsequent theological reflection. African theologians therefore sought conceptual frameworks through which the biblical Christ could be understood within African religious experience without compromising biblical revelation.

Among the various contextual models proposed—including Christ as Healer, Chief, Elder Brother, Master of Initiation, Liberator, and Servant—the ancestor paradigm has emerged as one of the most influential and enduring. Within many African societies, ancestors occupy a significant place as respected members of the extended family who symbolize continuity, communal identity, moral authority, and relational mediation between generations. Consequently, several African theologians proposed that this cultural institution could provide an appropriate analogy for communicating the identity and saving work of Jesus Christ.

The development of ancestor Christology has not been the work of a single scholar but represents an ongoing theological conversation spanning several decades. Bénédet Bujo described Christ as the Proto-Ancestor or Ancestor par excellence; John S. Pobee identified Him as the Great Ancestor (Nana); Charles Nyamiti developed the concept of Christ as Brother-Ancestor; and Kwame Bediako advanced the title Supreme Ancestor. Building upon these earlier formulations, Chesosi Bonface Kimutai synthesized the tradition by proposing the designation Christ the Supra-Ancestor, arguing that this model most adequately integrates both the divine and human dimensions of Christ while remaining intelligible within African cultural consciousness.

Despite its growing influence, ancestor Christology continues to generate significant theological debate. Supporters regard it as one of the most successful examples of authentic African inculturation. In contrast, critics question whether ancestral categories adequately express the uniqueness, pre-existence, deity, universal mediation, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. The central issue is therefore not whether African categories should be employed in Christological reflection, but whether the ancestor paradigm sufficiently preserves Christ's biblical

uniqueness while remaining faithful to African cultural realities.

This review article examines that question through a critical analysis of the historical development, theological foundations, and biblical evaluation of the Supra-Ancestor proposal. It argues that the Supra-Ancestor model represents the most comprehensive synthesis of African ancestor Christology to date. Nevertheless, like every contextual Christological model, it functions most appropriately as an analogical and missiological framework rather than as an exhaustive definition of the person of Christ. Properly understood, the model enriches African theological reflection by offering a culturally meaningful interpretation of Christ while acknowledging that the fullness of the incarnate Son ultimately transcends all human conceptual categories.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative theological review methodology that combines historical, biblical, and systematic theological analysis. Primary sources include the seminal writings of John S. Mbiti, Bénédet Bujo, John S. Pobee, Charles Nyamiti, Kwame Bediako, and Chesosi Bonface Kimutai, whose collective works form the principal corpus of African ancestor Christology. These primary texts are examined alongside recent peer-reviewed literature addressing African contextual theology, inculturation, biblical Christology, and intercultural hermeneutics.

The study follows a historical-developmental approach by tracing the evolution of ancestor Christology from its earliest formulations to the contemporary Supra-Ancestor synthesis. A comparative theological analysis is then undertaken to evaluate the strengths, limitations, and theological coherence of each proposal. Finally, the models are assessed through a biblical-theological framework that gives normative authority to the canonical witness of Scripture while recognizing the indispensable role of contextualization in Christian theology.

The review adopts a critical yet constructive perspective. Rather than dismissing contextual Christology as syncretistic or accepting it uncritically, it seeks to evaluate its contribution within the broader framework of orthodox Christian doctrine. This approach recognizes that every Christological formulation is both historically situated and culturally mediated, while affirming that the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ remains the normative criterion for evaluating all theological contextualizations.

3. Literature Review: The Development of African Ancestor Christology

3.1 The Rise of African Christology

The emergence of African Christology represents one of the most significant theological developments in twentieth-century Christianity. As Christianity became increasingly rooted in African societies, theologians recognized that the gospel could not remain permanently expressed through predominantly European philosophical categories if it were to become genuinely at home within African cultures. This concern did not imply dissatisfaction with biblical revelation itself; rather, it reflected the conviction that while the gospel is universal, its expression must be made intelligible in every cultural context.

John S. Mbiti's pioneering work marked an important turning point in this discussion. In *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), Mbiti demonstrated that African Traditional Religion possesses a coherent religious worldview characterized by belief in God, the reality of the spirit world, communal existence, and the continuity between the living and the departed. His description of the "living-dead" profoundly influenced subsequent theological reflection by showing that African concepts of kinship and mediation could provide meaningful points of contact for Christian theology.

Although Mbiti famously observed that "African Christological concepts do not exist" (Mbiti, 1972, 51), his statement was not intended as a criticism of African Christianity but as a challenge to African theologians to develop authentically African interpretations of Christ. Ironically, the conceptual framework that later became ancestor Christology emerged largely from Mbiti's own anthropological descriptions. His work therefore became both the diagnosis and the catalyst for one of the most creative movements in African theology.

African Christology subsequently developed along two complementary trajectories. The first emphasized inculturation, seeking to express the person and work of Christ through indigenous African concepts. The second emphasized liberation, interpreting Christ primarily within the realities of political oppression, economic exploitation, racial injustice, and social transformation. While liberation theology addressed Africa's historical struggles, inculturation theology concentrated on cultural identity and religious meaning. Ancestor Christology belongs principally to this second trajectory and remains one of its most influential expressions.

3.2 Inculturation and the Search for Indigenous Christological Models

Inculturation theology begins with the conviction that Christianity should not appear as a foreign religion. Instead, the gospel should encounter every culture in ways that both affirm and transform its deepest values. This theological principle reflects the incarnation itself, whereby the eternal

Word became flesh within a particular historical and cultural context without compromising His divine identity.

Consequently, African theologians explored numerous cultural images capable of communicating different dimensions of Christ's person and ministry. Christ was described as the Great Healer, the Divine Chief, the Elder Brother, the Master of Initiation, the Liberator, the Servant, the Mediator, and ultimately the Ancestor.

Donald Goergen's influential survey of African Christologies demonstrates that each of these models illuminates an important aspect of Christ while simultaneously revealing certain limitations. Christ the Healer effectively communicates restoration and salvation but does not adequately express His eternal deity. Christ the Chief conveys authority but may inadvertently reinforce hierarchical power structures. Christ the Liberator emphasizes justice yet risks reducing salvation to political emancipation. The ancestor model gradually emerged as the most comprehensive because it integrates mediation, kinship, community, morality, continuity, and relational identity within a single conceptual framework.

It is precisely this integrative capacity that later enabled Kimutai to argue that the Supra-Ancestor image synthesizes the strengths of the other contextual models rather than competing against them.

3.3 The Progressive Development of Ancestor Christology

Ancestor Christology did not arise suddenly but evolved through a progressive theological conversation extending over nearly five decades. Each theologian contributed an essential insight that expanded and refined the developing paradigm.

Bénézet Bujo: Christ the Proto-Ancestor

The first major systematic proposal emerged from Bénézet Bujo, whose work sought to situate African theology within African cultural experience rather than within European scholastic categories. Bujo argued that ancestors occupy a central place within African moral and religious consciousness because they preserve communal identity, transmit ethical values, and symbolize continuity between generations.

Building upon these observations, Bujo designated Christ as the Proto-Ancestor or Ancestor par excellence. His argument was not that Jesus merely resembles traditional ancestors, but that He fulfills and perfects everything the ancestral institution seeks to accomplish. Christ therefore becomes the definitive ancestor through whom authentic human community is restored.

Bujo's contribution was revolutionary because it shifted African Christology away from imported theological categories toward indigenous conceptual resources. Rather than viewing African culture as a problem to be overcome, he regarded it as a providential context within which the gospel could be authentically understood.

John S. Pobee: Christ the Great Ancestor (Nana)

John Pobee developed the discussion within the Akan cultural tradition of Ghana. The title Nana signifies more than biological ancestry; it denotes dignity, authority, wisdom, and communal leadership.

Pobee therefore described Christ as the Great Ancestor, whose authority surpasses that of every human elder because His relationship with God is unique. Christ becomes both the supreme moral exemplar and the definitive mediator between God and humanity.

Unlike Bujo, Pobee gave greater attention to Christ's divine identity, thereby preventing ancestor imagery from being interpreted merely as an anthropological analogy. Nevertheless, his formulation remained primarily functional, emphasizing what Christ accomplishes within the believing community.

Charles Nyamiti: Christ the Brother-Ancestor

Charles Nyamiti produced what many scholars regard as the most systematic exposition of ancestor Christology. His distinctive contribution was to ground the ancestral analogy within Trinitarian theology rather than merely within African anthropology.

According to Nyamiti, Christ is humanity's Brother-Ancestor because through the incarnation He truly enters the human family while simultaneously remaining the eternal Son of God. The incarnation establishes genuine kinship between Christ and believers, thereby making His mediatorial work intelligible within African concepts of familial solidarity.

Nyamiti's Christology is particularly significant because it attempts to preserve Chalcedonian orthodoxy while employing African conceptual language. Consequently, his work occupies an important mediating position between contextual theology and classical Christian doctrine.

His famous response to Bujo remains one of the most memorable statements in African theology:

"Does eating African rice with a European spoon make the rice also European?"

The remark illustrates Nyamiti's conviction that theological method does not determine theological authenticity; rather, authenticity depends upon whether theology faithfully communicates Christian truth within African experience.

Kwame Bediako: Christ the Supreme Ancestor

Kwame Bediako further advanced ancestor Christology by integrating it with biblical salvation history. For Bediako, Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension collectively establish His identity as the Supreme Ancestor.

Unlike previous formulations, Bediako explicitly connected ancestor imagery with Christ's resurrection and exaltation. Consequently, Christ's superiority over traditional ancestors derives not merely from moral excellence but from His victory over death and His exaltation as Lord of creation.

Bediako's proposal significantly strengthened the biblical foundations of ancestor Christology by locating the analogy within the redemptive events of Scripture rather than solely within African cultural structures.

Chesosi Bonface Kimutai: Christ the Supra-Ancestor

The development of ancestor Christology reaches its most comprehensive synthesis in the work of Chesosi Bonface Kimutai, whose 2020 article introduced the designation Christ the Supra-Ancestor.

Kimutai argues that previous titles—Proto-Ancestor, Great Ancestor, Brother-Ancestor, and Supreme Ancestor—each illuminate important dimensions of Christ but remain individually incomplete. His proposal therefore seeks to integrate these complementary insights into a single Christological framework.

The term "Supra" is deliberately theological rather than merely comparative. It signifies that Christ exists above, beyond, and infinitely transcends every human ancestral category. Christ is not simply the greatest ancestor among many; He is the transcendent fulfillment of everything that the institution of ancestry imperfectly anticipates.

Kimutai further argues that the Supra-Ancestor uniquely unites Christology from above (the eternal divine Son) and Christology from below (the historical Jesus of Nazareth). Through His incarnation, creation, redemption, resurrection, exaltation, and continuing lordship, Christ fulfills every legitimate human longing for identity, mediation, belonging, protection, and eternal communion while simultaneously surpassing every ancestral limitation.

In this respect, the Supra-Ancestor represents not merely another contextual title but the theological culmination of five decades of African ancestor Christology. Rather than replacing biblical revelation, it seeks to demonstrate that African cultural categories can illuminate the universal significance of Jesus Christ when interpreted under the authority of Scripture.

4. Christ the Supra-Ancestor: A Constructive Theological Evaluation

4.1 Christ the Supra-Ancestor as the Fulfilment of African Religious Consciousness

The proposal of Christ as the Supra-Ancestor represents one of the most mature developments within African contextual theology because it seeks neither to replace biblical revelation with African Traditional Religion nor to ignore African religious consciousness in favour of imported theological systems. Rather, it proceeds from the missiological conviction that God's self-revelation has always encountered humanity within particular cultural contexts. Consequently, the African understanding of ancestry is viewed not as an independent source of revelation but as a providential cultural category capable of receiving and communicating the gospel.

This approach resonates with the broader Christian doctrine of general revelation. Scripture affirms that God has never left Himself without witness among the nations (Acts 14:17; Romans 1:19–20). Likewise, Paul's address at the Areopagus (Acts 17:22–31) demonstrates that cultural concepts, religious practices, and philosophical insights may serve as points of contact for proclaiming the gospel without becoming equal authorities alongside Scripture. Paul neither affirmed Greek religion wholesale nor rejected it absolutely; instead, he interpreted it christologically. African ancestor Christology operates within this same missionary principle.

Kimutai therefore argues that Christ the Supra-Ancestor functions as the fulfilment rather than the confirmation of African ancestral expectations. Every legitimate aspiration expressed within African concepts of ancestry—communion, belonging, mediation, identity, moral guidance, continuity, protection, and reconciliation—finds its perfect realization in Jesus Christ. The analogy does not elevate ancestors to the level of Christ; rather, it elevates Christ above every ancestral category.

4.2 Christological Foundations of the Supra-Ancestor Model

The theological strength of the Supra-Ancestor proposal lies in its attempt to integrate the entire economy of salvation into a single contextual Christological model. Unlike earlier ancestor formulations that emphasized one aspect of Christ's work, Kimutai intentionally grounds Christ's ancestorship in His complete redemptive identity.

Christ as Creator

The first foundation is cosmological. The New Testament consistently presents Christ as Creator of all things:

"All things have been created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16).

"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3).

These texts extend Christ's relationship with humanity beyond genealogy. Whereas traditional ancestors belong to particular families, tribes, or nations, Christ stands as the Creator of all humanity. His relationship with humanity is therefore universal rather than ethnic.

From this perspective, the designation "Ancestor" is employed analogically rather than biologically. Christ becomes the universal source of human existence because all creation derives its origin from Him. This cosmological argument distinguishes the Supra-Ancestor from earlier ancestor models by locating Christ's relationship to humanity before the incarnation itself.

Christ as Incarnate Kinsman

The incarnation provides the second theological foundation. African concepts of ancestry are fundamentally relational. Ancestors belong to their communities because they share common humanity with those whom they represent.

The New Testament similarly emphasizes Christ's genuine participation in human nature:

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity" (Heb. 2:14).

"He had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect" (Heb. 2:17).

The incarnation therefore establishes authentic solidarity between Christ and humanity. Unlike mythical heroes or distant divine beings, Jesus enters human history, experiences human suffering, participates in human relationships, and identifies fully with the human family while remaining without sin.

The Supra-Ancestor model emphasizes this relational solidarity precisely. Christ is not merely humanity's Creator. He is also humanity's Brother. His incarnation transforms divine transcendence into covenantal intimacy.

Christ as Universal Mediator

Perhaps the strongest aspect of ancestor Christology concerns mediation. Across many African societies, ancestors are regarded as intermediaries who preserve communion between the visible and invisible worlds.

The New Testament similarly presents Christ as mediator. However, it radically transforms the concept. Paul writes:

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

The Epistle to the Hebrews develops this theme further by presenting Christ as the eternal High Priest whose priesthood surpasses every previous mediatorial institution (Heb. 4:14–16; 7:23–28).

Consequently, Christ does not merely participate within an existing chain of mediators. He terminates the necessity of every other mediator. The Supra-Ancestor therefore fulfils mediation while simultaneously transcending it.

Christ as Redeemer

Redemption constitutes another significant foundation. Traditional ancestors preserve family identity through shared blood relationships. The New Testament presents Christ as creating a new covenant family through His sacrificial blood.

"You were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Paul similarly declares that believers become members of Christ's body through His redemptive work. The Church therefore becomes not merely an ethnic community but a redeemed family united in Christ.

Within this framework, Kimutai's observation that Christ's blood "flows in our veins" should be understood metaphorically rather than biologically. The expression communicates covenantal participation rather than physical genealogy. Believers belong to Christ because they participate in His new covenant life.

Christ as the Firstborn from the Dead

The resurrection provides perhaps the most decisive theological basis for the Supra-Ancestor model. Traditional ancestors remain among the dead. Christ conquered death. Paul therefore calls Him:

"The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20), and "the firstborn from among the dead" (Col. 1:18).

These titles signify more than chronological priority. They indicate the inauguration of a new humanity. Christ becomes the head of a redeemed creation whose destiny is resurrection rather than continued existence among the dead.

Thus, while traditional ancestors symbolize remembrance, Christ embodies victory over death itself. The resurrection fundamentally transforms the meaning of ancestry. Christ is not remembered because He died. He is worshipped because He lives.

Christ as Cosmic Lord

The final foundation concerns Christ's exaltation. Philippians 2:9–11 proclaims that God has highly exalted Christ and bestowed upon Him the name above every name.

Every knee shall bow. Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Here the Supra-Ancestor reaches its theological climax. Christ is no longer merely related to humanity. He reigns over all creation. His lordship extends beyond every family, clan, tribe, nation, and culture. Consequently, the prefix "supra" acquires its fullest theological significance. It signifies transcendence.

Christ infinitely surpasses every human ancestor because He is eternally God incarnate. No ancestor receives universal worship. No ancestor exercises universal sovereignty. No ancestor judges the living and the dead. Only Christ occupies this position.

4.3 The Integrative Contribution of the Supra-Ancestor Model

One of the most significant contributions of Kimutai's proposal is its integrative character. Rather than replacing previous African Christologies, the Supra-Ancestor synthesizes them. Christ remains: the Healer who restores creation, the Chief who governs God's people, the Elder Brother who shares humanity, the Master of Initiation who brings believers into new life, the Liberator who delivers humanity from sin, the Redeemer who reconciles humanity to God, and the Lord who reigns over all creation.

These images are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they converge within the person of Jesus Christ. The Supra-Ancestor therefore functions as an umbrella metaphor capable of integrating multiple contextual images into one coherent Christological framework.

This synthesis represents the principal theological advancement of Kimutai's work over earlier ancestor formulations. Rather than offering another title among many, the Supra-Ancestor seeks to provide an overarching contextual Christology that embraces both Christology from above and Christology from below, preserving the unity of Christ's divine and human natures while speaking meaningfully within African cultural consciousness.

5. A Critical Biblical-Theological Assessment of Christ the Supra-Ancestor

5.1 Introduction

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that the Supra-Ancestor model represents one of the most sophisticated expressions of African contextual Christology. Nevertheless, every contextual theology must ultimately be evaluated against the normative witness of Scripture and the historic confession of the Church. The fundamental question is not whether African cultural categories may be employed in theology—Christian history demonstrates that they may—but whether those categories faithfully

communicate the biblical identity of Jesus Christ without distorting His unique person and work.

This section therefore evaluates the Supra-Ancestor proposal through a biblical-theological lens. The objective is not to dismiss the model but to determine both its theological strengths and its conceptual limitations. Such evaluation is consistent with the principle articulated by the Apostle Paul, who urged believers to "test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Contextual theology must likewise retain what is biblically faithful while refining what remains theologically inadequate.

5.2 The Historical Objection: Can Jesus Be an African Ancestor?

Perhaps the earliest criticism directed against ancestor Christology concerns the historical definition of ancestry itself. Within most African societies, an ancestor is ordinarily understood as a deceased member of one's own family, clan, or ethnic community who lived an exemplary life and continues to exercise moral and spiritual influence over subsequent generations. This definition appears to exclude Jesus because He was neither biologically African nor historically situated within any African lineage.

Critics therefore argue that the ancestor analogy lacks historical correspondence. Christ belonged to first-century Jewish Palestine, whereas African ancestors belong to particular African communities. The analogy consequently appears culturally artificial.

However, proponents of the Supra-Ancestor model respond that this objection confuses literal genealogy with theological analogy. Kimutai argues that Christ's relationship with humanity is grounded not in ethnicity but in creation and redemption. Because all humanity derives its existence through the eternal Logos (John 1:3; Col. 1:16–17), Christ's relationship transcends biological descent. Through the incarnation, He entered the human family universally rather than tribally. His ancestry is therefore covenantal and redemptive rather than genealogical.

This response significantly strengthens the proposal. Nevertheless, it simultaneously modifies the traditional meaning of ancestry. Once ancestry is detached from biological lineage and applied universally, the concept undergoes theological transformation. Consequently, Christ should not be understood as an ancestor in the ordinary anthropological sense but as One who fulfills and transcends the ancestral institution.

5.3 The Practical Objection: Does Ancestor Christology Encourage Ancestor Veneration?

A second criticism concerns pastoral practice. Throughout many African churches, converts continue to struggle with

traditional practices involving ancestral consultation, ritual remembrance, sacrifices, and spiritual mediation. Some scholars therefore fear that presenting Christ as an ancestor may unintentionally reinforce rather than replace traditional ancestral devotion.

This concern deserves serious consideration because Christian discipleship requires exclusive devotion to Christ. If the ancestor analogy is misunderstood, believers may conclude that Jesus merely joins the existing company of revered ancestors instead of replacing every other mediatorial structure. Such an interpretation would contradict the New Testament's consistent affirmation that Christ alone is worthy of worship (Matt. 28:17; Rev. 5:11–14).

Yet this danger does not invalidate the model itself. Rather, it illustrates the necessity of careful theological teaching. The adjective *supra* performs a crucial theological function precisely at this point. Christ is not one ancestor among many; He is categorically above every ancestral institution. All legitimate ancestral functions—identity, mediation, protection, belonging, moral example, and communal continuity—are fulfilled completely in Him.

Consequently, the Supra-Ancestor model abolishes dependence upon deceased ancestors by directing every legitimate human longing toward the living Christ. In this respect, the model resembles the New Testament presentation of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood. Christ does not become another priest alongside the Levitical system; He fulfills and supersedes it (Heb. 7:23–28). Likewise, Christ fulfills every legitimate ancestral expectation while rendering further ancestral mediation unnecessary.

5.4 The Christological Objection: Does the Ancestor Category Adequately Express the Person of Christ?

The most substantial criticism concerns Christology itself. The New Testament presents Jesus Christ as uniquely divine, eternally pre-existent, incarnate, crucified, risen, exalted, and reigning. These affirmations form the foundation of orthodox Christology and distinguish Christ from every merely human religious figure.

Philippians 2:5–11 provides one of Scripture's clearest Christological summaries. Five theological affirmations within this passage demonstrate both the usefulness and the limitation of the ancestor analogy.

Christ's Eternal Pre-existence

The hymn begins by affirming that Christ existed "in the form of God" before His incarnation (Phil. 2:6). Traditional ancestors come into existence through birth. Christ existed before creation itself. This eternal pre-existence cannot be explained through ancestral categories. Rather, it

transcends every human analogy. Consequently, the Supra-Ancestor model must derive its theological content from biblical revelation rather than from traditional concepts of ancestry.

The Incarnation

Philippians next describes Christ's voluntary self-emptying (kenosis) and incarnation. Unlike every human ancestor, Christ did not become significant because of His earthly achievements. He became human while remaining fully God. The incarnation therefore represents an event unique within salvation history. No ancestral analogy can fully encompass this mystery.

The Atoning Death of Christ

Traditional ancestors may function as moral exemplars or communal guardians. They do not die as substitutionary sacrifices for the sins of humanity. The New Testament consistently interprets Christ's death as unique, once for all, and universally effective. As Hebrews declares:

"He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26).

Consequently, Christ's redemptive death belongs to a theological category beyond every ancestral comparison.

The Resurrection

Perhaps the greatest discontinuity appears in the resurrection. Ancestors remain among the dead. Christ conquered death. His resurrection inaugurates the new creation and establishes Him as "the firstborn from among the dead" (Col. 1:18). Thus, while ancestors are remembered by descendants, Christ actively reigns as the living Lord. The resurrection therefore transforms the analogy from within. Christ is not the greatest deceased ancestor. He is the risen Lord who has abolished death itself.

Christ's Exaltation and Universal Worship

Finally, Philippians concludes by declaring that every knee shall bow before Christ and every tongue confess Him as Lord. This universal worship distinguishes Christ absolutely from every ancestor. African Traditional Religion reveres ancestors. Christian faith worships Christ. The distinction is decisive. Worship belongs exclusively to God. Therefore, any contextual Christology that obscures Christ's exclusive divine lordship must be rejected.

The Supra-Ancestor model avoids this danger only when it consistently emphasizes that Christ infinitely transcends every human ancestor.

5.5 Classical Christology and the Supra-Ancestor

The historic ecumenical councils provide another important criterion for evaluation. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

confessed Christ as "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) affirmed that Christ possesses two complete natures—divine and human—without confusion, change, division, or separation. These doctrinal formulations remain normative for orthodox Christianity.

Significantly, the Supra-Ancestor proposal does not deny these classical affirmations. Instead, it seeks to interpret them within African conceptual language. Its theological legitimacy therefore depends upon whether it remains subordinate to Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology.

Properly understood, the title "Supra-Ancestor" is not an alternative Christology but a contextual interpretation of classical Christology. Its value lies in translation rather than innovation. It communicates orthodox doctrine through African cultural categories without replacing the doctrinal content of the historic Christian faith.

5.6 Summary Evaluation

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the Supra-Ancestor model possesses considerable theological strengths. It affirms Christ's genuine humanity. It communicates His solidarity with humanity. It explains His mediatorial work. It speaks meaningfully within African communal consciousness. It strengthens contextual evangelism. It promotes indigenous theological reflection.

Yet the analysis also demonstrates that ancestry alone cannot adequately describe Christ's eternal deity, incarnation, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, exaltation, and universal lordship. These doctrines derive not from African anthropology but from divine revelation. Accordingly, the ancestor analogy should function as a theological bridge rather than a theological destination.

When Scripture governs the analogy, the Supra-Ancestor becomes an effective contextual Christology. When the analogy governs Scripture, theological distortion inevitably results.

The enduring contribution of Kimutai's proposal is therefore not that it exhaustively defines Christ but that it provides African Christianity with one of its most comprehensive contextual interpretations of the biblical Christ while explicitly affirming His transcendence over every cultural category.

6. Discussion and Theological Implications

6.1 Christ the Supra-Ancestor and the Future of African Christology

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the proposal of Christ the Supra-Ancestor represents a significant milestone in the ongoing development of African Christology. It is neither an isolated theological innovation

nor merely another contextual metaphor. Rather, it constitutes the culmination of a theological trajectory extending from Mbiti's anthropological observations through the Christological contributions of Bujo, Pobee, Nyamiti, and Bediako to Kimutai's integrative synthesis. In this respect, the Supra-Ancestor model reflects the maturation of African theological reflection and illustrates the capacity of African Christianity to contribute original insights to global Christological discourse.

The significance of the model lies in its ability to hold together two commitments that have frequently appeared to be in tension. On the one hand, it insists that the gospel must be genuinely intelligible within African cultural consciousness. On the other hand, it maintains that every contextual expression of the gospel remains accountable to the canonical witness of Scripture and the historic confession of the Christian Church. Consequently, the Supra-Ancestor proposal rejects both theological imperialism, which imposes foreign conceptual frameworks without regard for culture, and theological relativism, which allows culture to redefine biblical revelation.

6.2 Contextualization Without Syncretism

Perhaps the most important theological implication of this study concerns the nature of contextualization itself. Throughout Christian history, the Church has continually translated the gospel into new cultural contexts. The New Testament itself demonstrates this process. Jesus was proclaimed as the Jewish Messiah to Israel, the Logos to the Hellenistic world (John 1:1–18), the Wisdom of God to Greek audiences (1 Cor. 1:24), and the universal Lord to the Roman Empire (Phil. 2:9–11). None of these titles exhausted Christ's identity; each illuminated particular dimensions of His person and work.

African theology therefore stands within a long tradition of theological contextualization. The employment of ancestral categories should not be regarded as exceptional but as another expression of Christianity's catholicity. The gospel does not belong to one civilization, language, or philosophical tradition. Rather, it is continually incarnated within diverse cultures while remaining faithful to apostolic revelation.

Nevertheless, authentic contextualization differs fundamentally from syncretism. Syncretism permits competing religious systems to determine Christian doctrine. Contextualization allows culture to provide language and imagery while Scripture retains normative authority. The Supra-Ancestor model succeeds only insofar as it preserves this distinction. Christ fulfills African ancestral expectations; He is not defined by them.

6.3 The Contribution of the Supra-Ancestor Model to African Theology

The present study identifies several enduring contributions of the Supra-Ancestor proposal.

First, it restores theological dignity to African cultural categories. For many years, missionary theology often regarded African Traditional Religion primarily as an obstacle to Christian faith. The Supra-Ancestor model demonstrates instead that African religious concepts may function as legitimate points of theological dialogue when critically interpreted through Scripture. This represents an important corrective to earlier assumptions that authentic theology could emerge only through European conceptual frameworks.

Second, the model strengthens the doctrine of the incarnation by emphasizing Christ's genuine participation in human communal life. African cultures place exceptional theological weight on relationality, kinship, and corporate identity; the Supra-Ancestor model channels this emphasis into a Christology in which the incarnation is understood not merely as a metaphysical event but as an act of relational solidarity, in which Christ genuinely enters the network of obligation, belonging, and mutual accountability that defines African communal existence.

Third, the model offers a constructive framework for pastoral ministry, particularly for intercessory and deliverance ministries that regularly engage questions of ancestral spirits, lineage curses, and generational bondage. By presenting Christ as the One who fulfils and supersedes every ancestral function, pastors and intercessors are equipped to redirect congregants away from ancestral veneration and toward exclusive dependence upon Christ, without dismissing the underlying cultural anxieties that such veneration seeks to address.

Fourth, the model contributes to the wider ecumenical conversation on Christology by demonstrating that contextual titles, properly disciplined by Scripture and creedal orthodoxy, enrich rather than diminish the Church's shared confession of Christ. In this sense, the Supra-Ancestor stands alongside other historic contextual titles—Logos, Pantocrator, Servant, Liberator—as one more facet through which the global Church perceives the inexhaustible richness of the person of Jesus Christ.

Taken together, these contributions suggest that the Supra-Ancestor model's significance extends beyond a single cultural sphere. It offers African theology a mature, biblically accountable vocabulary for expressing Christ's centrality, while offering the global Church a case study in how contextual and creedal theology may be held together without collapsing into either syncretism or cultural indifference.

7. Limitations of the Study

As with any qualitative theological review, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the review is primarily text-based and does not incorporate empirical or ethnographic research into how ancestor Christology, and specifically the Supra-Ancestor model, is received, taught, or practically applied within congregations. Consequently, the study's conclusions concerning pastoral risk and benefit are theological and inferential rather than derived from field data. Future research employing congregational surveys, interviews with pastors and intercessors, or participant observation would substantially strengthen the practical claims made in Sections 5.3 and 6.3.

Second, the review concentrates on a specific lineage of Anglophone and predominantly Sub-Saharan African scholarship—principally the Congolese, Ghanaian, Tanzanian, and Kenyan contributions of Bujo, Pobee, Nyamiti, Bediako, and Kimutai. It does not comprehensively engage Francophone, Lusophone, or North African theological traditions, nor does it give sustained attention to ancestor Christologies articulated outside these five principal figures. The findings should therefore be read as representative of one influential strand of African Christology rather than as an exhaustive account of the continent's Christological diversity.

Third, because Kimutai's Supra-Ancestor proposal is a comparatively recent formulation (2020), the surrounding body of peer-reviewed critical engagement remains limited. This review has situated Kimutai's proposal within the broader ancestor-Christology literature and biblical-theological criteria, but a more definitive scholarly assessment awaits further published critiques, responses, and receptions of the proposal within the guild of African theologians.

Fourth, the study's biblical-theological evaluation proceeds from an evangelical, canonically normative hermeneutic that treats Scripture as possessing final doctrinal authority over cultural analogy. Scholars working from different theological methodologies—for example, those granting greater independent theological weight to African Traditional Religion, or those working within a more strictly historical-critical framework—may evaluate the same material differently. This methodological commitment has been stated explicitly so that readers may assess the study's conclusions accordingly.

Finally, the review does not undertake a systematic comparison between ancestor Christology and analogous kinship-based or mediatorial Christologies in other Majority World contexts (for example, East Asian ancestor veneration traditions or Latin American popular

Catholicism). Such comparative work falls outside the scope of the present study but represents a promising direction for future cross-cultural Christological research.

8. Conclusion

The development of African Christology represents one of the most significant theological achievements of contemporary Christianity. As the demographic center of global Christianity continues to shift toward Africa, the need for Christological formulations that faithfully articulate the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ within African cultural contexts has become increasingly urgent. The emergence of ancestor Christology constitutes an important response to this challenge, demonstrating that African theological reflection is capable of engaging both the Christian tradition and indigenous cultural realities in a constructive and intellectually rigorous manner.

This review has traced the historical progression of ancestor Christology from its conceptual foundations in John S. Mbiti's analysis of African religious consciousness to the systematic proposals of Bénézet Bujo, John S. Pobee, Charles Nyamiti, and Kwame Bediako, culminating in Chesosi Bonface Kimutai's synthesis of Christ the Supra-Ancestor. Each stage of this development has contributed valuable theological insights into the relationship between Christ, African culture, and biblical revelation. Collectively, these contributions illustrate the gradual maturation of African Christological reflection from descriptive anthropology toward constructive systematic theology.

The review has argued that Kimutai's proposal represents the most comprehensive synthesis presently available within the ancestor-Christology tradition. Unlike earlier formulations, the Supra-Ancestor model intentionally integrates Christ's identity as Creator, Incarnate Son, Redeemer, Mediator, Risen Lord, and Cosmic King into a single contextual framework. Consequently, it succeeds in bringing together the principal strengths of previous ancestor Christologies while providing a more comprehensive theological explanation of Christ's universal significance.

At the same time, the analysis has demonstrated that every contextual Christology possesses inherent limitations. Although the ancestor paradigm effectively communicates Christ's solidarity with humanity, His mediatorial work, His communal identity, and His redemptive relationship with believers, it cannot, by itself, exhaust the biblical witness concerning His eternal pre-existence, unique incarnation, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, ascension, and universal lordship. These doctrines derive their authority from divine revelation rather than from cultural analogy. Therefore, the theological adequacy of the Supra-

Ancestor model depends upon its continuing submission to the normative authority of Scripture and the historic Christological confession of the Church.

The study therefore proposes that Christ the Supra-Ancestor should be understood as an analogical and contextual Christology rather than as an ontological definition of Christ. Like other biblical and theological metaphors—including Shepherd, Lamb, Vine, Bread of Life, High Priest, and Logos—the title illuminates authentic dimensions of Christ's person and work without claiming to exhaust the mystery of the incarnate Son. Its significance lies in its capacity to communicate biblical truth within African conceptual categories while simultaneously affirming that Christ infinitely transcends every human analogy.

Furthermore, this review suggests that the enduring value of the Supra-Ancestor proposal extends beyond African theology. It contributes to broader discussions concerning contextualization, inculturation, intercultural hermeneutics, and the catholicity of the Christian faith. The history of Christian theology demonstrates that the gospel has always been expressed through culturally meaningful language without compromising its essential doctrinal content. In this respect, the Supra-Ancestor model stands within the historic tradition of Christian theological contextualization, illustrating that African Christianity is not merely receiving theology but actively enriching the Church's global understanding of Jesus Christ.

Finally, this review contends that the future of African Christology lies neither in rejecting indigenous cultural categories nor in allowing those categories to determine Christian doctrine independently of Scripture. Rather, the most fruitful path forward is one of faithful theological integration, whereby African conceptual resources are critically appropriated under the authority of biblical revelation. Within this framework, Christ the Supra-Ancestor remains one of the most significant contemporary contributions to African Christology because it demonstrates that authentic contextual theology can be simultaneously African in expression, biblically orthodox in substance, and universally relevant in its theological implications.

Accordingly, the designation Christ the Supra-Ancestor deserves continued scholarly engagement, constructive refinement, and ecumenical dialogue. Its greatest contribution is not that it offers the final word on Christology, but that it opens new avenues through which the Church may confess with renewed clarity that Jesus Christ is both fully at home within every culture and infinitely greater than every culture, for He alone is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15), "the same yesterday and today and forever"

(Heb. 13:8), and the One in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19).

Declarations

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no financial, professional, or personal conflict of interest relating to the subject matter of this article. The theological positions represented and critiqued herein—including those of Bujo, Pobee, Nyamiti, Bediako, and Kimutai—are engaged solely for scholarly purposes, and no affiliation with any cited author or institution has influenced the analysis or conclusions presented.

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