Cruciform Theology and its Implications for African Christianity

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ABSTRACT

Christianity has, since the beginning of the 20th century, experienced an unmatched numerical growth in Africa. Presently, Africa occupies a central position in global Christianity, as evidenced by the active involvement of numerous African churches in reverse missions to areas like Europe and North America. The proliferation of the church in Africa has given rise to a cadre of theologians and biblical scholars who engage in diverse theological inquiries to enhance the qualitative growth of the church. However, despite their diligent efforts, the impact of African theologians and biblical scholars on the church and society is limited because most African biblical scholars fail to focus on the cross. The need for a cross-informed theology has prompted this paper which explored how cruciform theology might affect evangelical Christianity and the society. This paper further explored the implications for contextualizing theology, responsibly exercising political power, and practicing effective stewardship within the African context. The paper used a qualitative research approach to collect primary data from books, journal articles, and theses/dissertations on the subject matter. Using a descriptive approach, this paper sought to reconstruct cruciform theology for African evangelicals and to draw lessons for Christianity in Africa. The main argument is that the cross should be at the heart of every dimension of the church's existence, ultimately leading to the transformation of society. The goal of this study is to encourage ongoing dialogue and reflection on the theology of the cross among the African Evangelical Christian community.

Keywords: *Africa, Evangelical, Christ, Cruciform theology, Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Christianity in Africa has experienced remarkable growth, with African churches now playing a significant role in global Christianity.[1] The growth of the African church has led to a growing interest and investment in the study of theology across Africa. One notable factor is the increasing access to education throughout the continent. As educational opportunities expand, more individuals have the chance to pursue higher education, including theological and

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[1] This paper is dedicated to the memory of my late friend, Dr. Batanayi I. Manyika, who at the time of his sudden death on Friday, March 22, 2024, served as the Academic Dean of South African Theological Seminary. My interest in conducting research on Cruciform Theology was deeply inspired by my engagements with his insightful presentations on the topic.

biblical studies. Another factor is the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa which has compelled the church to direct efforts towards theological and biblical research. Consequently, African scholars are increasingly bringing their unique perspectives to the study of the Bible. Furthermore, globalization has facilitated collaboration and exchange between African scholars and their counterparts from other parts of the world. Many African scholars are participating in international conferences, publishing in academic journals, and engaging in collaborative research projects. There is considerable progress in biblical hermeneutics and theology through various theological and interpretative frameworks.

However, despite all that African theologians and biblical scholars have come to know and continue to do, and despite their vast methodological prowess and analytical precision, more than ever before, the church is asking the seminary and the university the most basic of questions: Does our theology transform life? For most African Christians, the honest response to this question is negative. This is not because of a lack of intellectual depth or methodological skill but because the cross is not at the center of many theological frameworks in Africa. The absence of a cruciform focus in theology has led to a disconnection between theological discourse and the transformative power of the Gospel. When the cross—representing self-sacrifice, redemption, and reconciliation—is marginalized, theology becomes a mere academic exercise rather than a life-altering truth.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to reshape African Christian scholarship to make it more impactful and relevant. This paper is an attempt to address this need through a critical exploration of cruciform theology. It is believed that a theological focus on cruciformity will address many of Africa's socio-religious challenges. The central claim is that the cross should occupy a pivotal position in every aspect of the church's life in order to facilitate societal transformation.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the paper employed a qualitative research approach, drawing on primary data from sources such as books, journal articles, and theses/dissertations related to the subject. Data were also gathered from video recordings on the subject matter. Through a descriptive method, this study seeks to reconstruct cruciform theology within the context of African evangelical theology and to explore its implications for Christianity in Africa. Relevant themes were identified, discussed, and implications were derived based on a comprehensive review of the literature.

The analysis of biblical texts utilized a biblical-theological perspective that emphasized how the concept of cruciformity emerges within Scripture. This approach focused on understanding the theological basis of self-sacrifice, community-centered care, and stewardship principles that align with cruciform values. The study examined how these themes not only shape personal faith but also address collective environmental and social concerns within African communities.

DEFINING CRUCIFORMITY

The subject of cruciformity (cruciform theology) has in recent times attracted much scholarly attention, with Michael J. Gorman as a prominent figure in this field of study. Therefore, this paper will examine Gorman's insights on the subject in an attempt to explain what cruciformity is. According to Gorman, "cruciformity"—derived from "cruciform" (meaning "cross-shaped")—can be understood as embodying the likeness of Jesus, who was crucified as the Messiah.[2] In other words, cruciformity refers to the alignment of an individual's journey of faith and the principles that underpin faith around the crucified Christ.[3] This definition emphasizes the central significance of the *starous,* the cross and echoes Jesus' own proclamation that his incarnation was destined to culminate in the sacrifice of his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). In this light, Christ's sacrificial death on the cross emerges as not only an event of historical importance but also as a profound and enduring pattern for the life of discipleship to which Jesus' followers are called to adhere. The cross-centred interpretation of the cross invites believers to align their lives with the transformative example set forth by Jesus in his crucifixion. This understanding resonates with Gorman's definition, which identifies cruciformity as

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[2] Michael J. Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2013): 64-83, 66.
[3] Benjamin D. Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*, 2, 1 (2016): 1-16, 5. [Available at: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol2/iss1/1]

encompassing both the spiritual and moral dimensions of Jesus' crucifixion, shaping the worldview and actions of believers across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

Even though the word "cruciformity" is not found in the pages of scripture, its conceptual framework saturates the hermeneutical trajectories of every biblical text directly or indirectly.[4] In other words, the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross is the foundational principle that underpins and informs the entirety of biblical interpretation. According to Gorman, though the language of cruciformity looms large in the entire New Testament and early Christian tradition, its prominence is particularly notable within the theological framework and practices outlined in the writings of Paul.[5] As a Pauline scholar, Gorman's exploration of cruciformity focused mostly on Pauline texts. Therefore, the interpretation of cruciformity is best grasped within the context of Pauline theology, though it is not divorced from the broader notion of cruciformity found across various parts of the Bible.

The expression cruciform theology (cruciformity) refers to a theological approach where issues and questions are engaged through the distinctive perspective the Christ's self-sacrificial death on the cross. Cruciform theology is Trinitarian in nature as one cannot talk about the cross without talking about the Godhead. The Trinitarian dimension of cruciform theology is the Father's initiating love in sending the Son, the Son's obedient submission to the Father's will in laying down his life on the cross, and the Holy Spirit's empowering presence in convicting hearts and bringing about transformation.

ASPECTS OF CRUCIFORM THEOLOGY

This section outlines selected aspects of cruciform theology. It will focus on the transformative, ethical and epistemological characterizations of cruciform theology.

Transformational dimension of Cruciform Theology

From the cruciform perspective, the essence of theology lies in its ability to bring about personal and communal transformation. One cannot discuss being cruciform while envisioning a distant world; rather, cruciformity holds direct implications for the present lives of humans here and now.[6] So one may ask: "Do our theological outputs move the hands to action? Do our theological outputs move our feet to acts of justice and mercy?"[7] Theological exploration and reflection should not merely serve as intellectual exercises but should also lead to a deepening of one's faith, understanding, and relationship with the divine. Cruciformity instills a kind of spirituality that empowers believers to work toward their own transformation and the transformation of the society. This is in line with Batanayi I. Manyika's assertion that "cruciformity is not abstract. It has a location, a primary protagonist, and secondary actors that draw their identity and function from the words and works of the main character [Christ]."[8] Thus, cruciformity can be described as the transformative impact of the cross on the life, mission, and public involvement of both individuals and communities within the church.[9]

The personal dimension of this transformation involves reshaping beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors in accordance with spiritual truths and principles. It challenges individuals to undergo inner change, growth, and maturation as they grapple with profound questions about the nature of existence, morality, suffering, and the divine. The transformative dimension of cruciformity comes as a result of love for God and form neighbor. The cross is an expression of God's love for humanity (Rom. 5:8). In response to this love, believers are to love God with all their, heart, mind, strength. Love serves as the indication of Christ's presence through His Spirit within an individual or a community. Cruciform love embodies a profound commitment to others, mirroring the same self-sacrificial and others-centered attitude demonstrated by Christ on the cross. Cruciform-oriented theology should promote this kind of

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[4] Batanayi I. Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology" Academic Dean's Address presented on 3rd February, 2023. (Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-xd5iIclCo).

[5] Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 66.

[6] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."

[7] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."

[8] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology"; Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 66.

[9] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."

love. This theology moves its audience to make deliberate choices and undertake actions that serve as tangible manifestations of the Holy Spirit's presence within individuals and their allegiance to Christ.[10]

Cruciform theology also promotes other-centeredness where people do not pursue personal advantage or recognition but instead prioritize the well-being and upliftment of others.[11] At its core, cruciform theology provides a foundational framework for addressing systemic injustices such as poverty, racism, sexism, and economic inequality. It calls on individuals and communities to confront and address societal issues that perpetuate human suffering and marginalization.

Ethical Dimension of Cruciform Theology

The cross of Christ is not only the central event of salvation but also the guiding principle for ethical living for believers. The Pauline evidence for this assertion is not far-fetched. Firstly, Paul emphasizes the transformative power of the cross in the lives of believers. He teaches that through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, believers are liberated from the power of sin and death and are made new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). This transformation is not only spiritual but also ethical, as believers are called to live in accordance with their new identity in Christ. Secondly, the cross serves as a model of selflessness and love for believers to emulate in their ethical conduct. Paul teaches that just as Christ laid down his life for others on the cross, believers are called to love sacrificially and serve one another in humility (Phil. 2:5-8). The cross thus becomes the ultimate expression of ethical behavior, inspiring believers to imitate Christ's example in their interactions with others. Furthermore, the cross shapes Paul's understanding of Christian ethics in relation to social and cultural norms. Paul challenges believers to live counter-culturally and to reject the values of the world (Rom. 12:1-2) and instead embodying the values of the kingdom of God. This includes practices such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice, which are all rooted in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

Cruciformity, therefore, embodies a life shaped by the cross of Jesus, the Messiah.[12] It entails allowing the crucifixion of the Messiah to not only define but also serve as the source of life in him.[13] It further involves active participation in and embodiment of the cross. Paul in Galatians 2:19-20 asserts "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (NIV). Here, Paul talks about a new reality that has resulted from the Christ-Event.

Given the relational nature of this reality, it is essential not to focus solely on "the cross" but rather on "the crucified."[14] Furthermore, while Paul occasionally employs the language of imitation (as seen in 1 Cor. 11:1), it is crucial to distinguish Pauline spirituality from a mere ethic of imitating Christ. Paul's emphasis lies on the dynamic activity of the living, indwelling Messiah, which is inseparable from the work of God's Spirit dwelling within believers.[15] Cruciformity thus emerges as a narrative-driven spirituality, one that tells the compelling story of Christ crucified. As Christ's death serves as a paradigm for the Christian faith, the cross becomes the guiding force shaping Christian convictions and dispositions in all circumstances. In essence, the faith commitments manifested in everyday decisions should reflect the obedient and self-sacrificial posture demonstrated by Christ at the cross.

Individuals who embody the principles of cruciformity integrate humility and obedience into all aspects of life, and reject the tendency to compartmentalize or privatize their values and beliefs.[16] This approach involves a holistic demonstration of virtues that reflects a consistent alignment between principles and actions across various domains of life. The prevailing cultural inclination to separate personal convictions from other areas, such as work, politics, or social interactions, limits the potential for a unified and coherent practice of values. Cruciformity, as a conceptual framework, highlights the

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[10] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[11] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[12] Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 67.
[13] Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 67.
[14] Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 67.
[15] Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 67.
[16] Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," 7.

importance of making decisions—such as how time, energy, and resources are utilized—that align with self-giving and ethical principles, creating a model of integrity that transcends individual and societal spheres.[17]

Epistemological Dimension of Cruciform Theology

Another dimension of cruciformity is epistemological. The cross serves as the epistemological epicenter, meaning it functions as a foundational framework for understanding knowledge. Manyika emphasizes the apocalyptic and epistemological uniqueness of the Christ event. He notes that the cross disrupts conventional wisdom and reshapes understanding by presenting a radically alternative viewpoint on power, success, and wisdom.[18] He further argues that the cross challenges conventional notions of strength and status, emphasizing instead the paradoxical nature of God's kingdom, which is founded on sacrificial love and humility.[19] In essence, the epistemological aspect of the cross invites believers to delve deeper into their comprehension of God and his intentions. As one views life through the cross, one gains firsthand knowledge of God's presence, grace, and transformative influence in their lives. Thus, the cross serves not only as a symbol of redemption but also as a profound wellspring of wisdom and understanding, molding believers' perceptions of themselves, others, and the world around them.

The epistemological dimension of cruciformity is well articulated in J. Louis Martyn's interpretation of the cross which is outlined briefly below. According to Martin, for Paul "there are two ways of knowing, and … what separates the two is the turn of the ages, the apocalyptic event of Christ's death/resurrection. There is a way of knowing which is characteristic of the old age … there must be a new way of knowing that is proper either to the new age or to that point at which the ages meet."[20] For Paul, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus represent the entrance of the new era into the existing order. Through the transformative impact of the message of the cross, the dawn of this new age emerges, illuminating and exposing the deficiencies of the old order.[21] Martyn demonstrates that for Paul the two ages converging in the cross correspond to "two ways of knowing" and, as he goes on to explain, "two kinds of knowers."[22] The knowledge proper to the old age is knowledge *kata sarka* (knowledge according to the flesh)[23] which characterizes the thoughts and actions of "the *psychikos anthrōpos*" ('the unspiritual person')."[24] Devoid of spiritual enlightenment, the unspiritual individual lacks the discernment to recognize the arrival of the new era through the crucified Christ. Thus, the antithesis of understanding through worldly standards is not understanding through spiritual standards, but rather understanding *kata* stauron ("by the cross").[25] In Martyn's interpretation, Paul viewed the cross as an unparalleled epistemological watershed or turning point, marking a division between knowledge derived from worldly perspectives (*kata sarka*) and knowledge derived from the cross.[26] Within the current period extending from the crucifixion to the Parousia, the apparent foolishness of the cross contrasts with worldly wisdom, implying that knowledge is either in accordance with worldly desires or with "the Spirit of the crucified Christ."[27]

The following examples illustrate how the cross serves as a source of knowledge and insight about fundamental questions of life—questions about God, humanity, and the world. Essentially, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ serves as the pivotal event through which Christians gain a profound understanding of the nature of God.[28] Consequently, Christ's actions, serving as a representation of

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[17] Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," 7.

[18] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."

[19] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."

[20] J. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 95.

[21] See Jüngel, "New–Old–New: Theological Aphorisms," trans. R. David Nelson, in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster*, ed. R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis (London & New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 131–135.

[22] Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," 99.

[23] Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," 99.

[24] Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," 99.

[25] Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," 108.

[26] Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," 108.

[27] Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," 108.

[28] Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," 5.

God's character, exemplify certain virtues that are integral to the Christian faith. Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, humanity gains a deep understanding of God's love, mercy, and justice. The cross, then, is a tangible expression of God's willingness to reconcile humanity to himself. Also, the cross provides crucial insight into the nature of sin and redemption. It serves as a powerful symbol of the seriousness of sin and its devastating effects on humanity, while also demonstrating God's provision for forgiveness and reconciliation through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. In this way, the cross becomes a focal point for understanding the depths of human brokenness and the transformative power of God's grace. Moreover, the cross underscores the value and dignity of every human being. By willingly sacrificing his Son on the cross, God affirms the inherent worth of humanity, regardless of individual circumstances or actions. This profound act of love and sacrifice serves as a powerful reminder of the immense value that God places on each and every human life.

Therefore, "the cross is the interpretive key to all reality because through it a new reality is inaugurated."[29] This reality was prophesied by the Old Testament prophets and was expected by faithful followers of Yahweh. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:2 underscore "the cross as both a historical event and an epistemological phenomenon."[30] In other words, "to read in cruciform modality is to employ the *stauros*, the cross of Jesus, as a heuristic tool that interprets, reinterprets, and even conditions the ethical substance of the people of God, together with their mission and public theological expression."[31] While some may consider Paul's approach an exercise in essentialism, what is undeniable is the centrality of the person of Christ and the event of the crucifixion. Paul's use of the perfect passive participle *estaromenon*—which communicates a past completed act having a continuing effect in the present—underlines that "the crucifixion of Jesus is both a historical event and a dynamic act that affects the present, animating those who pledge allegiance to the king to become a new creation."[32]

Hence, despite the perception of Jesus' crucifixion as a display of weakness, the paradoxical nature of his crucifixion serves as a universal turning point that reshapes the understanding of the past, present, and even the future.[33] This apocalyptic and epistemological significance of the cross provides the foundation upon which cruciformity, the embodiment of Christ's sacrificial love and humility, is established.[34] Moreover, the mention of the cross in 1 Corinthians is intricately connected to the event of the resurrection and its profound implications as expounded in 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection of Jesus, which follows his crucifixion, represents the culmination of God's redemptive plan and the ultimate victory over sin and death.[35] In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explores the theological implications of Christ's resurrection and its transformative impact on believers. This event not only validates the significance of the cross but also demonstrates the power of God to overcome the forces of darkness and bring about new life.[36] Thus, the resurrection serves as a cornerstone of Christian theology, reinforcing the foundational importance of the cross and inspiring believers to embrace cruciform living in light of Christ's victory over death.[37] One might aptly describe the cross and the resurrection as the guiding compass and defining lexicon of theological exploration within Paul's writings. They serve as the GPS of theological adventure to direct believers towards a deeper understanding of God's redemptive plan, and as the authoritative dictionary of theological inquiry.[38] There can be no authentic Christian theology without these subjects—the cross and resurrection.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY
The cruciform theology espoused above has many implications for Africa, three of which will be outlined briefly below.

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[29] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[30] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[31] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[32] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[33] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[34] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[35] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[36] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[37] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."
[38] Manyika, "Singing with Paul: A Case for Cruciform-Doxological Theology."

Cruciformity and the Contextualization of Theology

Theology is usually informed by the sociopolitical and cultural milieu in which it is formulated. Cruciform theology, like many other theologies, is formulated for a context and so may be considered as a form of contextual theology.[39] Jesus Christ, who is the main protagonist in cruciformity, was not isolated from the realities of human existence, but rather took on human form (or incarnated; cf. John 1:14a; Phil. 2:7b), entered into the complexities of human life, experienced firsthand the joys, sorrows, challenges, and triumphs that define the human condition. The incarnation of Jesus into the first-century Greco-Roman world and his charge that his gospel be taken to every nation (Matt. 28:19-20 and its parallels) underlines the need for cultural considerations in theological formulation and missional engagements. That is to say that cruciform theology, like all theology, must be sensitive to the cultural, social, and political context in which it is articulated and applied. Just as Jesus entered into the specific cultural and historical context of first-century Palestine, so too must cruciform theology be contextualized within the diverse cultural contexts in which it is proclaimed and practiced.

The cruciform theology espoused in this paper is not antithetical to the contextualization of theology. Cruciformity is not opposed to the fact that the universal scope of Jesus' commission to take the gospel to every nation underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication in theological formulation and mission endeavors. Cruciformity acknowledges that culture, as a way of life, deserves preservation. Cultural diversity enriches humanity's collective experience. In the context of Christianity, he cites the example set by Jesus Christ to illustrate the profound significance of cultural immersion. When Jesus took on human form, he embraced the cultural practices, traditions, and customs of the Jewish people among whom he lived and ministered. Throughout his earthly life, Jesus engaged deeply with Jewish culture, demonstrating respect for its customs, attire, cuisine, and thought patterns. Despite this immersion, Jesus remained morally impeccable, free from sin, and consistently asserted his divine authority as the Son of God. His sinlessness did not detract from his ability to authentically connect with people from various cultural backgrounds, including both Jews and Gentiles. Upon this premise, he argues (convincingly, I think) that Jesus did not intend for Africans to become American Christians or for Europeans to become Indian Christians. Instead, God's design is for African believers who accept Christ to retain their unique African identity. Therefore, African Christians are encouraged to uphold and cherish their cultural heritage, recognizing its intrinsic value and significance in shaping their identity and community.

The foregoing underscores the need to transmit the gospel through Africa without distorting its core message. Manyika's approach to achieving this is framed within the Katoan theological tradition. According to this tradition, an authentic theological approach must fully address the universal human condition which is central to the Christian faith. Manyika asserts: "While there is a place for retrieval and celebration of African identity, customs, and culture, any retrieval that claims to be gospel in modality yet does not launch from a gospel premise runs out of steam when it comes to treating the universality of the human condition."[40] He suggests that while acknowledging and confronting past and present challenges is important, it should be secondary to the primary focus on gospel ministry. This implies that in addressing the human condition, spiritual needs should take precedence over cultural and societal concerns. Manyika further states that "Africans like Norwegians, like Swedes, and even like the British are sinful, and nothing in our Africanness can mute the deep spiritual need we have for a savior. So while it is important that we address the ills of yesterday and today, this should be done as a secondary expression of our corollary outflow of gospel ministration."[41]

Following Kato's lead Manyika argues that evangelical theology must be rooted in confessional approaches that prioritize the apocalyptic proclamation of the gospel over both culture and injustice.[42]

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[39] John Barton, "At the Foot of the Cross, in the Middle of the World: Reflections on Cruciform Mission," *Leaven*, Vol. 23(3), (2015): 124-129, 124.

[40] Batanayi I. Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South," Academic Dean's Address presented on 4th February, 2022 (Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar3xDgv6uvY)

[41] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."

[42] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."

In his view, one might argue that the theological pitfalls that Kato observed in his 1975 *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* have grown into poisonous trees and must be felled to prevent them from polluting the African context. The priority of the gospel, or the necessity to use the gospel as a lens to interpret culture and sociopolitical issues should not suggest that grappling with the legacies of historical social injustice through a gospel lens is unnecessary.[43] In fact "God calls the church to service that includes applying gospel principles to social life and being engaged in dialogue with Africa and the world around."[44] His point rather is that while public engagement is important, it should be guided by the principles of the Christ event, both in intention and in manifestation.

Therefore, the theologian's commitment to cultural preservation should be balanced with adherence to biblical teachings. In Manyika's words, "It is the Bible that must judge the culture. Where a conflict results, the cultural element must give way."[45] This assertion leads to his claim that "the African Christian dances the two-step in the same gospel song. With one stride, we preach the gospel, and with the other, we appropriate its implications in context to achieve the African God. Once we are integrated or should be integrated in our theology, yet in our integration, we give due weighting to the central and secondary."[46] That is to say, African public theological engagement needs to first of all be faithful to the gospel and secondarily to the African culture. So Manyika states, "Our preoccupation should be with theologising about the acts of God in Christ and, secondarily, how these interface with our context and experience. A reversed emphasis produces a different theological project, one preoccupied with agendas that do not necessarily square off with the telos of redemption. If the starting point of our theologising is not Christ—his death and resurrection—then we will theologise according to fleeting and occasional needs and opinions to the detriment of the Gospel message."[47] While acknowledging the relevance of culture, authentic theology should not in any way place culture above the Christian gospel.

In this regard, the epistemological aspect of cruciformity should guide scholars to utilize the cross as the lens through which they interpret culture, rather than allowing culture to interpret the significance of the cross. When viewed through the lens of the cross, ancestor Christology can become syncretic by blending elements of traditional African beliefs regarding ancestors with Christian theology. This syncretism occurs when the significance of Christ's role as the ultimate mediator between God and humanity is diluted or overshadowed by the veneration of ancestors as intermediaries between the divine and earthly realms. Instead of recognizing Christ's unique and central role in salvation, ancestor Christology may blur the distinctions between Christian doctrine and traditional African spirituality, resulting in a hybrid belief system that compromises the purity of biblical teachings. As such, the Bible must be "the source for the symbols, stories, teachings and doctrines that form the cognitive framework for the worldview of the believing community."[48]

Cruciformity and Power

Leadership crisis is one of the issues that need theological attention in Africa. For a long time, Africa has often been portrayed as a continent governed by authoritarian figures who wielded stringent control over their constituents. While this characterization may not apply universally, numerous leaders have fallen significantly short of acceptable standards of leadership. The emergence of such political theories as Senghor's negritude, Nkrumah's African personality and consciencism, Nyerere's *ujaama*, Kenyatta's *uhuru*, Kaunda's African humanism, and Mobutu's Cultural Revolution was meant to address leadership problems facing the continent. Despite these efforts, instances of dictatorial regimes, militarism, marginalization, racial discrimination, ethnic divisions, tribal conflicts, corruption, and moral and spiritual decay are still common in Africa. In such a context, a cruciform theology of power might serve as an effective panacea.

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[43] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."
[44] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."
[45] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."
[46] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."
[47] Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."
[48] S. J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 88.

Cruciform power finds its ultimate expression in self-sacrifice, as exemplified by Christ on the cross. At its core, cruciform power stands in stark contrast to worldly power dynamics characterized by domination, coercion, hierarchical status to assert control and dominance and self-interest. Instead, it embodies principles of sacrificial love, humility, and servant leadership. In this paradigm, those who wield power prioritize the well-being of others above their own ambitions or desires for control. Cruciform power embodies a paradoxical essence—where weakness paradoxically signifies strength—because in vulnerability and suffering, the true potency of Christ is revealed, characterized by love (2 Cor. 12).[49] The paradoxical nature of cruciform power finds expression in Paul's ministry through his personal encounters with suffering and the continual trials of a life centered on serving others.[50] Central to grasping power from this perspective is acknowledging Paul's belief that "weakness manifests Christ's power" (2 Cor. 12:8; 4:7-12), which might include "tangible physical hardships endured for the sake of spreading the gospel."[51] Cruciform power does not seek to manipulate or impose its will upon others but rather seeks to empower and uplift them through service in humility (Mark 10:35-45). It is a power that recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of every individual and seeks to nurture their potential for growth and flourishing.

The foregoing holds significant implications for Christian political ethics, particularly in terms of leadership within the church. African Christian political ethics should challenge and reject traditional power dynamics that rely on coercion and social hierarchy, instead of embracing cruciform qualities such as vulnerability, humility, and weakness. The church must facilitate a reassessment of how power is understood and exercised within its context. This is in line with Gorman's definition of power as something that "transcends and reverses social status" because the "cross reveals the way God works, not just the way he achieved salvation" for humanity.[52] Leadership in the church setting should be a continual demonstration of self-emptying and humility, in a similar manner that Christ did on the cross, where the divine power of God was revealed.

Cruciform leadership style is first of all sacrificial. This sacrificial aspect of cruciform leadership reflects the essence of the cross itself—a symbol of ultimate selflessness and love. Just as the cross represents the pinnacle of sacrificial love, cruciform leaders emulate this model by demonstrating genuine care and concern for the needs and growth of their followers, even at great personal cost. Leaders who embody this approach prioritize the welfare and advancement of their followers above their own interests, echoing the sacrificial nature of Christ's ultimate act on the cross. Secondly, cruciform leadership is characterized by service. Leadership is meant to serve and address the needs of one's followers. Robert K. Greenleaf helps us to appreciate this aspect of leadership when he says, "The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead."[53] Kofi Abrefa Busia makes this point in his assertion that "the ultimate goal of politics [or power] is the creation of conditions, which will give every individual the opportunity to be the best he can as a human being and as a member of a community."[54] For the African context, such leadership services should result in tangible improvements such as well-maintained roads, access to clean drinking water, healthcare facilities, sanitation infrastructure, educational opportunities, and other essential amenities. Busia adds to this by suggesting that our assessment of progress should be based on the individual's development, including their knowledge, skills, behavior within society, the standard of living, and the level of cooperation, unity, and harmony within the national community.[55]

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[49] Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," 10

[50] Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," 10.

[51] Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 288.

[52] Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*, 300.

[53] Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant-leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002), 27.

[54] Kofi Abrefa Busia cited in Okodie Anane-Agyei, *Axioms of K. A Busia: A Compilation of Philosophies, Ideas and Policies of a Stateman* (Accra: Abibrem Communications, 2014), 37.

[55] Busia cited in Anane-Agyei, *Axioms of K. A Busia*, 104.

Cruciformity and Environmental Stewardship

Environmental degradation poses a significant challenge for contemporary Africa. Issues such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change threaten the livelihoods of millions and the well-being of the continent. The continent is far from the flourishing state in which it was initially created. In this context, the concept of cruciformity offers a valuable framework for engaging with environmental issues. Cruciformity, with its root in the principles of self-sacrifice, love, and service, as demonstrated by Christ on the cross can inspire African Christians to take action for the environment.

At its heart, cruciformity highlights that environmental stewardship is an essential expression of faith. In the framework of cruciform theology, Jesus' sacrificial love extends beyond humanity to embrace the entirety of creation. His death was not only to redeem individuals but also to initiate the restoration of the entire cosmos. The vision of Christ's future Kingdom, as described in Revelation 21:1, reveals a transformed universe, a "new heaven and a new earth," where the brokenness of this world is fully healed and reconciled. Paul emphasizes in Romans 8:18, 21-22 that this redemption reaches beyond human lives to the whole of creation, which eagerly awaits liberation from its "bondage to decay" and longs for renewal. In Colossians 1:19-20, Paul writes, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (NIV). Through this cruciform lens, the cross represents God's commitment to restore harmony across all of creation, acknowledging that everything—from humanity to the earth and its ecosystems—requires redemption due to the universal consequences of the Fall. Therefore, the cross should be seen as a symbol of God's overarching plan to redeem and heal all creation The cross reveals that caring for the environment is not only an ethical duty but a profound expression of participating in God's redemptive work, aligning with the love, self-sacrifice, and restorative justice that Jesus embodied.

Criciformity invites believers to see their interconnectedness with creation and to recognize the moral responsibility to safeguard it. This perspective shifts environmental care from a mere social obligation to a form of love for God and neighbor. Through this lens, sustainability becomes a lived faith practice that prompts individuals and communities to account for their impact on the earth. Community involvement plays a pivotal role in applying cruciformity to environmental care. Many African cultures naturally prioritize communal well-being, which aligns with the cruciform call to love and service. Churches and faith leaders can harness this cultural foundation, and then mobilize congregations for activities such as tree planting, clean-up efforts, and waste reduction. These collective actions not only enhance the local environment but also strengthen social bonds.

From the cruciform perspective, the stewardship of creation extends beyond mere management or control of natural resources. A stewardship rooted in self-sacrificial love should not view nature as a separate entity to be controlled or exploited.[56] Rather, it should recognize humanity's integral connection to the natural world, seeing people as participants within creation rather than dominators over it.[57] This means that nature is integral to human existence; it is not something to be dominated but is instead essential to human survival. The well-known saying that "when the last tree dies, the last human being will also die" underscores this truth, as plants provide the oxygen necessary for life and are a vital source of food and other essentials.

Cruciformity also calls for a commitment to environmental justice. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities across Africa, where pollution, food insecurity, and health risks are prevalent. Christians with cruciform principles are well-positioned to advocate for these communities This posture amplifies their voices in policy discussions on land rights and environmental protections, thereby modelling Christ in the virtues of compassion and justice.

Cruciformity and Material Ethics

Cruciform theology addresses not only spiritual matters but also human attitudes toward the creation, possession, and sharing of material resources. A cruciform approach to material wealth begins with

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[56] McDaniel as cited in Isaac Nortey Darko, *Environmental Stewardship and Indigenous African Philosophies: Implications for Schooling, And Health Education in Africa: A Case of Ghana* (PhD Thesis: University of Toronto, 2014), 60.

[57] McDaniel as cited Darko, *Environmental Stewardship and Indigenous African Philosophies,* 60.

the recognition that all possessions are gifts from God, entrusted to humanity for his purposes.[58] Scripture consistently affirms God's ultimate ownership of all resources. Genesis 1:1, Psalm 24:1–2, and Haggai 2:8 remind believers that the Creator is the source of all things—rain, sunlight, and life itself. Human beings are stewards, not owners, of material possessions. This means there will be a day of accountability and so one's use of possession must be Christ-centered to be able to give an acceptable account.

Stewardship carries ethical implications, as demonstrated in passages like Deuteronomy 15:1–11 and Matthew 6:19–34, which urge believers to hold possessions lightly and prioritize generosity over accumulation. Castor M. Goliama rightly asserts that Christians "have a fundamental calling to create a community of radical sharing and mutual interdependence."[59] Cruciformity, therefore, deepens this ethical call by framing stewardship within the sacrificial love of Christ with emphasis on sharing thanaccumulation of wealth. In contemporary contexts, where economic success and social influence are always equated with God's favor, cruciform theology offers a corrective. It serves as a radical critique of selfishness and greed, compelling believers to reject individualistic ownership and embrace a vision of wealth that prioritizes the common good. Christ, who owned no material wealth and died a criminal's death, exemplifies that divine approval is not contingent on material prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

So far, this study has sketched cruciform theology and how it may be applied to the African context. Before concluding, the researcher outlines three key recommendations based on the findings from the study. There is a need for the African church to develop and promote the principles of cruciformity within its Christian education programs. A well-structured curriculum could be devised, commencing with an introductory overview of cruciformity and its foundational narrative themes. Subsequently, participants could engage in a detailed analysis of specific New Testament passages, examining them through the lens of cruciform principles. Considering the customary weekly scheduling of church teachings, such a comprehensive program would likely span the duration of one year.

An alternative approach to integrating cruciformity into the life of the church could involve hosting seminars or retreats specifically tailored for church leaders. These gatherings provide an ideal platform for introducing leaders to the foundational principles of cruciformity in a focused and immersive setting. A retreat setting, in particular, may offer a unique opportunity for leaders to engage in in-depth discussions and meaningful dialogue surrounding cruciformity. Through guided sessions, leaders can be acquainted with the core principles of cruciformity while engaging in prayer and contemplation, allowing them to internalize and apply these concepts within the context of their congregation's unique needs and challenges.

Furthermore, cruciformity should be part of theological education in Africa. Universities and Theological Seminaries in Africa need to develop and promote courses in cruciform theology. Incorporating cruciformity into ministerial training programs entails teaching students to interpret Scripture, theology, and ministry practices through the lens of the cross. This involves exploring how Christ's sacrificial love informs various aspects of pastoral care, preaching, counseling, and community engagement. Practical aspects of ministry training also benefit from a cruciform approach. Students are encouraged to engage in hands-on ministry experiences that challenge them to embody the humility, compassion, and selflessness exemplified by Jesus in his earthly ministry.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the concept of cruciform theology and its profound implications for African Christianity. Cruciform theology, centered on the idea of the cross as a defining symbol of Christian identity and experience, offers a transformative perspective on faith that deeply resonates within the African context. The implications for African Christianity are far-reaching. Firstly, cruciform theology invites a re-examination of traditional theological perspectives, encouraging a more nuanced

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[58] Pickett, "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," 8.

[59] Castor M. Goliama, "The Gospel of Prosperity in African Pentecostalism: A Theological and Pastoral Challenge to the Catholic Church – With Reference to the Archdiocese of Songea, Tanzania" (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Vienna, 2013), 293.

understanding of suffering and triumph. It underscores the need for a contextual theology that respects cultural heritage while engaging with global Christian traditions. It promotes a theology that integrates the experiences of marginalization and resilience, aligning with the African context's emphasis on community solidarity and hope. Secondly, it challenges African Christians to embody a faith that is both deeply rooted in the cross and actively engaged in social justice, aligning with the call to address systemic injustices and support community development. Thirdly, cruciform theology reveals its huge impact on understanding the intersection of faith and political power. Cruciformity, with its focus on the cross as a symbol of sacrifice and redemption, provides a unique perspective on political engagement and authority. It challenges conventional notions of power by emphasizing servant leadership and solidarity with the marginalized, in contrast to dominant power structures that often prioritize self-interest and oppression. In the political sphere, cruciform theology calls for a transformative approach to power—one that aligns with the principles of justice, humility, and self-sacrifice embodied in the cross. This perspective encourages political leaders and movements to adopt a stance of empathetic governance and ethical responsibility, fostering a more just and compassionate society. Moreover, Cruciformity invites believers to take responsible actions to care properly for the environment. To conclude, cruciform theology offers a rich and relevant framework for African Christianity, promoting a faith that is both resilient and engaged with the challenges of contemporary African life.

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