

1 “African Cross” A Theology with a difference in the Context of 2 African Spirituality

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*It is commonly acknowledged that in the African traditional perspective, the death of Christ and its significance cannot be ignored, no matter how much we intend to ignore the Christian impact upon African systems of life. Conversely, it is fair to say that the hermeneutical process in African Theology entails accepting different concepts of the death of Christ on the cross. We have to consider African concepts of the cross as central among Africans who have reacted differently to this central belief. The understanding of the Cross of Christ has been given a radical dimension by the African Initiated Churches(AICs) who has demonstrated their commitment to the Christian faith by coming up with their own “Theology of the Cross” which is demonstrated by the unique “African Cross” which has “Three Pieces of Wood Across, The Vertical One”. It is today recognized as an “African Cross” which has been popularized by African Independent Pentecostal Churches of Africa (AIPCA). It is a forgotten cross in that not many Africans understand it. Some make fun of it saying Christ may have kicked at the point of death, hence the shape. Others think it represents the two thieves and Christ on the cross. This article traces the African theology of this cross. In contemporary African Christianity, the **cross** is a symbol of the atonement and reminds Christians of God's love in sacrificing his own son for humanity. It represents Jesus' victory over sin and death, since it is believed that through his death and resurrection he conquered death itself. This is a mystery to many African communities because conquering death is not within their concept nor was it in their ancient times. For Africans, the cross signifies more of the exchange of death and life than overcoming death itself. The cross underlines the seriousness of sin which permeates human life and thought (Dickson 2003:10). It is agreeable that the cross has been viewed in Africa from different perspectives depending on the prevailing circumstances.*

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Introduction

The Bible has played an ambivalent but key role in the construction and deconstruction of modern western Empires. Waweru (2007: 140) argues that it was also used for the construction of Africa as benighted heathendom, requiring the preaching of the Gospel. The Bible in such a situation legitimized the imperial control of indigenous lands leaving the land owners as landless. The “African cross”¹ will be reviewed in three major sections in this article. First, we look at the cross from the perspective of the New Testament teaching. This is an event that the New Testament readers struggled to understand. How their king of kings could die on the cross, this calls us to examine the material that deals with the cross in the NT. Such a reflection will allow us to grasp the theological understanding of the cross which the African Independent Churches inherited. Secondly, we look at the cross from the perspective

¹According to the New Bible Dictionary page 245: the Greek word for cross is *stauros*, which means primarily an upright stake or beam, and secondarily a stake used an instrument for punishment and execution. It is this latter sense, that is applied in the New Testament as a noun the term occurs in the NT for 28 times and as a verb it occurs 46 times. Generally there were four types of crosses: the single upright post (*crux simplex*); the *crux commissa* (St. Antony's cross), which was shape like a capital T; the *crux decussate* (St. Andrews cross), which was shaped like a letter X and the common cross *crux immissa* made of two beams +. The tradition has it that this is the New Testament cross used to crucify our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 27:37; Mk 15:26; Lk 23:38; Jn 19:19-22).

1 of the Western missionaries who in their evangelization over emphasized the
2 resurrection of Christ for our salvation as the most significant. We need not to say that
3 without the cross resurrection is not complete. It is clear that the death of Christ on the
4 cross brought salvation to us, even if resurrection was not there. Thirdly, we look at it
5 through the African eyes, where we shall reflect on the role of death in the society and
6 how this affected the Africans in viewing the cross as a platform for new life. Before
7 then, we need to understand African Independent Church of Africa as it's found in
8 Kenya.

9 The African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (A.I.P.C.A) is one of the
10 largest indigenous Churches in Africa. In Kenya it was founded in 1920s. It has a
11 following of approximately 1.8 million members currently with a strong presence in
12 Central, Nairobi, Eastern, Rift Valley and Coast regions of the country. This Church is
13 historically associated with the struggle of independence from Colonial Government.
14 The Church is known to have encouraged the practice of African culture even when
15 such practices were being dismissed by the European missionaries as contradicting the
16 Biblical teachings.

17 The missionary teachings were against African practices in most areas of cultural
18 practice making the founders of African Churches discontented. Such a behavior from
19 the mission churches resulted in the founding of indigenous Churches that now
20 incorporated some African virtues in its teachings, leading to the birth of AIPCA in
21 Kenya. Africans were dissatisfied by the doctrines of the missionary Churches
22 particularly on the value of the African Culture ([http://www.aipca-church.or.ke/
23 about.html](http://www.aipca-church.or.ke/about.html)). The Africans feared that the white missionaries would change their
24 culture through the teaching in the formal schooling. The Africans came up with
25 Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (K.I.S.A) within its spiritual wing as an
26 independent Pentecostal Church. African Independent Churches were directly
27 involved in Mau Mau Resistance Movement or the freedom movement from the
28 British rule (1952-60). Such an involvement provoked the government of the day
29 especially during the state of emergency in 1952. This led to the censorship of AIPCA
30 by the colonial government that subsequently led to the proscribing of the Church and
31 her premises which were closed as they were seen as havens of recruitment for Mau
32 Mau freedom fighters and oath administration centers. Its education system equally
33 suffered a setback when Independent Schools were closed, others were handed over to
34 other Churches (refer to Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists etc) to manage; and others
35 were handed over to District Education Boards (D.E.Bs).

36 Kenya gained its independence in 1964, which paved the re-registration of the
37 AIPCK Church that had been proscribed by the colonial government. The Church later
38 changed its name to African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (A.I.P.C.A),
39 perhaps to emphasize its spiritual concerns in a country where Main Line Churches
40 were associated with dry doctrines. The AIPCA Church soon pursued its original
41 vision of offering quality education without losing focus on African cultural values.
42 The church is today a proud adviser or owns some of approximately **162** Educational
43 Institutions. While many indigenous Churches in Africa do not claim apostolic
44 succession, A.I.P.C.A draws its apostolic succession through Archbishop William
45 Daniel Alexander of African Orthodox Church Africa, of South Africa.

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The 'Cross' concept in A.I.P.C.A

Benhardt Y. Quarshie (20016:1) argues that since human beings are the agents of the translation and interpretations of the Bible, for their own benefit and for that of their target groups, their training and socialization is bound to influence their concepts:

The question of a judicious interpretation of the Bible in terms of the African's total existential situation has quite often engaged the attention of African theologians. In view of the high proportion of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, such a hermeneutical exercise is considered by scholars like Mbiti... Wambudta... and Parrat... as an integral aspect of the quest for relevant theologies in Africa. This point can be supported with the claim that the Bible is, indisputably, the most important source for African Christian theological reflection and practice³

Following the above argument the African Church came up with its 3-Crosses concept; the Church gained some general acceptance after the arrival of a visiting South African clergy (William Alexander) who ordained her first clergy in 1935. In turn, Archbishop William Daniel Alexander was consecrated by George Alexander McGuire (Alexander I) on September 11th 1927 (<http://www.aipca-church.or.ke/about.html>). The reason for a change of name is not clearly explained. This consecration placed him in the apostolic succession, which he then passed to African independent Pentecostal Church by ordaining its first bishop. The African Independent Pentecostal Church 'Cross' concept is borrowed from the three bar cross shape used in the Orthodox Church of Russia in simple adornments, crucifixes, or in Icons (<http://www.churchofthenativity.net/orthodoxy/three-bar-cross/>). The three bar cross concept is borrowed from the Russian Orthodox Church. The common cross is known as Latin cross, believed to have been used by the Romans to crucify Christ. The African cross hangs uniquely in the altar of these indigenous AIPCA Churches.

The New Testament view of the cross

Due to the limited and space, I shall deal with Pauline texts concerning the cross, since Pauline letters contain much of the New Testament teaching on the death of Christ. Paul express the basic meaning of the cross in 1Corinthians 1:18, 'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God'. In Paul's understanding it is through the crucifixion of Christ that humanity is reconciled with God. Paul links the effects of the cross in a number of passages in Romans such as 3:21f, 5:9, 10, where the cross leads to justification, redemption and its being propitiation by the blood of Christ. The 1 Corinthians contexts which forms the background of Paul's declaration has been described by Hans Küng (1978:399), in a sense that Corinthians were regarding the earthly Christ as of past and preferred to invoke the exalted Lord and victory over the powers of fate. Such was influenced by the fact of possession of the Spirit and from their superior knowledge, which made them claim a self-assured freedom which permits them to indulge in all kinds of self glorification. The cross is a single event that accomplished several things simultaneously; it offered righteousness, redemption, propitiation and

³Ekem, John D.K., Priesthood in Context: A study of Priesthood in some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation (Accra: Sonlife Presss, 2009): 174.

ransom. The term above the Ark is used in Hebrews 9:5 and it appears twenty-one times in the LXX, referring to the top of the Ark of Covenant upon which the blood was poured out on the day of Atonement in order to atone for the sins of the community. One key factor shaping theology in Africa is the manner in which biblical texts are re-formulated in response to the needs of various African communities:

Given the particularity of the scriptures in terms of their historical and cultural background, it is not sufficient for the Church in Africa... merely to accept the tradition of a covenantal relationship between God and Israel. It is of fundamental importance that Christian Church, wherever it is found, should experience the approach of God to humankind... An important consequence of this is that the message of God in the scriptures must be heard and appropriated in the context of every people's circumstances; the scriptures must be heard speaking in the particularity of their life situations. Thus in addition to the theological continuity, there is a hermeneutical or interpretative continuity between Israelite traditions in the scriptures, and the life and thought of other peoples⁵.

Hence for Africans it's not just the death, of Christ on the cross, but the cross of Christ as Paul stated in Philippians 2:8: 'And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross'. This cross must gain new meaning to the Africans, it is interesting to see the way Paul emphasizes Christ's death on the cross; he was not worried about the role of the cross as a stumbling block to Jews and a folly to Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23). It made no sense to preach to Jews about salvation through the cross, since any hanged person is cursed of God in the Jewish tradition and is a defilement of the Land given by God as an inheritance, a number of verses have offered an explanation (Deut. 21:23; Heb. 13:12 and Lev.4:21, 16:27) on what happens to the carcasses of the victims of sacrifice. The language used by Paul could alienate any Jew wanting to become a Christian. Even to the Greeks it was not wise to think of death as part of divine plan for salvation. However to Paul the cross brings reconciliation and peace between God and humanity. It has two aspects, God sent the Son as the propitiation to reconcile us, while He stands in our place to offer Himself up as a sacrifice in order to expiate the sins of His people. Christ stands for God and humanity as well as for humanity to God in 1Tim. 2:5 (Ridderbos 1953). This is the concept Africans got in adopting their African Cross.

The reasons why Paul uses this kind of language where the cross is more important, is because of the sacrificial language which is appealing to him, Christ is our Passover, and dying for us as a sacrifice, he gave us a free gift of salvation, which we could not afford to work for on our own (1 Cor.15:3). The cross is powerful, upon it we through all our problems, stress, divorces and immorality. The cross lays bare our powerlessness in all that we do.

Therefore the sacrifice of Christ reconciled the humanity with God, where Christ took all our burdens and relieved us as we were carrying with him the guilt of evil and sin (Morris 1965). For through his death people recognize their inadequacy of their holiness as they attempt to expiate their sins (Young F 1975: 137):

In the process of translating and interpreting the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, scholars have, since ancient times, been faced with the Herculean task of making these scriptures relevant to their target audiences through the dynamic process of 'vernacularization'. In such a process, the 'original texts' are expected to be communicated in a way that will meet the needs of receptor audiences whose world-views are quite different from those of the original recipients. It involves, so to speak, the re-packaging of thoughts embedded in

⁵Dickson, Kwesi A., *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984):20.

1 an 'original revelation/message' for the speakers of other languages taking cognizance of
2 relevant theological, linguistic, and cultural factors.⁷

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4 For this reason Africans were not left behind in interpreting the cross of Christ.
5 Furthermore, Christ has proved to be the faithful one, obedient and in his death
6 offering a great lesson for humanity. This is contrary to the humankind who always
7 resists God and seeks in vain ways and means for their own salvation. For Käsemann
8 (1975:151), the death of Christ on the cross, has destroyed our illusions, in order to
9 create the new person who forgoes his will in order to accept Christ saving power.
10 Hence we are reconciled with God, having a common bond with Christ and with each
11 other (1 Cor.10:14-16). It is obvious that Paul recognizes the cross as the power
12 behind the salvation of humanity. He is not ashamed of the cross despite its
13 association with ridicule and bewilderment among the Jews and the Greeks. He goes
14 further to challenge the Corinthians by stating to them 'I decided to know nothing
15 among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2).

16 In the same tone, Paul uses quite powerful language about the resurrection,
17 despite the fact that he would be isolated by the Jewish community, since no much
18 attention was accorded to the issue of resurrection among the elite of his time, just
19 like in our times when little references are being offered to the resurrection (Robbert
20 1969:64). It is clear that Paul uses a language that leaves no room for doubt that
21 resurrection is a key element of faith in Christ Jesus, 'If Christ has not been raised,
22 then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain' (1 Cor.15:14). This offers an
23 idea that resurrection meant a great deal to Paul just as the cross, they are both
24 complementing each other.

25 Even though Paul uses passages that refer to the resurrection in the course of him
26 dealing with controversy, however references are no less significant, it's only that Paul
27 decided to use them that way. Hence we have 1Corinthians 6:14: 'And God raised the
28 Lord and will also raise us up by his power'. Here Paul is dealing with the immorality
29 of the people, which he believed was wrong and even questioned how a member of the
30 body of Christ could engage in immorality. Our human bodies are shaped by their
31 physical existences on the earth, but they require restoration to life. Likewise Paul in
32 1Corinthians 15:14, asserts that Christ resurrected and if not our preaching is in vain,
33 since there will be no resurrection. This verse is situated in 15:12-19, Paul explains
34 clearly that the impossible and ridiculous conclusions that follow from a logically
35 from a denial of the resurrection of the Dead, for Paul such an argument is not
36 possible since it would equally mean Christ was not raised from the dead. So if Christ
37 as a human being was not raised from the Dead, then it would obviously imply that
38 there will be no resurrection for all the people.

39 When all these are put into consideration one will realize that Paul was not
40 comparing the importance of resurrection to the significance of the Cross. For Paul the
41 cross is a great challenge. Hence the cross cannot be put at the shadow of resurrection,
42 for to do so is to do injury to the Pauline material. In all the thirteen letters of Paul,
43 there is a clear distinction between the cross and the resurrection, as they relate to the
44 Christian life (Dickson 2003:11). However it's good to realize that for Paul, the cross
45 and the resurrection may at times constitute one reality. The cross was the symbol of
46 conviction to Paul that it worked our salvation, creating us a new in Christ Jesus. The
47 resurrection then becomes the symbol for that newness in Christ for all humanity.

⁷Ekem, JDK., Interpreting "ton arton hermon ton epiouision" in the context of Ghanaian Mother-tongue hermeneutics', in Musa Dube et al (eds), Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012): 317-8.

1 Without any doubt the cross becomes the foundation for people's salvation in Christ
2 Jesus, it's the 'transits station' on the way to the resurrection (Dickson 2003: 11). The
3 cross becomes our assurance that resurrection was a reality.
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Western view of the cross

Western scholarship has put the cross of Christ in the shadow of the resurrection among the Western Theologians, which has provoked our re-thinking about the cross and its significance. For these Western scholars the cross is a regrettable event, it is a disaster that makes Easter a period of mourning and sadness contradicting the concept of a Good Friday. For Hengel (1997) death by crucifixion was, during the time of Jesus' earthly life, a barbaric form of execution of utmost cruelty. Crucifixion was considered one of the most severe punishments exercised at that time. Indeed, for Roman sensibilities, it was considered the "supreme penalty" for what were deemed the worst crimes. Hengel continues his argument that crucifixion was a manifestation of trans-subjective evil, a form of execution which manifested the demonic character of human cruelty and bestiality in Rome. Indeed, we have no doubt that the death of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross was one of utmost pain and humiliation.

The cross is an important symbol for salvation for all Christians, which makes the day of crucifixion to be celebrated by all Christians in the year. Christians celebrates what they believe to be the most momentous weekend in the history of the world. Ever since Jesus died and was raised, Christians have proclaimed the cross and resurrection of Jesus to be the decisive turning point for all creation. Paul considered it to be of first importance that Jesus died for our sins on the cross and was buried, and was raised to life on the third day, all in accordance with what God had promised all along in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3).

On Good Friday Christians remember the event on the cross, when Jesus willingly suffered and died as an ultimate sacrifice that reconciled humanity with God. For Paul this sacrifice is followed by Easter, the glorious celebration of the day Jesus was raised from the dead, heralding his victory over sin and death and pointing ahead to a future resurrection for all who are united to him by faith (Romans 6:5). But why call the day Christ died on the cross "Good Friday" instead of "Bad Friday". One African man asked me if your mother was murdered by a thug using a club, would you keep that club. Surely not at all, but the death of a mum through such a quarrel act will still not offer what the death of Christ offered. Many Christians in the Western World do take this approach: in German, for example, the day is called Karfreitag, or "mournful Friday." However in English, the name Good Friday is entirely appropriate because the suffering and death of Jesus, as terrible as it was, marked the dramatic culmination of God's plan to save his people from their sins:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:6-10).

1 Therefore so far as, the death occurred, and if that were the end or consummation
 2 of his work- as it's taught by the traditional Christians. The death of Christ on the
 3 cross is a painful and a regrettable event. This event culminated in reconciling of the
 4 humanity with God, as they obtained forgiveness is much of the present than past. For
 5 such there would have been no Christian Gospel or Christian Church (Shaw
 6 1953:219). Here is a true statement in the western thought that unless, the resurrection
 7 took place, and the cross could not have provided the foundation for Christianity. This
 8 opinion has been succinctly expressed by Pannenberg (1967:116), by stating that,
 9 without his resurrection the Gospel message would have turned out to be a fanatical
 10 audacity. It is my suspicion that such views of the cross and its relation to the
 11 resurrection come essentially from the western understanding of death. The western
 12 thought is limiting the power of the cross and its significance.

13 We do understand that, with the changing of life style in the West, death is no
 14 more a public affair, as Häselbarth (1972) argues. Death in a German village was an
 15 affair that affected all inhabitants of an area, work had to stop, people had to come
 16 together to condole the briefed and thereafter form a procession from the dead persons
 17 home to the Church. Bells would be rung and the choirs sing. In the local bars people
 18 would eat and dance together until the deceased was laid to rest in the centre of the
 19 village, within a church compound, this is no longer the practice. In other words death
 20 affected the whole community. Such is the African Spirit of mourning and preparing
 21 the burial of the loved ones as Appiah- Kubi has rightly observed:

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 23 The false sense of superiority and righteousness of some cultures and some Churches that
 24 justifies multifaceted racism, sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, ecclesio-centrism, religio-
 25 centrism, and other forms of human degradation and marginalization is the greatest evil in
 26 today's world. It is this righteous sense of superiority that has enabled so-called
 27 Christians and civilization that calls itself Christian to conquer entire people, steal their
 28 lands, enslave their people, exploit their natural resources, underpay their workers and
 29 destroy entire ways of life that were sacred to the peoples of the land. Those defined as
 30 unwanted or untouchable by the dominant groups are still kept out of the structures of
 31 responsibility and opportunity. This evil denies the fundamental dignity of the human
 32 person in his/her historical and cultural reality.⁸

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 34 Hence Africans had to re-think the theology of the cross. Unfortunately today
 35 death is a private affair in the West; it has been commercialized by burial institutes,
 36 which has camouflaged it with flowers, wreaths, taped music, expensive dress and
 37 caskets. This has turned death into a private experience of the individual, demanding
 38 funeral to be done within circles of the loved ones in all quietness. Such would happen
 39 without any invitation to visit the family. This would sound rude and outrageous in an
 40 African Context. Death is an embarrassment which must be forgotten as quickly as
 41 possible through the help of morticians. For Häselberth (1972), death does not match
 42 the world view guided by the ideas of activism, progress, success, optimism,
 43 rationalism and youthfulness. Death is a huge business today in the West and its
 44 catching fire in Africa too. But in the African context death is still meaningful making
 45 the cross of Christ in African Pentecostal Church a tool for salvation. The Church
 46 cannot comprehend its mandate without the cross, so it came up with a unique cross
 47 for the purposes of preaching the Gospel.

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⁸Appiah-Kubi, F. The Gospel and Culture: Paradoxes and challenges. A critical re-reading of the theology of inculturation; in Shaji George Kochuthara (ed), Revisiting Vatican II. 50 Years of Renewal, vol.1 (Bangalore: Dharmaran Publications 2014):519.

1 **African Independent Pentecostal Church view of the cross**

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3 The African Church “cross” provokes a debate of the meaning of Christianity in
4 Africa, since the Continent hosts various types of crosses (from two pieces of wood to
5 four) and Christianities, perhaps even Christianities within Christianities (Maluleke
6 2001:165). For this reason reflecting on this Church’s ideology of the cross is rather
7 complicated. Nevertheless, every organized and ritualized African manifestation of
8 Christianity implies a theology albeit acted, symbolized or demonstrated out theology.

9 However, I shall concentrate on the AIPCA ‘special cross’ that has not been
10 explored properly in African Christian Theology. The cross in Africa still bears the
11 marks of salvation; the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA)
12 has a unique cross which has four pieces of wood- This is an interesting cross with
13 four pieces of wood hanging in a number of African Independent Pentecostal Church
14 of East Africa (AIPCEA), very little has been published concerning this unique cross.
15 It has not even been adopted in the common symbols of the cross, unlike the Roman
16 cross (which is the missionary cross- the cross Africans received as Christian cross
17 through the missionaries who evangelized Africa) with two pieces.

18 The African ‘cross’ has three pieces of wood running across the vertical piece. A
19 unique “cross” that has four pieces of wood making the special African ‘cross’ found
20 on top and at the altar of all African Independent Pentecostal Churches of Africa and
21 also in African Independent Pentecostal Churches of East Africa (AIPCEA). The
22 African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA) explains that, their cross
23 signifies the seven words of Christ on the cross: For the Africans the Cross of Christ is
24 the corner stone of their faith. Hence africanizing it makes it the chosen symbol of the
25 African Christian faith. While to the West the cross is empty to the Africans is a
26 symbol of victory over evil and still contain the seven words spoken by Christ as He
27 breathed His last. As Maluleke (2001:166) argues the Bible’s significance and
28 influence goes far beyond the confines of the “official Church” and its various
29 denominations. So what does it mean to us? Is the four pieces Cross in our African
30 experience more meaningful than a nicely sculpted piece of wood or an elegantly-
31 shaped piece of gold hanging around the neck of the missionary priest? To the African
32 Independent Churches (AICs) the Cross of Christ is God’s final words on the Cross
33 (Seven words) demonstrating the character and consequence of human sin, and of the
34 wonder and sacrifice of divine love by Jesus Christ to the African Church.

35 Jesus was crucified so that through his death and resurrection we shall acquire a
36 personal relationship with God and get to know God’s power in every area of our
37 lives. When the AICs speak of "the Cross", the Church is not thinking of it in the
38 purely physical sense of two rough pieces of wood, bolted together and suspended by
39 its vertical section before being dropped into a hole in the ground. This is a specific
40 “cross” for AIPCEAs in East Africa, which has a unique cross different from other
41 known AICs. To African Christians, in these AIPCEA Churches the cross means
42 much more than that - "the Cross" is “shorthand" not only of the seven words on the
43 cross, but also an expression that demonstrates the death of Jesus. The “cross” is Jesus
44 stretched out in the theology of salvation, suffering more than anyone has ever
45 suffered, for Africans who have been colonized in the name of civilization. The AICs
46 cross is Christ still repeating the seven words to all of their believers. There is no
47 holier place that we can ever hope to come to as Africans than to the Cross of Christ.
48 This is well demonstrated by the Kenyan Anglican Church prayer book, where to
49 climax the Holy Communion Service all Christian big and small faces the cross and
50 state the following:

1 Minister: All our problems,
2 People: We send to the Cross of Christ.
3 Minister: All our difficulties,
4 People: We send to the Cross of Christ.
5 Minister: All the devils works,
6 People: We send to the cross of Christ.
7 Minister: All our hopes,
8 People: We set on the risen Christ (Modern Service: 57).

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10 This calls for a ‘paradigm shift from Western thinking of eschatology, which is
11 chromos to an African thinking of eschatology, which is *kairos*’, (Waweru 2011:125).
12 For Paul, that eating and drinking at the Lord’s Table is joining Christ on his death (1
13 Corinthians 1:16-17) now, it is a *kairos* moment for all Christians. The African
14 Christian services contain a most wonderful commentary on the Cross in the words of
15 Jesus himself, spoken from the Cross itself. Seven words recorded are signified by the
16 AICs’ Cross: if there were more the Africans don’t know but surely it’s significant
17 that seven is God’s perfect number, explained by the seven points’ represented by the
18 African Cross. In African terms, the cross represents completeness and wholeness.
19 The AICs states that Christ on that Cross almost two thousand years ago, meant ‘seven
20 great statements’, treasured by the African Cross as the Seven Words of Christ on “the
21 Cross”. They cover the basic needs of mankind.

22 Paul seems to agree with this African concept of the Cross, when he writes:

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24 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The
25 bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one
26 bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the
27 people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? (1Cor 10”16-
28 17).

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30 This communal meal demonstrates, what took place in the ritual, meaning that it
31 had a dual effect of uniting the people with God. Any person who participates in a
32 ritual meal made from the flesh of the victim, strengthen the bond, and they are bound
33 to each other through participation. For Awolalu (1979:143), such a communal eating
34 of meat from sacrificed animals is quite common in the African setting of a sacrifice.

35 The African cross is the supreme sacrifice in which Christ is the victim and the
36 victor at the same time. This means that Christ is singularly linked to us through his
37 own death. He was without blemish, making every dead African blemish less as they
38 carry their crosses to their graves. Every time there is a coffin in an African funeral; it
39 is accompanied by the cross. This means that as death becomes commercialized in the
40 urban centers, the cross is not left behind. In Africa death is caused by evil, through
41 sleekness, accidents or being bewitched by a jealous neighbor. The African philosophy of
42 causality is relevance here, where nothing happens without a cause. As Kwesi Dickson
43 (2003:12) puts it, in African context death does not just happen, hence it requires
44 something more than a physical explanation. He further argues that, even when the
45 physical explanation is understood Africans will still seek a theological explanation
46 that goes beyond the physical reasons. Such an idea is backed by Maluleke
47 (2001:167), when he says that Africans uses the Bible in various ways which, impinge
48 on the manner in which African Christians relate to the Bible in their day to day lives.

49 When an elderly person dies, one would seek to know why didn’t the person die
50 earlier and why now. There must be a reason for that death; an enemy could be doing
51 some tricks in one way or the other. A sacrifice has to be carried out and a goat in this

1 case will be the victim, otherwise the dead may live to haunt the living. For the
 2 Africans people do not just die, willing whether on the cross, in the water, valley, and
 3 mountains or in sleep. An agency or other particular people with special reasons could
 4 have caused the death. The concept of will to die for others is completely a new
 5 ideology within African settings.

6 However in Africa, the idea of death does not conclude life, life is a continuous
 7 process, where people keep on moving to other worlds. The river of death is the most
 8 significance among the people. The reason being people are expected to cross to the
 9 other side on the point of death and go on living happily. For this purpose people have
 10 to be careful in the first world, because in the second world their evils will follow
 11 them. Ones a relative is dead, a ceremony to sever the relationship has to be carried
 12 out. Otherwise *ngoma* (the spirit of the dead in the Kikuyu community) simply implies
 13 that those who are dead are just asleep and they may come back at the slightest
 14 provocation of their spirits (Spirit) of the dead will be revisiting the community now
 15 and then and many goats will be sacrificed once the *ngoma* visits. As Mbiti (1969)
 16 puts it, the dead remain ‘the living dead’, respected, revered, and communed with by
 17 the society. For the Kikuyu community one is supposed to share a drink with the
 18 living dead and the ancestors through libation every moment of drinking. This is a
 19 sharing that keeps the community together by allowing the departed to share with the
 20 living. So if a woman is widowed, the society knows the husband is not dead and she
 21 must then be treated well, otherwise the gone husband may come back and terrorize
 22 the community. Paul is against other peoples traditions in Galatians 4:8-11, where he
 23 describes this as being in bondage to beings that are by nature not gods, Paul sees such
 24 beings as “weak and beggarly elemental spirits”.

25 Although death will separate the ‘living dead’ from the living, the bond between
 26 the dead and the living is very much alive. For this reason people will celebrate a life
 27 of dead person in order to give a decent burial, or else the spirit of the dead abides
 28 within the community and keeps on tormenting the living. In most African societies
 29 there is great concern on how to carry out the burial ceremony so that the dead may
 30 travel safe to the next world. In Kenya some will bury their dead inside houses, others
 31 at the entrances of their compounds, while others will bury their dead in the afternoon
 32 after the setting of the sun. They at curatively bury their dead as a preparation for their
 33 next life in the next world. However, paradoxically burying the dead properly is seen
 34 as a way of escorting them to the next world, as they remain members of the living
 35 family. In other words African funerals are tailored to strength the bond between the
 36 living and the dead (Dickson 2003:12). The dead are taken as role models of the
 37 living, perhaps this explains why during the funeral everyone is eulogized no matter
 38 the kind of life they lived.

39 Therefore death in the African setting is an occasion for seeking more life. It is
 40 through death that one is able to be transformed into a spirit as one joins the spirits
 41 world. The dead are believed to be in a position to see what is happening behind them
 42 and even bring blessings to the community once they do well as expected of them, this
 43 accounts for the reason the dead are given tributes as they depart from this world to
 44 the next. Such tributes are illustrative of the African connection and concern for the
 45 life after death. However we have several communities like the Kikuyu of Central
 46 Kenya who don’t seriously mourn the dead, because they are believed to have rested
 47 rather than died. Such would be quickly taken to the rainy forest in order to rest in a
 48 good rainy place. Kikuyu people believed that their dead are just asleep, and they will
 49 soon return to see what is happening around.

50

1 Nevertheless death does not negate natural self-expression. Although death is a
 2 loss in a community, it does not signify the end of the individuals self expression. Life
 3 will continue regardless of the dead persons' departure and the work of the deceased
 4 will also continue. In other words life never ceases to go on. As Nottingham (1962:32)
 5 has noted without death, the eliminator, there could be no continuing life. But even
 6 when this positive affirmation is obscure, in the African setting the termination of the
 7 death rituals, which offered a chance for the coming together of individuals is marked
 8 by discreet feasting and circumspect conviviality. Such a affirmation of life is
 9 widespread in African communities as part of death rites. It is a clarion call to a
 10 continuity of life (Mugambi & Kirima 1976:102).

11 Therefore death in African world view affects the whole community. It is not an
 12 individual's affair, the rites conducted during the burial ceremony simply implies that
 13 relatives, friends, neighbors, as well as those who are friends to those who knew the
 14 deceased would flock around to condole with the family. Donations will come from all
 15 sides and there will be a concourse of people coming and going. Such come in order to
 16 identify themselves with the bereaved family; this will mean that the number of people
 17 who come to condole with the family is not in direct proportion to the social standing
 18 of the deceased. When death occurs to any member of the community whether high or
 19 low class it creates an opportunity for community interaction that attracts all social
 20 groups.

21 In the light of this African understanding of death and the New Testament
 22 understanding of the significance of the death of Christ, how would the African
 23 Church review the theology of the cross received from the Western world view.
 24 Dickson (2003:12) poses the question regarding the reality of death both in African
 25 concept and the Western point of view. It is clear that the African will not speak in
 26 silence to affirm that the cross is the basis of the Christian hope in Christ Jesus. For
 27 Gabriel Setiloane (1969: 204-207), it is when he is on the cross, "the Christ of
 28 Nazareth, with holed hands and open side, like a beast at a sacrifice, browned and
 29 sweating water and blood in the heat of the sun, yet silent that we cannot resist him".
 30 He is writing from own experience in a South African context, where people were
 31 being humiliated in their own homes.

32 However this is an image that many African Christians could identify themselves
 33 with in their normal situations in life. Although the cross is a symbol of "human
 34 degradation and evil", to the African Christians it demonstrates victory for the
 35 community of believers. Such an understanding explains in a single sense why the
 36 Africans have not resisted the cross of Christ, even after all the noise about Western
 37 humiliation of the African culture. For Ridderbos (1975:182) the relationship between
 38 justification and reconciliation is complex. This is because justification may on one
 39 hand mean a condition of reconciliation, so that God could enter into a relation with
 40 humanity, since their sins must be dealt with. Once righteousness of God has been
 41 achieved, a reconciliation door is opened, making peace possible. This is demonstrated
 42 by God, when He sent his son to reconcile humanity, such lead to justification. This
 43 means justification and reconciliation operate together though in different spheres.

44 The African cross demonstrates that redemption towards salvation is "not a
 45 perfectionist once-for-all occurrence", but an unceasing process (Dorothee Sölle 1967:
 46 108). The African experiences of renewal, healing, reconstruction, and reconciliation
 47 will always be provisional and incomplete. The cross will always be part of the
 48 African story, not only of the past but also of the many days to come. The Africa hope
 49 for renewal is not to be confused with utopia eschatology, which awaits an other-
 50 worldly, escapist salvation, which has no relation to the African world we live in. The

1 African eschatology is firmly rooted in the cross, and is therefore ever cognizant of the
2 real, tangible, African life of reality where evil, pain, and suffering are present.

3 Africans might argue that the cross of colonialism/imperialism/neocolonialism is
4 a terrible tragedy which nevertheless has/had some paradoxical purpose, such as the
5 transformation of a society from an oppressive system to a wellness system. For
6 Waweru (2011:98), the major concern of African theologians is to find out the
7 relevance of Christ to their faith. The cross moved the Africans from intrinsic injustice
8 and despair to hopefulness and reconciliation. So even those who still experience the
9 pain and the sufferings of the cross, or they are carrying the heavy loads only after the
10 inauguration of the new dispensation, the good news stands. The African cross enables
11 the people of God to see a hope revealed in their hardships, where God is a comforter,
12 a healer, a friend and a forgiver. In Africa the cross propels people to seek justice and
13 elimination of their sufferings, knowing that the God of justice is on their side. The
14 cross becomes peoples hope for the impending troubles of life.
15
16

17 **Conclusion**

18
19 The article set out to do a reflection on the African understanding of the cross of
20 Christ. It has argued that AIPCA understanding of the cross, the New Testament view
21 as represented by Pauline theology and the Western view are all different. In the New
22 Testament the cross had become the true symbol of conviction to Paul for it worked
23 our salvation, creating not only a new relationship with Christ Jesus. The resurrection
24 then becomes the symbol for the new life in Christ for all humanity. Without any
25 doubt the cross becomes the foundation for people's salvation in Christ Jesus. The
26 Western view of the cross and its relation to the resurrection come essentially from the
27 Western understanding of death. The western thought is limiting the power of the
28 cross and its significance.

29 The African experiences of renewal, healing, reconstruction, and reconciliation will
30 always be provisional and incomplete. The cross will always be part of the African
31 story, not only of the past but also of the many days to come. It has clearly emerged
32 from the discussion that the views of the cross depends on the individuals contexts. It
33 has become clear that the creative ideas rooted in their deep intellectual discourse and
34 sober reflections on the cross resulted to the new insights of the death of Christ on the
35 cross.

36 It is the conclusion of the article that Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities,
37 both from the West as well as from Africa and put them to shame, by triumphing over
38 them in him as explained in Colossians 1:15,17;2, 1Cor. 5:15-18. The African cross is
39 where Christ demonstrates justice, reconciliation and also brings peace and defeats the
40 enemies. Through the African cross, hostility from all sides is replaced by the peace
41 that passes all understanding within the African culture. However, this last statement
42 ingeniously suggests that the African, Western and the New Testament views of the
43 cross are antagonistic to each other, but with a final concept that at the cross salvation
44 was discovered.
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