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JESUS CHRIST AND THE TRIPLE THREAT IN KENYA: CENTERING WOMEN'S EVERYDAY CHRISTOLOGIES AMONG LUO-*NYAMRECHE*-COMMUNITY HEALTH PROMOTERS IN SIAYA COUNTY

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ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

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DEDICATION

To every village boy and girl like myself who are daring to dream big, and daring to make small but steady steps towards their dreams;

To my late grandmother Rosebela Ojode *Nyar Kisumo*, to my late mother Sylvia Auma *Nyar Yimbo Magombe*, to my spiritual mother Phelesia Omondi *Nyar Magwar*, and Mary Otieno *min yudhe*, and to all women whose lived stories about Jesus have chanted down structural inequalities;To every person out there whose theologies and writings know no taboo subjects.

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ABSTRACT

Christians believe and assert that Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" is addressed to every individual and generation in every context. Therefore, the quest for a relatable Christ figure in touch with the lived realities of the people has remained a prolific area for theological inquiry. As such, this research is a theological exploration of a public health concern in Kenya addressing the question: "How is Jesus' promise of life in abundance appropriated in the context of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR) advocacy?" Through Narrative ethnography of stories from purposively sampled Luo-speaking women in church ministry and who are also community health volunteers known as *Nyamrerwa (singular) or Nyamreche (plural),* the study uses the African women Talitha cum hermeneutical framework to identify, theorize, highlight, and analyse women Christologies that are utilized in everyday life to promote Adolescents and Youth Sexual and reproductive health in the context of the triple threat challenge of Gender based violence, Teenage pregnancies, HIV infections. The study concludes that these women's Christologies are oral, embodied, and performed; are based on a hermeneutic of life and flourishing; are undergirded in Jesus' diakonia, and such Christologies bequeath the women with agency to curate and promote an everyday intersectional faith and health-based approach to the triple threat challenge. Such an approach enables adolescents and youths to contest, to rise, to live, and to thrive against religio-cultural structures and narratives that (re) produce and perpetuate all forms of exclusion and dehumanization based on gender, sexuality, and health status. The study contributes to African Christian theology and AYSRHR by illuminating African women's lived and oral Christologies at two interlinked levels: the ideological–discursive level, which engages questions of Jesus' identity and significance, and the material–experiential level, which attends to the micro-politics of AYSRHR, gender, sexuality, and health in everyday life.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

St. Paul's University Repository

DECLARATION AND STATEMENT ON AI USE.....ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....iii

DEDICATION.....iv

ABSTRACT.....v

ABBREVIATIONS.....ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....1

1.1 Background of the study.....1

1.1.1 Who are Community Health Promoters- *Nyamreche*?.....3

1.1.2 *Nyamreche,* The triple Threat challenge, and everyday faith responses.....13

1.2 Preliminary Literature Review.....18

1.3 Problem Statement.....28

1.4 Research objectives.....29

1.5 Research questions.....30

1.6 Research Methodology.....30

1.7 Research Hypothesis.....32

1.8 Scope of the study.....33

1.9 Conclusion and Chapters Outline.....34

CHAPTER TWO.....40

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF EVERYDAY, ORAL, AND LIVED CHRISTOLOGIES.....40

2.1 Introduction.....40

2.2 Masking and Unmasking of Jesus.....41

2.3 Oral and Lived Christologies (1st Century–Present).....49

2.3.1 The early Church Binitarian Spirituality.....52

2.3.2 The masking of Jesus in the Greco-Roman world.....57

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

St. Paul's University Repository

2.3.3 Jesus from the West to the Rest- the Eurocentric and colonial frameworks.....65

2.3.4 Jesus in Independent Africa- The "Christological crisis" and Patriarchal Vestiges 71

2.3.5. The African Women's Critique: Male voices alone do not suffice.....75

2.4 A new Challenge: The 'Jesus of *Tongaren*' and other Kenyan Jesus' Stories.....81

2.5 A Critical conclusion: *Qua vadis* Oral and Lived Christologies.....88

CHAPTER THREE:.....91

TOWARDS TALITHA CUM HERMENEUTICS AS A DECOLONIAL STORY TELLING METHODOLOGY.....91

3.1 Introduction.....91

3.2 The Necessity of a Methodological Shift.....92

3.3 Talitha Cum Hermeneutics.....98

3.4 Talitha Cum Hermeneutic as a Decolonial Pathway.....106

3.5 The intersections of Talitha Cum Hermeneutics and Narratology method.....112

3.6 Conclusion.....116

CHAPTER FOUR:.....121

REFRAMING AN EVERYDAY DIAKONIA CHRISTOLOGY OF THE NYAMRERECHE.....121

4.1 Introduction.....121

4.2. Theological Significance of *Nyamreche* ways of Knowing.....123

4.3 Situating the *Nyamreche* within Their Context of Theological Meaning-Making.....126

4.4 The Jesus of the *Nyamreche*: Actively ever present in all Areas of life.....131

4.5 Form and shape of *Nyamrereche* Christologies.....143

4.6 Conclusion.....149

CHAPTER FIVE:.....155

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

St. Paul's University Repository

NYAMRECHE CHRISTOLOGIES AND THE TRIPLE THREAT RESPONSE: A FAITH, HEALTH, AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO SRHR.....155

5.1 Introduction.....155

5.2 Foregrounding An-Other Thought, An-Other Logic, An-Other Language.'.....156

5.3 Relationship between Theological Discourses and SRHR in Kenya.....162

5.4 *Nyamreche* Vision for Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality of SRHR 175

5.5 *Nyamreche* intersectional Approach: faith, health, and rights based interventions....188

5.6 Conclusion: Reimagining Christology as a Tool for SRHR Justice.....193

CHAPTER SIX:.....196

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....196

6.1 Summary of findings and conclusions.....196

6.2 Recommendations and Directions for Future Inquiry.....202

6.3 Conclusion.....204

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....212

APPENDICES.....241

APPENDICE I: ETHICS CLEARANCE AND RESEARCH PERMISSIONS FROM NACOSTI.....241

APPENDICE 11: ETHICS CLEARANCE AND RESEARCH PERMISSIONS FROM ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY.....242

APPENDICE III. CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS.....243

APPENDICE IV: QUESTIONNAIRE.....245

APPENDICE V. THE MAP AND LOCATION OF SIAYA COUNTY.....251

APPENDICE VI. MAP AND LOCATION OF SIAYA SUB COUNTY.....252

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

St. Paul's University Repository

ABBREVIATIONS

AAAQ- Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality of SRHR

ACK – Anglican Church of Kenya

ACT- African Christian Theologies

AWT – African Women Theologies

AYSRHR – Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

CCAWT- Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

CHP- Community Health Promoters *(Nyamrerwa* (singular) *or Nymarehe* (plural)

CHU- Community Health Unit

CHV- Community Health Volunteers *(Nyamrerwa (singular) or Nyamarehe (plural)*

CSE- Comprehensive Sexuality Education

ESCR- (The Committee on) Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

GBV- Gender based Violence

ISJA- Intersectional, See, Judge and Act

NACOSTI- The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

SGBV- Sexual and Gender based Violence

SPU- St. Paul's University

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

UN- United Nations

UN-ESCR- The United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

WCC- World Council of Churches

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

This study opens with a personal reflection rooted in the experiences of my mother and grandmother, whose fireplace stories about Jesus shaped my early imagination of faith. Through their narratives, I witnessed and experienced how Jesus was invoked as a compassionate presence responding to the everyday challenges and anxieties they faced. This experience can best be restated using Kärkkäinen's idea when he states that, "some of the most profound Christological truths may come from the mouths of an illiterate elder of the community or a grandmother in the family," (Kärkkäinen, 2003:247). Kärkkäinen's statement seems to suggest that deep and meaningful insights into who Christ is do not emerge only from theologians, scholars, or academic institutions. Instead, some of the most authentic and profound understandings of Jesus can come from ordinary people, such as community elders or grandmothers, who may not have formal theological training but draw on lived experience, cultural wisdom, and embodied faith. Their Christological insights are shaped by real-life struggles, storytelling, and practical engagement with faith in daily life (Amoah and Oduyoye, 1988:42). This argument highlights the value of grassroots, lived, and experiential theology, affirming that Christology is not the exclusive domain of academic discourse, but is also constructed, nurtured, and articulated within everyday communal and familial contexts.

Further, the argument underscores the importance of locally grounded Christologies that emerge from people's lived experiences, an approach reflected in Kiboi's (2017) work among the Sabaot. His exploration of Christ through the indigenous concept of *Worgoondet* (a Sabaot/Kalenjin cultural and religious term which refers to a traditional Sabaot religious mediator, ritual specialist, or revered spiritual leader who serves as an intermediary between

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

the community, ancestors, and God) similarly demonstrates that profound Christological meaning arises when faith is interpreted through familiar cultural symbols and narratives. Both the grassroots wisdom of grandmothers and the Sabaot inculturation of Christ reveal that authentic understandings of Jesus often grow from within the community, shaped by its stories, struggles, and cultural imagination.

Such arguments capture the story of my grandmother and mother's experience with Jesus Christ succinctly. My grandmother and mother were my first teachers of theology right at their fireplace. I was only seven years old during the Easter Sunday of the year 2000 when our Sunday school teacher suggested that the risen lord was walking in the neighborhood as a testimony that all forces of evil in the neighborhood were defeated. Having heard stories of evil spirits roaming the village at night, I was curious to know when Jesus would be arriving at our doorstep to destroy the 'evil spirits' around our home. That night in the fireplace, I asked my grandmother and mother when Jesus would be arriving home. My grandmother responded emphatically that ''Jesus is always here with us, and there is no evil force that can be near here.' This answer raised more curiosity and questions about Jesus. This fireplace became my first theological school where these curious questions were discussed.

This experiences and assertions resonate with John S. Pobee's (1979) assertion that "African theology must begin with the experiences of the people, for Jesus Christ must make sense in their setting if he is to be acknowledged as truly Lord and Savior" (1979:27). My grandmother and mother were precisely such theologians of the hearth and fire place who first encountered Jesus Christ not in abstract theological formulations, but in the lived experiences of communities, in homes, folktales, songs, and everyday conversations. As a matter of fact, such traditional gathering around the fireplace to tell stories about Jesus and sharing

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knowledge about what Jesus is doing hasn't been extinguished in our modern and postmodern world (Roemer, Michael, 1995). These have remained places where orality, embodiment, and performativity of lived faith in Jesus are harnessed for their transformative powers.

This present study focuses on such lived and embodied Christologies expressed by Luo-speaking Community Health Promoters (CHPs), also nationally recognized as Community Health Volunteers (CHVs), and locally referred to in Luo as Nyamrerwa (Singular) or *Nyamreche* (plural). The study specifically focuses on CHPs who are also involved in church ministry. These women operate at the intersection of community health work and church ministry, bringing their faith into daily practices that engage directly with pressing social and health challenges. By examining their experiences, the study highlights how these women articulate and perform Christology in ways that are deeply contextual, responsive to local realities, and intertwined with their roles as caregivers, mentors, and advocates for adolescents and youth. Their engagement offers a rich lens for understanding how theology is not only taught or preached but also lived, negotiated, and enacted within both spiritual and public health spheres, demonstrating the profound ways in which everyday faith informs action in the community.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

1.1.1 Who are Community Health Promoters- *Nyamreche*?

From the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Health (MOH) website, the terms Community Health Promoters (CHPs) and Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) are essentially used interchangeably and refer to the same role (MOH, 2010). However, there's growing recognition that the term "Community Health Promoters" is more accurate and reflects the broader scope of their responsibilities. (MOH, 2010) The ministry further defines CHPs as: "Community Health Promoters (CHPs) are trained members of the community who

work as a link between the community and formal health facilities, and who play a crucial role in addressing health inequalities by bringing essential health services closer to the people, especially those in rural and underserved areas," (MOH, 2010). CHPs work within a Community Health Unit (CHU) ((MOH, 2010). From the MOH website, CHU is a "health service delivery structure within a defined geographical area covering a population of approximately 5,000 people, and where each unit is assigned one Community Health Assistant (CHA) and 10 CHVs now known as CHPs who offer promotive, preventative and basic curative health services," (MOH, 2010) The CHUs are governed by a Community Health Committee (CHC) and each CHU is linked to a specific Health facility," (MOH, 2010).

Building on this framework, this study pays close attention to the role of *Nyamreche* in addressing the "triple threat" of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections in their communities. As trained Community Health Promoters operating within Community Health Units, these women are uniquely positioned to bridge formal health services and local populations, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Beyond their technical responsibilities, the study explores how *Nyamreche* draw on their lived faith and everyday Christologies to guide, counsel, and educate adolescents and youth on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Their ministry is thus not only a conduit for health interventions but also a space where theological reflection and practical action intersect. By examining their experiences, the research highlights how Christological narratives and faith-informed practices serve as tools for promoting SRHR, empowering young people to navigate social and cultural barriers, challenge harmful norms, and exercise agency over their health and well-being. In this way, *Nyamreche* serves as both a health promoter and a community

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theologian, demonstrating the transformative potential of faith-engaged leadership in addressing pressing public health challenges.

In the Luo community, the localized title of the CHVs as *Nyamrerwa* (singular) and *Nyamrerwas* (plural) (Aura, 2014; Shiino, 2014; Wambiya, 2023) needs to be explored. Thus, the terms *Nyamrerwa* and *Nyamreche* have evolved among the Luo community of Kenya. While today *Nyamrerwa* refers to a Community Health Volunteer (CHVs) (Wambiya, 2023:06), the term was originally designated to traditional maternal healthcare provider (Aura, 2014:4), also known as midwives (Shiino, 2014:13). Traditionally, *Nyamreche* were old women among the Luo community who assisted women during pregnancy, delivery, and care of newborns (Aura, 2014:5), and also dealt with healing misfortunes from the violation of mores on issues of sexuality (Shiino, 2014:1). *Nyamreche* gave specific advice to pregnant women regarding pregnancy, delivery, maternal health, infant health, and socio-cultural and spiritual obligations of parenting (Shino, 2014:3). *Nyamrerwa* also had a significant role in the village, because of her knowledge of various herbs to heal all sorts of ailments (Shino, 2014:3). In the recent past, the role and place of *Nyamreche* have further been recognized and defined by the government about health requirements and standards of the day, hence the term CHVs or CHPs. These two terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

The *Nyamreche*, whose participation in this study informed the key theological tropes of this dissertation, are ten remarkable community health volunteers whose lived experiences, community engagements, and faith commitments contributed richly to the reflections presented here. Their names, stories, and faith journeys offer profound insights into the intersection of health work, faith leadership, and community service in Siaya County. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms will be used

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throughout this study. This ensures that any *Nyamrerwa* who shared their personal experiences, faith reflections, and community engagement practices cannot be identified individually, safeguarding them from any potential social, professional, or community repercussions. Anonymity also encourages openness and honesty during data collection, allowing participants to speak freely about sensitive topics related to health, gender, sexuality, and faith without fear of judgment or stigma.

In this study, the ten *Nyamreche* participants will be referred to using unique research participant numbers. P01 represents Research Participant Number one. P02 represents Research Participant Number two. P03 represents Research Participant Number three. P04 represents Research Participant Number four. P05 represents Research Participant Number five. P06 represents Research Participant Number six. P07 represents Research Participant Number seven. P08 represents Research Participant Number eight. P09 represents Research Participant Number nine. P10 represents Research Participant Number ten. These ten *Nyamreche,* whose participation in this study informed the key theological tropes explored, are remarkable community health volunteers whose anonymity is maintained to ensure confidentiality and protect their privacy.

Nyamrerwa (P01) is a community health promoter (CHP) serving in Kirindo area within the Bar Agulu Community Health Unit in Siaya Sub-County. At 48 years old, she stands out as a women's leader in the Catholic Women Association within her small Christian community (commonly known as *Jumuia* in Kiswahili and *Duol* in Luo). She has faithfully served as a *Nyamrerwa* since 2012, a role she took up after being selected and endorsed by her village community. Her work is a testimony to her dedication to both community health and faith leadership. Her story of following Jesus in the double vocation of health service and

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church leadership in the Roman Catholic Church forms a significant part of this study's reflection on lived faith.

Nyamrerwa (P02), aged 60, serves as a CHP in Kaluo village within the Nyamila Community Health Unit. As Chairperson of Church Development in the Church of Christ in Africa — an African Independent Church known locally as *Johera* — she brings a deep well of experience, having started as a traditional midwife (*Nyamrerwa*) in 1992. In 2011, she was identified by her village headman and trained by the Catholic Mission Hospital in Mbaga Parish on community health and hygiene, after which she transitioned into her role as a community health volunteer. Her life and ministry reflect a dynamic interplay of indigenous practice, formal health training, and Christian leadership within an African Independent Church context. Her story enriches this study's exploration of faith, tradition, and community health.

Nyamrerwa (P03) is a 53-year-old CHP from Ulore Village, also within the Bar Agulu Community Health Unit. Serving as a mission secretary in the Legion Maria of African Church Mission, an African Independent Church known as *Legion Maria* or *Jolejo* in Luo, she brings together the traditions of traditional midwifery and community health work. With years of experience in both areas, and after several trainings in community health, nutrition, and hygiene, she became a CHP. Her story speaks to the synthesis of indigenous faith practices and modern health interventions, making her Jesus story a critical reflection on how faith movements like *Legion Maria* empower women in both spiritual and community leaderships.

Nyamrerwa (P04), aged 58, is a community health promoter in Masanga and Unyolo Villages under the Kodiere Community Health Unit. She is a women's leader in The Holy Spirit Church — a charismatic African Independent Church known in Luo as *Roho Mowar*

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Israel. Since 2019, Petronila has faithfully served as a CHP, blending her role in the health sector with active leadership in her faith community. Her experience demonstrates how charismatic spirituality and community health work can converge to serve the holistic well-being of local communities. Her Jesus story reflects charismatic faith intersecting with grassroots health advocacy.

Nyamrerwa (P05), a 73-year-old CHP from Rabango Village within the Karapul Community Health Unit, is a retired leader from various ministries within the Anglican Church, including the Mothers' Union, the Cathedral Women's Desk, and *Nyoluoro* (cell groups in Luo). Since her appointment in 2010, she has served as a community health volunteer for fourteen years. Her deep involvement in Anglican Church structures and her sustained commitment to community health make her Jesus story one of enduring faith, service, and leadership. Her narrative sheds light on the critical role of senior women in faith communities as custodians of both spiritual and social welfare.

Nyamrerwa (P06) is a young community health promoter working in *Got Oyenga* B within the Nyamila Community Health Unit. At just 28 years old, Joan stands as a youth leader in the Anglican Church. She became a *Nyamrerwa* at the age of 24 through an informal apprenticeship under her father, a male community health volunteer with over two decades of experience. Her Jesus story is a compelling reflection on intergenerational knowledge transfer, the role of youth in health ministry, and the shaping of young leaders within faith communities. Her narrative embodies the hope of continuity and the emergence of new voices in faith and community health spaces.

Nyamrerwa (P07), serving in Mahola within the Ulawe Community Health Unit, is a lay minister, also called a lay reader or *japuonj Kanisa* in Luo in the Anglican Church of

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Kenya. Since 2018, she has combined her role as a trained community health volunteer with that of a lay minister, creating a unique blend of spiritual guidance and health advocacy in her ministry. Her Jesus story is a testament to how lay leadership within the church can extend into transformative community service, showcasing the mutual reinforcement between pastoral care and public health work.

Nyamrerwa (P08) works within Baragulu Villages under the Baragulu Community Health Unit. As a Sunday School teacher in the New Apostolic Church, she brings a unique perspective to community health, having served as a CHP since 2011. Her dual role as a faith educator for children and a community health promoter highlights the vital connection between early spiritual formation and holistic community care. Dorcas's Jesus story emphasizes the nurturing role of faith leaders who also serve as health advocates in their communities.

Nyamrerwa (P09) serves in Karapul within the Karapul Community Health Unit, which is affiliated with the County Referral Hospital in Siaya Sub-County. She is a women's leader in the BGRM Pentecostal Church in Siaya Town and has been a CHP since 2010. Her story reflects the vibrant intersection of Pentecostal women's leadership and grassroots health ministry. Her Jesus story underscores the critical role of Pentecostal women leaders in fostering community health initiatives while sustaining dynamic faith communities.

Nyamrerwa (P10) is a CHP serving in Nyandiwa within the Nyandiwa Community Health Unit of the County Referral Hospital. As an ordained pastor in Christ the King (CTK) Church, a Pentecostal congregation in Siaya Town, she brings pastoral leadership into her community health role. Since 2019, she has served as a CHP, embodying the fusion of pastoral ministry and public health service. Her Jesus story highlights how ordained women pastors

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can be pivotal agents of change in both the church and the community, offering spiritual guidance alongside practical health interventions.

These ten *Nyamreche* offered rich insights through their lived experiences, faith commitments, and dedication to community service. Their narratives of Jesus, as reflected in this study, demonstrate how faith, health, and leadership intersect in ways that are both practical and transformative. Operating at the intersection of church ministry and community health promotion, they exemplify how grassroots women's leadership can shape both spiritual and social life through compassionate care, mentorship, and advocacy. Their engagement reveals how theological knowledge, particularly everyday Christologies, is enacted in daily practices to address pressing challenges such as gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections. By integrating faith with health promotion, these women provide a model of leadership that is relational, ethical, and responsive to the holistic needs of their communities, highlighting the powerful role of faith-informed action in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights among adolescents and youth.

These *Nyamreche, like my grandmother and mother's lack of theological education, do not stop them from reflecting critically on the place of faith and the person of Jesus in a context of multiple forces that subvert* and vandalize the dignity of women and other systemically marginalized persons in the community. This study focused *on Nyamreche, as a subset of grassroots women in Siaya County of Kenya who are on* the frontline in promoting the flourishing of lives through access to sexual and reproductive health-related services and information among girls and key populations. There are also CHPs who are men. However, the study targeted CHPs who are women and who are also involved in church life as lay or ordained ministers. The selection of this subset of women was important for the study to

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establish whether and how their knowledge of Jesus Christ and which is performed in their daily lives as community health volunteers influence their response to the triple threat challenge, and to explore how such an interplay between faith and life expressed in verbal articulations and embodied practices, offer relatable Christologies from a tripartite perspective of gender, sexuality, and health.

The work of *Nyamreche*, who are also Christians, emerges as both significant and prophetic in contexts where religion often serves as a barrier to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In many communities, particularly in deeply religious settings like Siaya County, assertions of SRHR are frequently dismissed as foreign, immoral, or anti-Christian. As Mombo and Adera (2024:40) observe, this dismissal creates entrenched barriers to access, expression, and the realization of rights, especially for women and young people. In these contexts, religion is not a neutral backdrop but an active social institution that frames, produces, and disseminates dominant public discourses and moral pedagogies (Kaoma, 2018:48).

When it comes to matters of sexuality and reproduction, faith communities often provide the primary language, symbols, and scripts through which these issues are negotiated (Valentine, G., & Waite, L., 2012). Ironically, even though many religious texts and traditions affirm holistic knowledge and service, including aspects of sexual and reproductive well-being, contemporary religious narratives have become some of the greatest obstacles to SRHR intervention strategies (Mombo and Adera, 2024, p. 29). Theologies, sermons, pastoral care, and religious education serve as the main moral compass for many believers, shaping personal and communal attitudes toward sexuality, gender roles, and health (Vanderbeke, 2023). These narratives do not simply reflect existing community values; they actively construct the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

cultural, social, and institutional environments in which SRHR policies are accepted, resisted, or transformed.

Furthermore, religious rhetoric, as Vik, Ingrid, and Moe (2019:10) highlight, often leans toward moral regulation and sexual control. Despite scriptural possibilities for advocating holistic wellness and justice, contemporary faith-based discourse tends to frame SRHR as incompatible with Christian values. This tension exposes a critical dissonance between the liberative potential within religious traditions and the restrictive interpretations commonly promoted in lived practice. In regions facing compounded health challenges such as HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and teenage pregnancies, this theological gap becomes particularly harmful, perpetuating stigma, silence, and misinformation.

In this landscape, the Christian *Nyamreche's* role becomes profoundly important. As faith-rooted community health volunteers, they inhabit a unique intersection between faith leadership and health advocacy. They embody a lived theology that bridges the gap between restrictive religious rhetoric and the everyday realities of community care. By virtue of their dual identity as trusted church leaders and frontline health workers, Christian *Nyamreche* challenges harmful narratives from within the religious space, offering alternative scripts that affirm dignity, promote holistic wellness, and support SRHR in culturally sensitive ways. Their work subtly but powerfully contests the narrative that faith and SRHR are incompatible, showing through action and word that Christian service includes advocating for the health, agency, and rights of the vulnerable.

Moreover, the *Nyamreche's* everyday engagement with families, youth, and women positions them as key agents in reshaping community attitudes. They do not simply provide health services; they offer pastoral presence, listen with empathy, and model faith-informed

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

advocacy that dignifies every person's right to health and well-being. In contexts where religious leaders often perpetuate stigma or silence around SRHR, the witness of these Christian community health workers introduces a prophetic voice of care, compassion, and justice, one that affirms that faith can be a source of healing rather than harm.

Their contribution is therefore not merely about delivering services but about redefining the theological and pastoral landscape of their communities. By integrating SRHR advocacy into their Christian witness, they exemplify a theology that is incarnational and one that does not shy away from the messy realities of human life but meets people where they are. In doing so, they create spaces for critical dialogue, transformative action, and hope in contexts often marked by theological resistance to SRHR. Their work becomes a vital site for contesting the moral regulation of sexuality and for imagining a faith practice that upholds justice, dignity, and holistic health for all.

1.1.2 *Nyamreche,* The triple Threat challenge, and everyday faith responses.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the government of Kenya has committed to ending HIV and AIDS as a public health threat and reducing teenage pregnancies by 2030, as well as eliminating gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, by 2026 (ICPD 25, Nairobi, Kenya). However, in 2023, the country experienced a rise in new HIV infections among adolescents, increasing cases of teenage pregnancies, and rampant sexual and gender-based violence, which collectively impede progress toward these targets (The National Syndemic Diseases Control Council, February 2023). These overlapping challenges highlight a complex web of vulnerabilities that profoundly affect adolescents' and young people's health, education, economic opportunities, and overall well-being.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

To address these interrelated issues, the National Syndemic Diseases Control Council (NSDCC) introduced the concept of the "triple threat" to capture the clustering of HIV infection, sexual and gender-based violence, and teenage pregnancies among adolescents and youth. Framed as a syndemic, this concept emphasizes how multiple health problems interact with social, economic, and cultural inequalities to exacerbate vulnerabilities (Singer, 2009, p. 28). In response, the government and its multi-agency partners have adopted the "End the Triple Threat" campaign as a coordinated strategy, highlighting a whole-of-government approach to tackling these interconnected challenges and promoting adolescent and youth health (Jervin, 2022, p. 1).

The triple threat of HIV, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence is intrinsically linked to the broader framework of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and, more specifically, Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR). SRHR, as defined by Mombo and Adera (2024:38), encompasses a range of human rights related to sexuality and reproduction, including access to sexual health information and services, emphasizing human dignity, well-being, and agency. Ghebreyesus and Kanem (2018:2586) further highlight the critical dimensions of bodily autonomy, freedom from coercion or violence, and non-discrimination in matters of gender and sexuality, underlining the direct connection between SRHR and the triple threat. Adolescents and youth are particularly vulnerable, often caught in a "triple-bind" of cultural silence, religious moralism, and policy neglect (Mombo & Adera, 2024, p. 40), which compounds the risks posed by HIV, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence (Dick et al., 2024, p. 88).

Addressing the triple threat, therefore, requires interventions that go beyond biomedical strategies to include rights-based, culturally sensitive, and youth-responsive

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

approaches. As emphasized by Peters and Bijlmakers (2024) and Aibangbee et al. (2024), effective strategies must integrate community engagement, policy advocacy, and faith-sensitive frameworks that challenge harmful social norms while empowering young people to exercise their SRHR. Faith communities, despite sometimes perpetuating restrictive moral discourses (Tamale, 2014; Kaoma, 2018), also offer opportunities to harness everyday theological reflections and Christologies to support adolescent and youth well-being (Mombo & Adera, 2024:29–40). By situating SRHR within both a human rights and faith-informed discourse, this study underscores how addressing cultural, religious, and structural barriers is essential for mitigating the triple threat and promoting holistic sexual and reproductive health outcomes among adolescents and young people in Kenya.

While the "triple threat" framework highlights a contemporary public health and policy challenge, the overlapping issues of HIV, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence are not entirely new phenomena within Kenyan communities. These challenges have long been experienced, interpreted, and responded to at the grassroots level, particularly through the lived faith and resilience of ordinary women. Personal narratives and family histories, such as those of my grandmother, mother, and Nyamreche, reveal how encounters with suffering, loss, and social injustices were continually interpreted through the lens of Jesus' presence and care. Such experiences illustrate that, alongside governmental and institutional strategies, communities have historically relied on faith-based frameworks and everyday Christologies to navigate and address intersecting vulnerabilities, offering both spiritual guidance and practical resilience in the face of structural and social adversities.

For instance, during the service of my ordination into priesthood on December 17, 2017, at the age of twenty-four, I honoured my grandmother to grace the occasion as the guest

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

of honour, partly because in everyday lived traditional Luo ethos, she was 'my wife,' and partly because at their fireplace, they nurtured me in faith together with my mother (Both of them have since joined the great assembly of ancestors in heaven). In her speech during this occasion, she observed how my ordination was her other rendezvous with Jesus whom she had constantly encountered in the face of domestic violence that had claimed the lives of her two daughters in the hands of their husbands, and in the stories of my own mother's struggle with a terminal illness and in raising a son who through his demeanour and behaviour did not fit within the cultural expectations of a male child. I could vividly recall these stories because I was old enough to witness the deaths of my two aunties, my mother's battle with a terminal illness, and to understand my mother's comments to her sisters in the East African Revival fellowship movement in the village that "this is my son who is my daughter too." She then led the congregation in singing her favorite song about Jesus, a song that she and my mother had made us sing every single night before going to bed as little children. The song is hymn number 84 in the Luo Anglican hymn book: *Yesu Ohera Jakony Mapako* (Jesus has loved me; He is my ever-present help whom I glorify).

My mother and grandmother's fireplace Christologies expressed as lived theologies, her speech and her song about Jesus are reminiscent of her moral agency that I witnessed as a child in their acts of resisting violence against women, wrestling with the threats of life, confronting all forms of gender based violence, and reclaiming the flourishing and abundance of life that Jesus gives to all people regardless of their gender, health issues or sexual orientation. Their story highlights how their faith and their knowledge of Jesus Christ are "performed in their daily life," (Amoah and Oduyoye, 1988, p. 45).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Similarly, throughout the study, the *Nyamreche* shared their personal stories about their work and the role of Jesus in their service to the community. They emphasized how Jesus' teachings and presence inspired their actions in addressing critical health and social issues such as teenage pregnancy, HIV, family violence, and healthcare accessibility. Their stories reflected a deep commitment to improving the lives of those marginalized or suffering in their communities, despite facing opposition and limited support from some church leaders. They described Jesus as a compassionate figure who challenged societal norms and offered healing and hope to all people, regardless of their circumstances. Many felt a sense of divine affirmation in their work, recognizing that their efforts aligned with Jesus' mission of love, healing, and service. They emphasized that Jesus' love transcended discrimination and that his message of inclusivity and care for the most vulnerable was central to their own work. Despite the difficulties they faced, the *Nyamreche* remained steadfast in their belief that Jesus supported their efforts to bring about positive change in their communities, particularly in areas where silence and stigma had long prevailed.

Based on these observations, the task of this study was to explore such an interplay between 'faith and life," (Amoah and Oduyoye, 1988, p. 42), and how such an interplay expressed in "verbal articulations and embodied practices," (Joziasse, 2020, p. 24), offer relatable Christologies that are utilized; albeit against the grain, to promote adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health in the context of the triple threat challenge- Gender based violence, Teenage pregnancies, HIV infections. Christology was preferred for this study as a locus of progressive and liberation imaginaries because of its place in African Christianity. Diane Stinton (2011) asserts that "at the core of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ, and consequently, the very core of Christian theology is Christology,"

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

(2011:4). Other scholars such as Mugambi and Magesa (1989), Dominic Nwuzor (1997), Nasimiyu Wasike (1989), Teresia Hinga (1992), Mercy Oduyoye (2001), Thomas Bohache (2008), Laurine Maseno (2015) Esther Mombo and Heleen Joziassse (2023), among others, also affirm the central place of Jesus Christ in African Christianity.

These scholars agree that for so many years in Africa, Christology has been formulated in light of the effects of colonialism, race, ethnicity, class, gender, poverty, diseases, culture and many other forms of intersecting identities and experiences of oppression. However, Christological formulations at the intersection of religion and reproductive health and rights remain under theorized. This present study sought to address this gap. This study, therefore, sought to fill this critical gap by exploring how African oral and lived Christologies, especially those articulated through women's everyday faith practices, can inform the Christological framework that speaks directly to issues of adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (AYSRHR) in contemporary Kenyan contexts.

1.2 Preliminary Literature Review

The question about Jesus in Africa and Jesus in African women's experiences has received considerable attention in scholarship in Africa to the extent that Tinyiko Sam Maluleke asked: "Will Jesus ever be the same again: What are the Africans doing to Him" (Maluleke, 1997)? In answering these questions, Maluleke celebrates and highlights the freedom, boldness and playfulness with which Christ has been reimaged in Africa (Maluleke, 1997, p. 15). Maluleke further notes that "Africans are talking Jesus by the hand teaching him a few African moves and sensitizing him to local issues and conditions" (Maluleke, 1997 p.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

24). Maluleke's assertion seems to agree with Bishop Henry Okulu's observations on where theologies, in this case, Christologies, exist in Africa:

> "When we are looking for African Theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church, to Christian homes, to listen to those spontaneously uttered prayers before people go to bed. We must listen to the throbbing drumbeats and the clapping of hands accompanying the impromptu singing in the independent churches. We must look at the way in which Christianity is being planted in Africa through music, drama, songs, dance, art, and paintings. We must listen to the preaching of a sophisticated pastor as well as to that simple village vicar…. Can it be that all this is an empty show? It is impossible. This then is African Theology," (Okullu 1974, p. 54)

In this observation, Okullu seems to be arguing that in the search for theologies, and in this case Christologies, in Africa, theological reflection must emerge from lived faith experiences rather than being imposed through external doctrinal frameworks. Okullu's vision suggests that African theology is not a detached intellectual exercise but a dynamic, participatory process shaped by the lived encounters of faith communities with the divine. By emphasizing the spontaneous prayers, vibrant music, and embodied expressions of faith within African Christian communities, Okullu, like Maluleke, underscores the necessity of grounding theology in the cultural and social realities of African believers. A concise survey of Christologies in Africa seems to be taking a similar trajectory but with some challenges.

The various social locations of answering Jesus' question "whom do you say I am?" have presented several themes and Christological formulations in Africa. A survey of them all is beyond the scope of this study. One overarching theme of these formulations, however, is the quest to comprehend Jesus' incarnation, atonement, and diakonia within African categories. In this regard, a proliferation of Christological formulations and reflections on essays and textual forms in Africa was witnessed from the 1980s onwards (Stinton, 2011, p. 19). Kwame Bediako (1995) observes that this emergence was significant since systematic

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

formulations of who Jesus was in Africa were conspicuously absent or minimal during the first phase of modern African Theology between the 1950s and 1980s (1995:59).

Stinton (2011) further asserts that although the 1969 first assembly of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC- officially constituted in Kampala in 1963) in Abijan affirmed that in order to achieve selfhood for the African Church, Christ must be centre of her theology, Christological writings only rose to prominent position in 1980s (2011:19). She further notes that this period marked a shift in theological development in Africa with a new generation of scholars exploring additional themes in theology by employing genuinely African categories which were legitimated by the first generation, (2011:23). At this level, the study pays attention to four incipient motifs: Stanger/Guest (Enyi Ben Udo), Ancestor/Universal saviour (Kwame Bediako), brother-ancestor (Charles Nyamiti), and Crucified among Cross bearers (Takatso Mofokeng).

Incipient theology refers to the very beginning stages of theological thought or development, particularly when it emerges from the experiences and contexts of marginalized communities or those outside traditional power structures (Swart, 2008). It is the phase in which theological reflection begins to take shape, often driven by a pressing need to understand and interpret religious beliefs in light of specific lived realities (Gutierrez, 1973; Bevans, 2002). Incipient theology often arises from the experiences of people who are not part of the dominant theological discourse. These may include communities living in poverty, facing systemic discrimination, or situated within cultures historically different from the traditional centers of theological authority, such as Europe and North America (Smith, 1991). Their theological articulations often arise from the urgency of survival, dignity, and justice rather than from academic inquiry. At this stage, theological ideas are being formulated and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

articulated in a nascent state. Incipient theology does not present fully matured systematic theologies but rather seeds of thought that begin to critique, supplement, or reimagine traditional theological frameworks (Cone, 1975).

A defining feature of incipient theology is its deep rooting in specific socio-political and cultural contexts. Rather than presenting theology as a universal or abstract endeavor, it highlights how beliefs are profoundly shaped by local histories, struggles, and worldviews (Bevans, 2002). In this sense, theology becomes a living, dynamic response to the real conditions of people's lives rather than a static system of thought. Incipient theology emphasizes praxis—the interaction between action and reflection. Theologians at this stage focus on how theological insight can be lived out in practice, often directing attention to social transformation, political resistance, and cultural affirmation (Gutierrez, 1973). Thus, theology becomes a tool not only for understanding faith but also for inspiring and guiding tangible change. Examples of incipient theology include the early stages of Latin American liberation theology, where grassroots Christian communities began articulating a theology of liberation in response to systemic oppression and poverty (Gutierrez, 1973). These theologies are often preliminary, flexible, and responsive, reflecting the lived realities of the communities that birth them.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

The earliest incipient Christology in this regard, though expressed primarily in textual and academic form, is the motif of Jesus as a stranger in Africa. This was in the doctoral study of Enyi Ben Udo at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1983, and later published as 'Guest Christology: An interpretative view of the Christological problem in Africa," (1988:73). In this work, Udo argues that Christ is a stranger in Africa (1988:73). He

is a stranger because of how he was introduced in Africa, packed in colonization. He asserts that "Christ entered the African scene as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant invalidating the history and institutions of a people in order to impose his rule upon them" (1983:64). He then presents three motifs of *Bongoka* (healer), liberator, and *Christus*-victor as alternative Christological paradigms to the received Christology. These three are premised on the notion of Christ as a guest who must first be welcomed according to indigenous concepts of norms and honor; he must then reside intimately among them, and on this basis, he can be recognized as no longer a guest but as our kin (1983:65).

This shift from portraying Jesus as a "stranger" to a "guest" is a valuable attempt to decolonize Christological imagination. However, its continued reliance on the motifs of "Liberator" and *Christus Victor* risks retaining conquest-laden imagery that subtly reinforces neo-colonial undertones. While the "Healer" motif offers a more contextually life-giving framework, especially given the deep spiritual, social, political, and economic wounds inflicted during mission and colonial encounters, Udo does not sufficiently interrogate how triumphalist narratives may undermine his decolonizing intent. Some insights into Udo's shortcomings can be found in Kwame Bediako's work, Udo's contemporaries who wrote on the same subject in 1983. While Udo's formulation is based on a socio-cultural interpretation of who Jesus is, Kwame Bediako's (1983) conception is grounded in the religious and spiritual universe of African consciousness that informs socio-cultural sensibilities.

In his work published in 1983, Bediako notes that the greatest shortfall of the missionaries was their failure to appreciate the primary universality of the gospel, of Christ, and hence his intimate relevance to all human contexts, and the resultant problem of presentation of Jesus masked in Eurocentric religious traditions (1983:132). This

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

notwithstanding, Bediako objects to the idea that Jesus is a stranger in Africa, but a universal savior and as such, also the savior of the African world (1983:133). Yet, accepting Jesus as our saviour always involves "making him at home (as a guest) with our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings," (Bediako 1990, p. 5). With this assertion, he proposes an ancestor motif as more applicable and points out that: Jesus is "the only real and true Ancestor and source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage of ancestors," (1990:41,42). The Ancestor Christology, therefore, becomes the second incipient Christological motif in African Christianity.

This conception of Jesus as an ancestor is indeed valuable in reclaiming African religious and social heritage that was suppressed or demonized through colonial missionary Christianity. It restores continuity between African cosmologies and Christian faith, affirming the legitimacy of African symbols as theological categories. However, the motif often remains at the level of abstract academic formulation, circulating primarily in scholarly discourse rather than shaping the everyday spirituality of ordinary Christians. It tends not to filter into liturgy, pastoral practice, communal rituals, or the devotional imagination of congregations. As a result, while it succeeds intellectually in decolonizing Christology, it fails to offer a concrete, relatable, and embodied expression of Jesus that resonates with the lived faith, prayers, struggles, and ritual life of most African Christians.

Charles Nyamiti significantly advances the conversation on African Christology in his 1984 work, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*. He begins by examining ancestral beliefs within African religious heritage and then systematically reinterprets the Christian message through the lens of the ancestor motif. For Nyamiti, the ancestor becomes a comprehensive theological category, one that can serve as a "point of

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

departure for dogmatic theology, Christian morality, spirituality, liturgy, canon law, and catechesis" (Stinton, 2011, p. 26). Central to his formulation is the idea of Christ as both "Brother-Ancestor" and "Proto-Ancestor." As Brother-Ancestor, Christ is analogously related to believers in a manner similar to the relationship between the deceased and their immediate nuclear family, which Nyamiti considers the closest though not exclusive analogy for understanding Christ's relationship with Christians (Nyamiti, 1984, p. 16). As Proto-Ancestor, Christ is understood as the original, perfect, and foundational Ancestor from whom all forms of human ancestorship derive their meaning.

Through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ becomes the ultimate mediator of life, blessing, and communion between God and humanity, thereby fulfilling and surpassing the ancestral functions known in African cosmologies (Nyamiti, 1984). Despite its ground-breaking contribution to African Christological discourse, Nyamiti's approach tends to privilege metaphysical and philosophical speculation over concrete sociocultural analysis. His conceptualization of Christ as Ancestor, particularly the Proto-Ancestor construct, risks remaining overly abstract and detached from the everyday religious practices, struggles, and lived experiences of African Christian communities. Consequently, although intellectually rich, his ancestor Christology lacks the pastoral immediacy and contextual resonance necessary to inform liturgy, moral formation, healing practices, or communal spirituality among ordinary believers. By prioritizing metaphysical coherence, Nyamiti's model fails to adequately engage with contemporary African socio-historical realities marked by poverty, political instability, generational trauma, and shifting family and kinship structures. Thus, the transformative and liberative potential of the ancestor motif is diminished, as it does not

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

translate sufficiently into embodied, practical, and life-affirming expressions of faith in present-day African Christianity.

The fourth incipient Christological paradigm is from Takatso Mofokeng (1983: 5). He begins his treatise with two questions: "How can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation," and the second one is "How can I be liberated to become my authentic self?" To answer these questions, he advocates an epistemological break in a new praxis of liberation and a new theological language, a project where Christology is central (1983: 4). He therefore uses two concepts- black and praxis to paint a picture of what such a Christology would look like. Black, therefore, goes beyond colour to encompass "the commitment of the poor and marginalized who seek to realize their humanity through humble dependence on Jesus Christ and obedience to his radical demands for establishing true humanity" (1983:42). Praxis on the other hand is based on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the lord of history, Jesus continues "to live in community and in solidarity with them, suffering in every way with them, but inspiring the resurrection as oppressed peoples are empowered to become agents of their own history," (1983:42). While Mofokeng's conceptualization opens a great door for liberation and affirmation of humanity, the downside of his cross bearers' motif can be used to justify suffering and passivity in a context of systemic structures of oppression.

In summary, these four incipient Christologies laid the groundwork for further formulations due to the key questions they posed, sources, and methods employed, and the central themes proposed (Stinton, 2011, p. 28). These can be seen in subsequent developments within the inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction motifs in conceptualizing what African Christologies looked like. Liberation and inculturation paradigms have offered Africa

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

different motifs of Christ. The latter have images such as life giver, healer, power, victor, liberator, mediator, savior, redeemer, amongst others. The former includes images such as proto-ancestor, ancestor, master initiator, chief, elder brother, among others (Gathogo, 2015, p. 3). In locating Christology within the ambit reconstruction paradigm, Mugambi sees Christ as the African guest, who in the New Testament, is portrayed as one who is always at home with all peoples, cultures and languages. Mugambi further argues that the uniqueness of Christ as a guest above other ordinary guests in the African context is seen in his emphasis on the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class and hierarchical barriers (Mugambi, 1995:15).

The challenge posed by these incipient Christologies and their further developments is the trap of elitism and the privileged, abstract formulation by a few with skills in textual, critical, and systematic criticism. This is why many of the images of Christ from these formulations have not found roots in daily lived Christianity in many parts of Africa. Also, it is important to note that these frameworks and their resultant motifs of Jesus have been challenged as embedded in androcentric perspectives and imageries that are privileged in a patriarchal society (Oduyoye 1986, 1993, 2001; Kanyoro, 2001; Maseno 2004).

While acknowledging the value of inculturation in reimagining Jesus in Africa, women theologians have raised concerns that such theological projects failed to unmask the African cultures' vestiges of patriarchy, and as such, rendering the motifs of Christ therein not inclusive of all people regarding gender. For example, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1993) observed that inculturation frameworks failed to take into account patriarchal elements found in African cultures (1993:109). Her assertion coalesces with Musimbi Kanyoro, who argues that:

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> "we African women theologians make the claim that inculturation is not sufficient unless the cultures we reclaim are analyzed and are deemed worthy in terms of promoting justice and support for life and the dignity of women (Kanyoro 2001, p. 107).

Loreen Maseno (2004) also notes that inculturation has been tacitly gendered from a male perspective since traditionally, an analysis of women's subordination has not been integrated in the task of inculturation (Maseno 2004, p. 226). In view of this, Maseno further argues that for inculturation in Africa to adequately account for human life, it has to contend with not only the lives and thoughts of African males but also of African females (Maseno 2004:228). These three women theologians seem to argue that, for African Christologies to be truly inclusive, they must engage with both male and female realities, ensuring that theological constructs reflect the full breadth of African lived experience.

Within this array of issues and panoply of Christological formulations, the symbiotic relationship between lived and oral Christologies with the intersecting sexual and reproductive health/wellness among Adolescents and Youth in the context of the triple threat challenge- Gender based violence, Teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections still remains under theorized. This study therefore asks the question: how does a localized knowledge about Jesus manifest in the everydayness of sexual and reproductive health discourses, and how does these quest in everyday life shape the confessed and expressed knowledge about Jesus? Further, the value of lived and oral Christologies as an important paradigm in the twenty-first century in presenting a relatable Christ motif, and Christ figures who are ever present with the people of God at all times, still remain invisible due to the privileging of written and textual formulations. Based on these facts, the study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on Christologies in African Christianity by attempting to fill these two voids, with Nyamrereche in Siaya County, Kenya, as a key contributor.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

1.3 Problem Statement

In African Christianity, Christology has historically been shaped in response to major socio-political realities, including colonialism, race, ethnicity, class, gender, poverty, disease, and cultural dynamics (Mugambi & Magesa, 1989; Nasimiyu-Wasike, 1989; Stinton, 2011; Oduyoye, 2001; Teresia Hinga, 1992); Thomas Bohache; 2008; Laurine Maseno, 2015; Esther Mombo & Heleen Joziassse, 2023). These efforts have given rise to important liberation and contextual theologies. However, despite this rich engagement, Christological reflection at the intersection of religion and reproductive health and rights remains significantly under-theorized. Thus, a significant gap in how Christological thought addresses issues at the intersection of religion, reproductive health, and rights still persists.

Further, the everyday Christologies embodied in the lives of African women such as the "fireplace Christologies" of my mother and grandmother and the oral, embodied, and performed Christologies of *Nyamreche,* engage deeply with the challenges of violence, health threats, and human dignity, yet have remained largely invisible within formal theological discourses. Yet, their lived theologies, expressed through speech, song, moral agency, and resistance to gender-based violence and other life-threatening forces, show how Jesus is known and proclaimed not only in formal theology but also through daily performances of resilience and hope. Therefore, given the increasing urgency of addressing the "triple threat" of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections among adolescents and youth, there is a pressing need to explore how such Christological frameworks could offer more relatable, embodied, and life-affirming theological responses.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

1.4 Research objectives

In general, the study situates and explores the Jesus question: "do people say I am?" within the ambit of a public health crisis in Kenya, specifically the "Triple Threat" of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections. It examines how a group of grassroots women, known as *Nyamreche,* are addressing these challenges through advocacy for adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (AYSRHR), which is deeply rooted in their lived faith in Jesus Christ. The exploration was done within the following objectives:

i. To trace oral, embodied, and lived Christologies in Christian History
ii. To delineate oral, embodied, and lived Christologies of Luo-speaking women in church ministry and who are also community health promoters known as *Nyamreche* as a subset of African Women
iii. To evaluate the relationship between oral, embodied, and lived Christologies of African women *(Nyamreche)* with everyday quests for life in abundance in the context of the triple threat challenge- Gender based violence, Teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections.
iv. To assess the practical and theological implications of such discourses in reimagining Sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) discourses and work in Africa.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

1.5 Research questions

To address the four objectives, the study answered the following questions:

1. What are oral, embodied, and lived Christologies in Christian History
2. What are the oral, embodied, and lived Christologies of Dholuo-speaking women in church ministry, who are also community health workers known as Nyamreche, as a subset of African Women?
3. What is the relationship between these oral, lived, and embodied Christologies with everyday quests for life in abundance in the context of the triple threat challenge- Gender based violence, Teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections?
4. What are the practical and theological implications of such discourses in reimagining Sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) discourses and work in Africa?

1.6 Research Methodology

The study utilizes a mixed-method approach with qualitative methods (face-to-face semi-structured interviews and a focused group discussion supported by open-ended questionnaires) as the primary strategy and Talitha cum Hermeneutics as the interpretive lens. Anchored in Tshehla's (2012:11) call for a methodological reorientation in responding to Jesus' question, *"Who do you say I am?"* (Mark 8:29), the study departs from a singular, doctrinal history of Christology toward a pluralistic appreciation of lived Christologies that emerge from everyday contexts (Wasike, 2005, p. 104). To achieve this, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics is adopted as the principal decolonial and liberative methodology for

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

identifying, interpreting, and theorizing oral and embodied Christologies expressed by African women, specifically *Nyamreche* in Siaya county.

This approach is particularly suited for examining how grassroots Christological reflections inform responses to the Triple Threat challenge of HIV infections, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and teenage pregnancy while simultaneously promoting adolescent and youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Thus, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics, rooted in Mark 5:21–43, reframes Jesus' words *"Talitha cum"* ("Little girl, arise") as a metaphorical summons to agency, healing, and life-affirming action in contexts marked by systemic forms of death, including patriarchy, colonial residue, poverty, and religious exclusion. This hermeneutical posture privileges African religious epistemologies of orality, embodiment, and performativity as valid sources of theological knowledge. Inspired by African women theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musa Dube, Talitha Cum functions both as a theological method and a praxis of resistance by reclaiming scripture from patriarchal and colonial interpretations and reimagining Christology in liberative, relational, and community-rooted ways (Pui-Lan, 2004).

The field-based component of this research focused on a specific group of grassroots women in Siaya County known as *Nyamrerwa*, now formally referred to as Community Health Promoters (CHPs). (Njiraini & Hussein, 2020:3,5). In 2023, Siaya County had 2,128 CHPs distributed across six sub-counties (Wambinya, 2023, p. 3). This study purposively targeted CHPs in Alego-Usonga Sub-County, which had the highest number of CHPs (518) and demonstrated notable engagement in interventions addressing the Triple Threat (NSDCC, 2023). From these, 12 women who served both as CHPs and active Christian faith leaders

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

were selected, as their dual roles positioned them at the intersection of faith and public health and thus uniquely placed to shape contextual Christologies in response to gender, health, and sexuality.

Data were collected over eight months through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and a focused group discussion supported by open-ended questionnaires, enabling participants to narrate beliefs, experiences, and motivations in their own words (Bhandari, 2023, p. 3; George, 2002:5). Thematic analysis was employed following a six-step process: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. This facilitated the identification of recurring themes related to lived and embodied Christologies and how these inform SRHR within the Triple Threat context. Ethical approval was obtained from St Paul's University Research Ethics Committee and The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was assured, and participants retained the right to withdraw without consequence. All university and governmental ethical standards were fully met.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

1.7 Research Hypothesis

This research was based on three hypotheses. First, that African Christology, historically shaped by socio-political realities such as colonialism, race, ethnicity, class, gender, poverty, disease, and cultural dynamics, has largely neglected the intersection of religion and reproductive health and rights. Despite the development of liberation and contextual theologies, Christological reflection on these issues remains underexplored. Secondly, that everyday Christologies embodied by African women, particularly those

expressed through lived experiences of resilience, resistance to gender-based violence, and hope, have been largely marginalized in formal theological discourses. Thirdly, the informal, embodied theologies exemplified in practices such as the "fireplace Christologies" of African mothers and grandmothers can offer more relevant, life-affirming theological responses to the pressing challenges of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections among adolescents and youth.

1.8 Scope of the study

Christology as a subject is broad. I delimited my study to oral and lived Christologies within the African context. The African context, too, is broad. I therefore delimited my studies to African women. Within the African women category, my study has been delimited to oral and lived Christologies emanating from Luo-speaking community health workers known as *Nyamrerwa,* who are also involved in church ministry in Kenya. Since AYSRHR is a broad concept that encompasses the different human rights related to sexuality and reproduction, such as sexual health, sexual rights, reproductive health, and reproductive rights (United Nations, ICPD 25, Nairobi, Kenya), the study is delimited to how the *Nyamreche* utilize their Christologies in navigating religious and cultural barriers in engaging the triple threat problem- HIV infection, Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), and teenage pregnancies. Further, the study utilizes Talitha *Cum* hermeneutical framework to analyse how such Christological praxis is produced and used to frame AYSRHR-related knowledge that facilitates personal, social, and systemic transformation towards achieving the quest for the promise of life in abundance by Jesus Christ and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal number three- "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

1.9 Conclusion and Chapters Outline

This study is structured into six interrelated chapters. Each chapter opens with either a story drawn from lived experiences or a theological insight often presented through a guiding quote that captures the heartbeat of the chapter's central argument. These opening narratives or reflections serve as thematic portals and gateways into the complex, nuanced discourse that unfolds within each chapter. Rather than functioning merely as literary embellishments, these entry points anchor the chapter in both theological depth and contextual relevance. They are intentionally chosen for their resonance with the chapter's themes and function as hermeneutical lenses through which the study engages the materials in each chapter critically and contextually. The weaving of story and theology reflects the study's overall approach: a synthesis of empirical engagement, theological reflection, and critical analysis, shaped by African lived experiences and interpretative frameworks. Each chapter is designed as follows:

Chapter one lays the foundational framework for the entire study. As a prolegomenon, it serves as a gateway, introducing the background, contextualizing the research problem, and establishing the significance of the inquiry. The chapter begins by outlining the pressing realities that undergird the study, particularly the intersectional challenges faced by marginalized communities in Kenya, including health, gender, socio-economic inequalities, and spiritual well-being. These lived challenges, often experienced most acutely by women, youth, and adolescents, create the crucible within which Christological questions gain urgent relevance. The chapter proceeds to engage the theoretical and conceptual framing of the research. It outlines the study's engagement with oral theology, lived religion, decolonial theory, and intersectionality as critical lenses that inform both the inquiry and analysis throughout the study. Particular attention is given to the way Christology

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

has historically been constructed, often through Greco-Roman philosophical categories and Eurocentric theological formulations that have tended to silence, marginalize, or altogether erase African perspectives, women's voices, and grassroots theological articulations.

The study's methodological approach is also clarified in this chapter. Drawing from qualitative research paradigms, particularly ethnography and narrative inquiry, the study is positioned within the praxis of participatory research. The research design emphasizes co-production of knowledge with community participants, resisting extractive models of scholarship. Methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and theological reflection are detailed, with an emphasis on ethical considerations, positionality, and reflexivity. Chapter one thus sets the stage for a study that is both academically rigorous and socially engaged, foregrounding voices often muted in formal theological discourse.

The second chapter delves into the conceptual heart of the study by interrogating the categories of oral and lived Christologies. It begins by tracing the historical trajectories of how Christology, as the theological exploration of the identity, nature, and significance of Jesus Christ, has been formulated and contested within Christian history. The chapter highlights how early Christian communities, long before formalized creedal declarations, experienced and articulated Christological convictions in ways that were oral, performative, and intimately tied to everyday life. These early expressions are contrasted with later theological constructions shaped by Greco-Roman philosophical categories, institutionalized church doctrines, and patriarchal power dynamics.

This historical mapping is not merely descriptive but critical. The chapter underscores how Eurocentric and androcentric images of Jesus, which often depict him as a

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

white, male, imperial figure, have dominated theological imagination, particularly in colonial and postcolonial contexts. These images are identified not only as theological distortions but as cultural tools that have perpetuated systems of oppression, erasure of local spiritualities, and the marginalization of those considered as 'the other' and those who embody non-conforming identities within Christian communities. In response, the chapter advocates for a retrieval and reimagining of oral and lived Christologies that emerge from the grassroots. These are Christologies that are not imposed by ecclesiastical authorities or academic elites but arise organically from the faith practices, narratives, and communal experiences of believers. The chapter sets the theoretical and practical groundwork for how such Christologies are appropriated within this research: as dynamic, contextually situated articulations of Jesus that resonate with the lived realities of marginalized communities in Kenya, particularly the *Nyamreche* women of Siaya County.

Chapter three introduces and elaborates on *Talitha cum* hermeneutics, a decolonial interpretative framework that draws inspiration from the Markan narrative of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41). The phrase, meaning "Little girl, arise," becomes a metaphor and methodological anchor for a theological approach that seeks to revive silenced voices, awaken marginalized subjectivities, and foreground subjugated knowledge forms. The chapter argues for the necessity of a decolonial hermeneutic in Christological inquiry, particularly in contexts historically shaped by colonialism, patriarchal theology, and theological imperialism. *Talitha cum* hermeneutics engages the Jesus question "Who do you say I am?" on two interconnected levels.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

First, at the macro level, this interrogates dominant ideological discourses concerning Jesus's identity and significance. It involves challenging the hegemonic theological constructions that have often presented a sanitized, politically neutral Jesus, disconnected from the struggles of oppressed peoples. The hermeneutic calls for a re-reading of Christology that situates Jesus within liberative, justice-oriented, and life-affirming paradigms. Second, at the micro level, *Talitha cum* hermeneutics engages with everyday lived experiences, particularly those at the margins. Here, the hermeneutic facilitates a reading of Jesus' significance in the context of health, wellness, gender, sexuality, and governance issues that directly impact the daily lives of communities like the *Nyamreche*. This approach refuses the dichotomy between academic theology and lived faith, advocating instead for a Christological inquiry that is both intellectually robust and socially transformative.

Chapter four presents the core ethnographic engagement of the study, constructed through eight months of participatory fieldwork with a group of ten *Nyamreche* women in Siaya County, Kenya. These women, whose theological reflections often remain outside formal theological scholarship, are foregrounded as theologians in their own right. The chapter narrates how these women embody and articulate a profound theological vision of Jesus. This vision is one that is rooted not in abstract dogmatic formulations but in the lived practice of diakonia (service). Through their roles as caregivers, health advocates, community leaders, and spiritual anchors, the *Nyamreche* manifest a Christology characterized by service, healing, advocacy, and spiritual presence. This everyday diakonia Christology is explored under three contours.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

First, that these Christologies are oral, embodied, and performed and are emerging through song, prayer, storytelling, and acts of service rather than formal theological treatises. Secondly, these Christologies are rooted in a hermeneutic of life and flourishing, thereby emphasizing holistic wellbeing, communal solidarity, and the affirmation of human dignity. Thirdly, that these Christologies are undergirded by Jesus' example of diakonia and as such draw on biblical narratives where Jesus serves, heals, and empowers the marginalized. The chapter argues that this form of Christology grants the *Nyamreche* agency to curate and promote a faith-based, intersectional approach to health, social justice, and spiritual care, particularly in addressing what has been termed the "triple threat" of HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and teenage pregnancy.

Building on the ethnographic insights of the previous chapter, chapter five explores how the Christological reflections and practices of the *Nyamreche* transcend theological discourse and shape concrete interventions. The chapter emphasizes that their response to the triple threat challenge is not only intersectional in theory but also in practice. It examines how their intervention operates at the confluence of three interrelated domains. First, there is a Faith-based compassion that provides spiritual support, prayer, and community accompaniment rooted in their understanding of Jesus as healer and advocate. Secondly, there is a Public health expertise that engages with community health initiatives, promotes wellness, and participates in local health governance structures. Thirdly is a Human rights advocacy that challenges harmful cultural practices, advocating for women's rights, and supporting vulnerable populations, especially in matters of sexual and reproductive health. The chapter shows how these women navigate complex socio-cultural landscapes, drawing strength from their faith and Christological convictions to enact transformative action in their communities.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Their praxis is presented as a model of embodied theology and, as such, integrates faith, public health, and social justice in ways that are contextually resonant and theologically profound.

The final chapter synthesizes the study's findings and offers a critical reflection on its distinctive contributions to theological scholarship and praxis. It recapitulates the central argument that Christological inquiry, particularly in African contexts, requires both a methodological and theological shift, one that privileges lived experience, oral narratives, and decolonial perspectives. The study's contribution is situated within the broader field of African Christian theology, highlighting how its Christological insights add to the panoply of motifs that characterize African theological thought. By foregrounding the everyday diakonia Christologies of marginalized women, the study challenges dominant Christological paradigms and opens up new avenues for theological reflection, academic inquiry, and practical ministry. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the potential implications of this shift for theological education, pastoral ministry, and community engagement. It calls for a reimagining of theological scholarship that is dialogical, participatory, and rooted in the lived experiences of faith communities, and as such, a scholarship that listens deeply to the voices from the margins and allows those voices to reshape the theological landscape.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

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CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF EVERYDAY, ORAL, AND LIVED CHRISTOLOGIES

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how Christological understandings have been shaped, masked, and unmasked throughout history, building on chapter one, which situated the study within the lived challenges of marginalized communities and the emergence of incipient African Christologies. Guided by Rieger's claim that Christ "never quite fits in" but disrupts the status quo (Rieger, 2007, p. 1), it examines how encounters with Jesus have continually challenged dominant socio-political and theological frameworks. Christology is shown as historically situated, socially constructed, and entangled with power, at times reinforcing empire, colonialism, exclusion, and hierarchical control (Ruether, 2001; Kwok, 2005). Yet, it has also served as a resource for resistance, liberation, hope, and transformative imagination (Bohache, 2008). The chapter traces the emergence of oral and lived Christologies, demonstrating that they arise from everyday experiences, communal practices, rituals, songs, and embodied faith rather than formal doctrines (Cook, 1997; Kärkkäinen, 2013). Drawing from postcolonial scholarship, it highlights how early Christian communities encountered Christ through oral witness and lived faith in contexts of persecution and marginality (Sugirtharajah, 2001; Bohache, 2008). Over time, however, these context-rooted Christologies were overshadowed by Greco-Roman philosophies and later Eurocentric colonial images of Christ that justified domination (Rieger, 2007; Sugirtharajah, 2001). This history underscores the need to retrieve and re-center lived, subaltern, and grassroots Christologies, especially those voiced by women, indigenous communities, and the oppressed, so as to reclaim Christology as a dynamic, liberative, and socially engaged discourse. In Summary, the chapter conceptualizes

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

oral and lived Christology historically and today, and clarifies how this study appropriates them as interpretive tools for engaging the lived faith of communities included in this research.

2.2 Masking and Unmasking of Jesus

This literature review section examines how Christological meanings have been both shaped and constrained by historical, cultural, and ideological forces, tracing how Jesus has been "masked" by dominant philosophical, political, and ecclesial frameworks while simultaneously "unmasked" in the lived, everyday experiences of believers. Building on the foundational insights of chapter one, this section explores how Christology has historically been constructed through oral, communal, and embodied practices, revealing a dynamic interplay between faith, culture, and power and highlighting how encounters with Jesus have continually challenged prevailing ideological, social, and theological categories. By surveying examples from early Christianity, medieval expressions, reform movements, and contemporary liberation contexts, the review underscores that Christology is not a static doctrinal enterprise but a living discourse, and as such one that is continually negotiated, embodied, and reimagined in response to social realities, resistance, and the everyday struggles of ordinary believers (Kärkkäinen, 2013; Bohache, 2008; Mombo & Joziasse, 2024).

While chapter one is prefaced with my grandmother and mother's fireplace oral and lived images of Jesus (Jesus walking in the neighborhood), this review is prefaced on how such and other portraits of that image are passed on from one generation to another. This underscores the role of media such as stories, songs, art, plays, and skits in passing and handing down images of Jesus. In my childhood, the film 'The Passion of the Christ' was a famous Christmas treat. The Passion of the Christ is an American epic biblical drama film produced, directed, and co-written by Mel Gibson. It stars Jim Caviezel as Jesus of Nazareth,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Maia Morgenstern as Mary, mother of Jesus, and Monica Bellucci as Mary Magdalene. The filming was coupled with role plays of the birth of Jesus during Christmas. Although these plays in Sunday school were based on the gospel stories about the birth, life, ministry, and death of Jesus, the performances were guided by the portrayal of Jesus from the passion story movie. Jesus was a man with blonde hair, who wore a long dress popularly known as *'marinda*.' In the plays, those who played the role of Jesus (and Joseph) were dressed in *marinda* and wore wigs to capture the 'blonde-haired' Jesus. While such a portraiture has been greatly critiqued in scholarship as a hegemonic Eurocentric presentation of Jesus as male and white, and which does not even capture the historical appearance of Jesus (Shawn, 2002: ii-xi), the question for African kids like me at that time was different.

Our question was on why Jesus was a woman, since in our context, wearing wigs, or having blonde hair, and adorning *marinda* were culturally assigned to women, although this type of dress code could have been a proper representation of men in the Greco-Roman world. Theologically, this was a question of unmasking a Jesus image that was concealed by both Western and Greco-Roman world ideologies and sensibilities. Answers were not easily provided to this question, except for phrases like 'this is what we were told' or 'look even at the movies, this is how he looks, and lives' or 'that is what we have been taught and always known.' While such answers tentatively solved the problem at that time, it kept lingering in my mind: 'Who told my teachers about Jesus? Why did this condition them to tell us the same about Jesus? How did this influence them in their everyday life? This study is an attempt to raise more questions, find answers that could help, and unmask Jesus.

Thus, while chapter one lays the foundational framework, the significance, context, and epistemological stance that guide the inquiry by situating it within the triple threat

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

challenge, and to the incipient Christologies that have emerged within African Christianity, the overarching task of this chapter is aptly captured in the assertion by Joerg Rieger, that:

> "Christ never quite fits in—(he)creates a theological and Christological surplus that pushes beyond the splendor of the status quo" (Rieger, 2007, p. 1).

This assertion exemplifies how everyday encounters with Jesus continue to trouble, stretch, and reconfigure inherited theological categories, such as the identity and work of Jesus Christ, in dynamic interplay with prevailing socio-political ideologies of any given era. Rieger reminds us that theology, including Christology, does not develop in a vacuum but is historically situated, socially constructed, and often deeply intertwined with the power dynamics of its context (Rieger, 2003). This insight, therefore, frames the central pursuit of this chapter, which is to revisit and critically highlight how prevailing ideologies across various historical epochs have significantly influenced the production and interpretation of Christological motifs. Furthermore, it explores how, at different moments in Christian history, emerging social, political, and cultural realities compelled faith communities, theologians, and movements to envision new Christologies that consciously subverted or resisted these ideological conditionings.

In this light, Christology has been both a mirror and a critique of its times, reflecting dominant cultural narratives while also serving as a prophetic voice that questions, challenges, and sometimes dismantles oppressive systems (Ruether, 2001). The narratives constructed around the figure of Jesus Christ have always been more than theological articulations; they have been instruments of identity formation, social cohesion, and, at times, instruments of imperialism, colonialism, and exclusion (Ruether, 2001). Conversely, they have also served as resources for liberation, resistance, and hope (Bohache, 2008). Therefore, the present study

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

examines Christology as both a product of its historical moments and a potential site of resistance against the very ideologies that seek to co-opt it.

Aligned with the first objective of this study, which is to trace oral and lived Christologies in Christian history, this chapter carefully interrogates how Christological thought has emerged, evolved, and been appropriated across different historical contexts. It aims to demonstrate that Christology has never been a static or purely doctrinal enterprise but has always been shaped by lived experiences, oral traditions, and the socio-cultural dynamics of the communities from which it emerged. This also means that, as Kärkkäinen observes, Christology cannot be adequately understood if divorced from the concrete, everyday lives of believers and the oral traditions through which theological meanings are transmitted, negotiated, and contested (Kärkkäinen, 2013).

The chapter is further guided by the first research question of this study: *What are oral and lived Christologies?* This question is not merely definitional but seeks to unpack the complexity of Christology as it exists beyond the formal creeds, councils, and theological treatises of church history. Thus, the study conceptualizes oral and lived Christologies as "the ways in which individuals and communities have articulated, embodied, and transmitted their understanding of Jesus Christ through everyday practices, narratives, songs, liturgies, art, rituals, and communal life," (Cook, 1997, p. 34). These Christologies are often fluid, context-specific, and shaped by the socio-political realities of their time (Mombo & Joziasse, 2024). They are not confined to academic theology or ecclesial dogma but are found in the lived faith expressions of ordinary believers in the ways people pray, preach, protest, and practice justice in the name of Christ (Mombo & Joziasse, 2024).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

The chapter is also premised on the argument advanced by postcolonial scholars such as Sugirtharajah (2001), Kwok (2005), Wasike (2005), Rieger (2007), Bohache (2008), and Kärkkäinen (2013), that early Christian communities first encountered Christ not through abstract doctrines or dogmatic formulations but in oral, embodied, and communal practices. These communities encountered Christ through the lived witness of apostles, martyrs, and fellow believers; encounters that grounded their faith in the intimate, transformative presence of Jesus amidst their historical and cultural contexts (Kärkkäinen, 2013). Thus, the apostolic and early church communities, shaped by persecution, social marginality, and communal solidarity, experienced Christology not as an intellectual construct but as a lived reality marked by radical love, inclusion, and transformative hope (Bohache, 2008).

However, as these scholars further note, over subsequent centuries, these fresh, context-rooted Christologies were increasingly filtered through dominant ideologies and hegemonic philosophies (Rieger, 2007). Starting with the Greco-Roman conceptual frameworks that sought to explain Christian beliefs in philosophical terms, Christological thought gradually became entangled with power structures that privileged certain images of Jesus, often as an imperial Lord, a cosmic ruler, or a metaphysical abstraction (Bohache, 2013). These expressions probably served to marginalize other lived, liberative expressions. The Eurocentric colonial missions of the 16th to 19th centuries further entrenched this trend, reframing the gospel witness with images of Christ that served colonial domination, cultural superiority, and racial hierarchies (Sugirtharajah, 2001). The result was a distortion of the liberating message of Jesus, transforming it into a tool of empire and a theological justification for oppression (Kwok, 2005).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

This historical trajectory underscores why the retrieval and critical engagement with oral and lived Christologies are vital for contemporary theological reflection, particularly in postcolonial, marginalized, and oppressed contexts. By tracing these Christologies through history, this chapter highlights the necessity of reclaiming the faith expressions that emerged from lived realities rather than imposed doctrines. It challenges theological discourses that have historically silenced the voices of ordinary believers, women, indigenous peoples, and oppressed communities, yet these are voices that have embodied Christology in their resistance, worship, suffering, and hope.

Therefore, the central task of "unmasking Jesus" takes three intersecting steps. First, it seeks to conceptualize what oral and lived Christology has been in the broad sweep of Christian history. This involves exploring examples from early Christian communities, medieval expressions, reform movements, and contemporary liberation theologies; all of which reflect how Christological meanings were shaped by the lived realities of believers. For instance, in the early church, confessions like "Jesus is Lord" carried subversive political meanings in contexts where Caesar was proclaimed lord (Bohance, 2008). Similarly, in the medieval period, Christological depictions often reinforced hierarchical power structures, while reformers like Martin Luther rearticulated Christology in ways that empowered individual conscience against institutional control (Sugirtharajah, 2001).

Second, it examines what oral and lived Christology is today, particularly within marginalized and subaltern contexts. In many contemporary settings, especially in postcolonial, indigenous, and oppressed communities, Christology emerges not from academic discourse but from the lived experiences of people grappling with issues of injustice, violence, poverty, and exclusion (Wasike, 2005). These lived Christologies often articulate

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Jesus as a companion of the poor, a liberator of the oppressed, a healer of the broken-hearted, or a challenger of corrupt systems (Wasike, 2005). Such images are not merely theological assertions but become the lifeblood of community resistance and resilience. They are passed on through oral narratives, communal practices, and daily struggles, shaping both individual faith and collective identity.

Third, this explores how the concept of oral and lived Christology is appropriated in this particular research. In doing so, it critically reflects on how these Christologies are relevant to understanding the lived faith expressions within the context of this study, particularly in relation to the communities and individuals whose stories, practices, and theological reflections inform the research. This involves acknowledging that the Christologies explored here are not theoretical abstractions but are deeply rooted in the lived experiences, socio-political struggles, and spiritual journeys of real people. The study seeks to engage these Christologies on their own terms, giving voice to those often marginalized in formal theological discourses.

This chapter, therefore, establishes the conceptual and methodological foundation for engaging with oral and lived Christologies in Christian history, in contemporary contexts, and within this research project. It underscores that Christology is a dynamic, living discourse, continually reshaped by the interplay among faith, culture, history, and social struggle. By tracing these Christological trajectories, the chapter not only responds to the research objectives and questions but also invites a reimagining of how theology can serve as a site of both critical reflection and transformative action in today's world.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

The preceding sections go to the annals of Christian history to locate 'this is what we were told/taught, and we now tell/teach you.' This historical quest is premised on a challenge raised by Bishop John Tylor when he became the General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society in 1963. He proposed a revisionist understanding of Christian mission in Africa, based on his encounters with many different African people. In his suggestion, he invited missionaries to listen and learn from African indigenous culture in a plausible Christological question:

> "Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Savior of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?" (Taylor 2001:16).

This Christological question brings to the fore two critical themes. First, that although Jesus is a universal savior, he is only encountered and understood within a context's specific reality, which Taylor refers to as 'question.' Secondly, this context's specific reality presents an answer, and in this case, a Jesus Christ-figure that is relatable to the people in that specific context. Our childhood Christological questions embedded in our socio-cultural contexts, and academic critiques of white supremacy conditioning that Jesus be a blonde-haired, blue-eyed man, become a starting point of unmasking Jesus through oral and lived Christologies in history.

Further, it pays attention to Nasimiyu Wasike's argument that the Christological question posed in Mark 8:29— "But who do you say I am?"—is not only central to the Gospels but also timeless, addressing believers across all generations and contexts such that Jesus is not just a distant metaphysical figure but an intimate presence in the struggle for dignity and wholeness in contexts such as Africa (Wasike, 2005, p. 129). Wasike further argues that

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

answering this question demands a shift from a monopolistic and Eurocentric theological framework to a pluralistic and contextualized understanding of Christ (Wasike, 2005:108). Her arguments are premised on the fact that missionary Christologies often imposed alienating and abstract images of Jesus, especially in the African context, portraying him as a conquering king aligned with colonial ambitions (Wasike, 2005:107). These depictions, shaped by elite white male theologians, ignored the existential and historical Jesus of the Gospels, contributing to the marginalization of indigenous African understandings of Christ. The preceding sections pay attention to the construction of Christologies from the vantage point of power and privilege, and how such have been contested as departing from the gospel witness of the person, life, and ministry of Jesus, thus paving the way for a historically grounded, life-affirming Christ who confronts systems of oppression and injustice.

2.3 Oral and Lived Christologies (1st Century–Present)

This section offers a concise survey of the earliest and incipient forms of Christologies that existed among first-century Christians and accounts for possible shifts and developments in such formulations. Incipient theology refers to the very beginning stages of theological thought or development, particularly when it emerges from the experiences and contexts of marginalized communities or those outside traditional power structures (Swart, 2008). It is the phase in which theological reflection begins to take shape, often driven by a pressing need to understand and interpret religious beliefs in light of specific lived realities (Gutierrez, 1973; Bevans, 2002). Incipient theology often arises from the experiences of people who are not part of the dominant theological discourse (Swart, 2008). These may include communities living in poverty, facing systemic discrimination, or situated within

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

cultures historically different from the traditional centers of theological authority, such as Europe and North America (Smith, 1991).

Their theological articulations often arise from the urgency of survival, dignity, and justice rather than from academic inquiry. At this stage, theological ideas are being formulated and articulated in a nascent state. Incipient theology does not present fully matured systematic theologies but rather seeds of thought that begin to critique, supplement, or reimagine traditional theological frameworks (Cone, 1975). A defining feature of incipient theology is its deep rooting in specific socio-political and cultural contexts. Rather than presenting theology as a universal or abstract endeavor, it highlights how beliefs are profoundly shaped by local histories, struggles, and worldviews (Bevans, 2002).

In this sense, theology becomes a living, dynamic response to the real conditions of people's lives rather than a static system of thought. Incipient theology emphasizes praxis as the interaction between action and reflection. Theologians at this stage focus on how theological insight can be lived out in practice, often directing attention to social transformation, political resistance, and cultural affirmation (Gutierrez, 1973). Thus, theology becomes a tool not only for understanding faith but also for inspiring and guiding tangible change. Examples of incipient theology include the early stages of Latin American liberation theology, where grassroots Christian communities began articulating a theology of liberation in response to systemic oppression and poverty (Gutierrez, 1973). These theologies are often preliminary, flexible, and responsive, reflecting the lived realities of the communities that birth them.

The study conceptualizes early church Christologies as incipient because they emerged from the immediate, lived experiences of the first followers of Jesus, many of whom

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

were marginalized within both Jewish and Greco-Roman societies (Hakola, 2022). Thus, these earliest Christological articulations were not systematic doctrines but rather confessional responses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, expressed in hymns, prayers, proclamations, and communal practices (Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5). The urgency to make sense of who Jesus was and what his life and work meant for their identity and mission drove these communities to formulate Christological expressions that were often fragmentary, poetic, and situational (Frei, 2013). They reflected a dynamic encounter with the risen Christ amid persecution, social displacement, and theological contestation, rather than abstract theological speculation.

Moreover, these early Christologies reveal a spectrum of interpretations shaped by diverse socio-political contexts ranging from high Christological affirmations of Jesus as pre-existent and divine (as in the Johannine community) to low Christological portrayals emphasizing his humanity and prophetic role (as seen in some synoptic traditions) (Bohache, 2013). The incipient nature of these Christologies means they remained open-ended, adaptable, and contested within the early Jesus movement (Bedford, 2021). They were marked by a raw, experiential authenticity that responded directly to the existential questions and communal struggles faced by believers. Rather than conforming to established theological orthodoxy, these emerging Christologies contributed to the broader and ongoing process of theological reflection that would later be systematized in the creeds and councils of the early church (Bedford, 2021).

These Christological constructions of early Christian communities are situated within a historical context. According to early church historian Schaff Philip (1998), early Christianity is generally reckoned by church historians to begin with the ministry of Jesus (c.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

27–30) and end with the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325(1998:2). The study specifically focuses on two periods in early Christianity: The Apostolic Age (c. 30–100), when the first apostles were still alive and the Ante-Nicene Period (c. 100–325) (Schaff, 1998:2). During these two periods, there are two critical developments that are important for this study; the early Church binitarian Spirituality (Hurtado 1999:97), and a period of conceptual clarity and logical synthesis of the nature of Jesus (Anatolios, 2011:9). These two developments are important for this study because they conceptualize the shifts from oral and embodied convictions of the early church on the worship of Jesus as God with minimal or no conceptual definitions and filtering through the dominant Greco-Roman philosophical logic and thought that presented Jesus within frameworks of power and abstraction through heresies and apologies about the nature and the person of Jesus.

2.3.1 The early Church Binitarian Spirituality

Early church historians observe that from the first century AD until 400AD, despite minor disparities, there was a progressive and consistent development of the doctrine of God with essential equality and economic distinctiveness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit expressed through worship and the everyday life of the church. For instance, Larry Hurtado (1999; 2004;2005) presents a comprehensive study of the first century shape of worship as binitarian without any form of controversy (199:95). By binitarian, Hurtado describe the shape of early Christian devotion to God, which incorporated and exalted Jesus as worthy of worship that in Judaism would exclusively be ascribed to God alone, while still affirming as in Judaism that God is one and is alone to be worshiped (1992:95). He further asserts that "this Jesus-devotion is a 'binitarian' form of monotheism because there are two distinguishable figures (God and Jesus), but they are posited in a relation to each other that seems intended to avoid

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

the ditheism of two gods," (2004:52). Further, the binitarian theory accounts for the belief of the Holy Spirit as "going out from God the creator, and is the creator: a person of God's being, which also live in Jesus," (Hurtado 2004, pp. 52-23).

Other scholars of early church history also underscore this form of early Church spirituality. Khaled Anatolios (2011) corroborates with Hurtado's assertion and observes that the fourth century inherited Christological and trinitarian discourse that were pervasively embedded in worship and proclamations, without conceptual definition of both the oneness of God and triadic forms of Christian discipleship (Anatolios 1999, p. 16). It seems that binitarian spirituality of the early church brings to the fore the fact that prior to orthodoxy's settlement in Christianity in the Nicene council, the early church, in their oral proclamations and everyday practices, had conceptions of the person and nature of Jesus. Moreover, these scholars do not suggest this form of spirituality as antithetical to Nicene Christianity. Rather, their postulation is an indication that before interruptions by Hellenistic philosophical sensibilities, these believers were monotheistic as demonstrated by their singular reference to the Father as God, yet also "devoted to Jesus as pre-existent, co-eternal, the creator, embodying the power of God, by whom the Father is revealed, and in whose name alone the Father is worshiped" (Hurtado 2005, p. 54).

The binitarian spirituality is an example of the shape of incipient Christologies of the church as lived and embodied in the everyday life of the church. I conceptualize incipient as initial stages or beginning or coming into existence (of things) (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023). Thus, biniterian spirituality of the early church as the beginning of not only Christological discourses but also the initial stages of foregrounding lived theologies, including Christologies. Borrowing from the postulations of both the philosopher Martin

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Heidegger and the theologian Paul Tillich that "lived theology is one's enactment of significance in the world," (Heidegger 1962:123; Tilich 1957, p. 189), lived theology has simply been defined as "the enactment of that, which is most significant to us at any given moment and as lived out in our everyday existence, rather than the systemization of creedal propositions of any given faith tradition," (DuBose 2014, p. 107). This definition offers a good accent to the binitarian spirituality of the early church. Since binitarian spirituality was about the incorporation of 'Jesus-devotion' in the daily life of the church, we can characterize it as an aspect of lived Christology by further paying attention to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's conception. Kärkkäinen (2003) defines the early church Christology as 'lived Christology rather than schematized doctrine" (2013:19). He argues that since the bible was written in the form of a story, it does not contain systematized outlines of the person of and work of Christ, through stories, symbols, and an emphasis on his deeds, the early church taught about Jesus.

In a decolonial turn, Kärkkäinen, while valorizing lived Christologies, pays attention to African Christologies and asserts that "some of the most profound Christological truths may come from the mouths of an illiterate elder of the community or a grandmother in the family" (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 247). Kärkkäinen is bringing to the fore that just like in early Christianity, even in our recent time, Christologies are multiple, fluid, and exist in various forms such as these verbal utterances and embodied realities of people who do not have historical critical tools or sophisticated hermeneutical prisms. It is on this note that from an empirical study of embodied faith practices of church women in the reformed church of East Africa (RCEA) and the Israeli Nineveh Church in Kenya, Heleen Joziasse theorizes their stories of Jesus and their agency in navigating life-threatening situations as lived Christologies:

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> "...Lived Christologies refers to expressions of faith in Jesus Christ which emerges from the lived, embodied, saving and liberating experiences with Jesus Christ of particular people in specific context; these experiences occur in their mundane, day to day life, and are dynamic, fluid, and "living," personal and both individual and communal, expressed in different models and aimed at the tangible transformation of life for the better," (Joziasse, 2020, p. 31).

Both Kärkkäinen and Joziasse, although writing in different contexts and examining different historical periods, their conceptions about lived Christologies help us understand the nature and form of early church Christology as encapsulated in their binitarian spirituality. The aspects of non-systematized yet authentic, legitimate, and orthodox knowledge of the life and work of Jesus Christ characterize some unique Christologies that have existed as 'lived' in the church, both as incipient and modern-day formulations. Coupled with the lived Christologies in the early church's binitarian spirituality is the oral corpus of the early church's Christologies, as has been demonstrated in many recent studies by early church historians (Burkett Delbert, 2002; Dunn James ,2013; Bockmuehl Markus, 2004). Markus (2004) observes that the early church's "oral traditions included different types of stories about Jesus like anecdotes about Jesus healing the sick and debating with his opponents," (2004:87). Burkett in agreement also asserts that the early church's traditions also included "sayings attributed to Jesus, such as parables and teachings on various subjects which, along with other sayings, formed the oral gospel tradition," (2004:109). Dunn (2013) also notes that "early Christians sustained the teachings of Jesus orally" (2013:4). He further notes that these teachings consisted of two parts: "the Jesus tradition or sayings of Jesus, and inspired opinion" (2013:14).

The binitarian spirituality and the oral tradition of the early church presented various images of Jesus. The most common images were: Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, and Kyrios (Lord) as borrowed from the Old Testament (Brown, 2004, p. 4). Kwame Bediako

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

(1992) suggests that these earliest Christological reflections were also shaped by both the Jewish background of the earliest Christians and by the Greek world of the eastern Mediterranean in which they operated (1992:31-32). Exploring each of these images is beyond the scope of this present study. In the next section, however, I shall pay attention to how these confessed and orally handed-down images were interrupted and intercepted by a new context characterized by Greek Hellenistic philosophies. These interceptions and interruptions caused a shift from oral and lived Christologies embedded in the everyday lives of early Christians to abstract, philosophical debates about the person and work of Jesus Christ. I conceptualize these interceptions and interruptions as 'masking Jesus' in reference to an unending pattern of application of certain privileged contextual sensibilities in making sense of the person and work of Jesus. While the incipient oral and lived images of Jesus became tested and thereby masked by the application and influence of the Greco-Roman world and Hellenistic sensibilities, later centuries come with either colonial Eurocentric sensibilities, patriarchal androcentric sensibilities, or heteropatriarchal normative sensibilities. A return/revisiting of oral and lived Christologies have continued to exist as frameworks of peeling back these masks.

In summary, the early church's Christological expressions, which were rooted in binitarian spirituality and sustained through oral tradition, offered diverse images of Jesus drawn from Jewish messianic expectations and titles such as Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, and Kyrios (Brown, 2004; Bediako, 1992). These images reflected a dynamic and relational understanding of Jesus within the lived faith and worship of early Christian communities. However, as Christianity increasingly engaged with the Greco-Roman world, these original, lived expressions encountered new intellectual currents that sought to redefine

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

or reinterpret Jesus through the lens of Hellenistic philosophical categories. This shift marked a significant turning point, one in which Jesus began to be "masked" by philosophical abstractions that often displaced the immediacy and relational nature of the incipient Christologies. The following section will examine how this process of masking unfolded, tracing how Greco-Roman philosophical frameworks interrupted the lived, oral tradition and reshaped the discourse about Jesus into speculative and doctrinal formulations.

2.3.2 The masking of Jesus in the Greco-Roman world

To understand the impact of this cultural contact on Christology, it is important to briefly describe the Greco-Roman world as the social, political, and intellectual environment in which early Christian theology took shape (Porter & Pitts, 2013).The term "Greco-Roman world" refers to the overlapping civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome, whose cultural and philosophical legacies profoundly shaped the Mediterranean basin from the classical period through late antiquity (Porter & Pitts, 2013). Church historian Grant Adamson (2019) describes these overlapping civilizations as comprising "ancient Greece during the archaic, Hellenic, and Hellenistic periods; and that of ancient Rome during the periods of monarchy, republic, and empire" (Adamson, 2019, p. 194). He further emphasizes that both civilizations were inherently multicultural. As empires that spanned vast territories, they incorporated a diversity of peoples, languages, and religious practices. Thus, the term "Greco-Roman" does not apply exclusively to ethnic Greeks or Romans but also encompasses various subjugated or incorporated peoples and territories, including Jews and early Christians who lived under Roman rule and operated within Hellenistic cultural influence (Adamson, 2019, p. 193).

This multicultural reality meant that early Christians and their fellow Jews could be classified as part of the Greco-Roman world insofar as they navigated its linguistic, cultural,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and political frameworks (Hartog, 2009). Even as Christianity retained distinct religious beliefs and practices, it inevitably absorbed elements of the surrounding culture. Within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, koine Greek emerged as the lingua franca, a common language that facilitated communication across diverse regions and peoples (Hartog, 2009). This was the language of commerce, administration, and philosophical discourse, and significantly, it became the language in which the New Testament and many other early Christian writings were composed (Porter& Pitts (Eds.) 2012). As Adamson (2015) notes, koine Greek was not only a practical tool for communication but also a conduit for the philosophical and intellectual heritage of ancient Greece, which continued to exert profound influence on religious and philosophical thought during the Roman period (Adamson, 2015, p. 4).

Moreover, the intellectual life of the Greco-Roman world was deeply shaped by the traditions of classical Greek philosophy, particularly the works of Socratic philosophers (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), whose ideas became the dominant paradigms for understanding reality, ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology (Van Kooten, 2009). These philosophical systems prioritized rational inquiry and logical argumentation as means of making sense of the world, a perspective that significantly differed from the apocalyptic and narrative-based worldview of Second Temple Judaism from which Christianity emerged (Van Kooten, 2009). The predominance of Greek philosophy created a cultural climate in which any credible religious or theological claim needed to be framed in terms of reason, metaphysics, and universal principles to gain intellectual legitimacy (Van Kooten, 2009). As a result, early Christian theologians, while seeking both to defend their faith against criticism

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and to communicate effectively with their contemporaries, began to appropriate and adapt philosophical concepts from the Hellenistic tradition (Van Kooten, 2009).

The continued use of koine Greek during the Byzantine era ensured that Greek philosophical language and categories remained influential in theological discourse well into the development of Christian orthodoxy (Ascough, 2022). Thus, this linguistic and philosophical context set the stage for what became a complex and often ambivalent relationship between Christian faith and Greco-Roman thought (Ascough, 2022). On the one hand, it provided early theologians with intellectual tools for articulating doctrines such as the nature of Christ, the Trinity, and salvation (Ascough, 2022). On the other hand, it risked reshaping and sometimes distorting the core messages of the gospel by subjecting them to foreign categories of thought (Ascough, 2022). This tension between faithful transmission of the apostolic witness and cultural adaptation lies at the heart of the debate over the "Hellenization of Christianity" and provides critical background for understanding how the identity and work of Jesus began to be masked by abstract philosophical and metaphysical formulations (Ascough, 2022).

In summary, early Christian thought and particularly Christology were significantly shaped by its encounter with the cultures and ideologies of the second to fifth centuries. This is grounded in Lamin Sanneh's (2009) argument that Christianity is a translatable religion, inherently open to engagement and adaptation across different cultural contexts. Sanneh contends that in these formative centuries, Christianity broke free from its exclusive Judaic roots and underwent a radical transformation through the adoption and assimilation of Hellenistic cultural forms, merging Jewish heritage with Greco-Roman philosophical ideas

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and imperial power structures (Sanneh, 2009, p. 15). Maurice Casey (2010) similarly notes that early Christians had to explain and defend their beliefs before a Hellenistic audience shaped by Greek philosophy, often adapting theological language to either resonate with or challenge prevailing worldviews.

This contact of Christianity with this environment led to a shift in the form of Christian Theology. Lamin Sanneh notes that theology took a metaphysical outlook and became hardened into dogmatic and intellectual developments (2009:34). This shift demonstrates that while the incipient Christologies of the first-century church existed in fluid and simple forms as lived and oral articulations, the second to fifth centuries come with great testing and stretching of these simple forms of Christologies. Perhaps this is the reason why historian Alister McGrath (2006) notes that although many early church Christian used these titles (Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, and Kyrios) in their worship with ease, from the second century they found themselves confronted with a set of new concepts and ideas relating to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the notions of salvation and redemption, and had to use new images, and ideas in order to deal with them (Mcgrath, 2006, pp. 137-141).

For instance, the construction of the Christian doctrines of the nature of Jesus and of God is widely attributed to Platonic philosophy. Specifically, Plato's idea of 'the Good' has been recognized as analogous with the notion of a Christian God (Marsh 1994, p. 69). Further, Plato's dualism and concept of pre-existence shaped how Christians talked about the person and Nature of Jesus. In his dualistic worldview, he suggests that the higher world consisted of ideas or forms while the lower world consisted of matter (Schaff, 1953, p. 1851). In this theory that came to be known as the Theory of Forms, Plato reasoned that in the higher world, everything, whether an object or an idea, existed in an ideal state, while the lower world

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

consisted of imperfect copies of the ideas or forms (Schaff, 1953:1852). For Plato, the ultimate form was an impersonal force called the Good (Schaff, 1953:1851). This concept is also tied to the question of the creator of the universe as the demiurge or architect which Platonism identified as the Mind *(Nous)* or *Logos* of God subordinated to the supreme God (Marsh 1994:55). Heraclitus was thought to be the first to apply the word logos to divine reason or wisdom which he believed to be a kind of power or influence that coordinated the universe (Schaff, 1953:1853).

Plato expounded on the idea by teaching that the logos was a part of a divine triad consisting of the Good, Ideas (Logos), and the World-Spirit (Schaff, 1953:1853). He did not think that Logos (wisdom, reason, etc.) was a literal person, but rather a governing principle or force (Schaff, 1953:1853). This Logos eventually becomes equated with the *Logos* of the prologue of St. John's Gospel (Dillon 1989:2-3). Further, Plato's view of the divine triad and the Logos, coupled with his belief in the immortal soul also influenced notions about Christology. Plato reasoned that all souls were eternal and literally pre-existed before being born, that is, before being incarnated (Olson, 2003:62). This belief served as a filter through which the Hellenized Church Fathers poured the gospel accounts (Olson, 2003:63). The result being the notion that Jesus literally pre-existed before being incarnated in Mary's womb since it's what all souls were said to experience (Olson, 2003:64). However, traditional Hebrew thought did not believe in a literal pre-existence of the soul, rather, it taught that things first "pre-existed" with God in His plan or foreknowledge (Olson, 2003:64)

In relation to this, it is also important to underscore how Jesus was understood as the divine logos in light of Christian convictions about the one supreme deity in the Greco-Roman milieu saturated with gods. Michael Bird (2002) observes that the idea of Jesus as divine was

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

present in the early church before contact with Greek philosophy. Categories used to describe Jesus as an eternal, true, and un-begotten deity from the earliest decades of the nascent church only found conceptual clarity with the contact with Plato's idea (2002:56). McGrath further notes that "the existing terms and structures which were available only became insufficient to express these Christological concepts (Mcgrath, 2006:137-141).Apostle Paul's Areopagus sermon in Acts 17:16-34 where Paul is attempting to convey the underlying concepts about Christ to a Greek audience is an example of these Christological discourses in trying to present conceptual and logical sensibilities of the person and work of Jesus in line with the existing ideological milieu of the Greco-Roman world (Casey 2010:17).

The Metaphysical turn in articulating the nature and the person of Jesus in the Greco-Roman world as occasioned by platonic philosophy also found its way into subsequent church councils. The councils addressed themselves to the errors and corruptions which crept into the Church due to platonic frameworks of dualism, pre-existence, and divine triad in attempts to make logical intelligibility of the person and nature of Jesus. What was considered orthodox was also conceptualized within Plato's philosophical frameworks. In the second century, Ebionism and Gnosticism threw the first spanner to the works. Ebionism argued that Jesus was an ordinary mortal, while Gnosticism held Docetic views which argued Christ was a spiritual being who only appeared to have a physical body (McGrath, 2007:78). In the third century, Monophysitsm underscored that after the union of the divine and the human in the historical incarnation, Jesus Christ had only a single nature (McGrath, 2007:80.). In the third and fourth century, Docetism claimed the human form of Jesus was mere semblance without any true reality (Donald, 1990:167). In the Fourth century, Arianism viewed the divine nature of Jesus, the Son of God, as distinct and inferior to God the Father and as such having a

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

beginning in time (Donald, 1990:168). In the fifth century, Nestorianism considered the two natures (human and divine) of Jesus Christ almost entirely distinct (Donald, 1990;168).

The fourth and the fifth century saw the convening of first major church councils to address these heresies. In 325, the First Council of Nicaea defined the persons of the Godhead and their relationship with one another, decisions which were ratified at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 (McGrath, 2007:103). The language used was that the one God exists in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); in particular, it was affirmed that the Son was *homoousios* (of the same being) as the Father (Donald, 1990:204). In 431, the first Council of Ephesus debated *miaphysitism* (two natures united as one after the hypostatic union) versus *dyophysitism* (coexisting natures after the hypostatic union) versus *monophysitism* (only one nature) versus Nestorianism (two hypostases) (Donald, 1990:208). From the Christological viewpoint, the council adopted *Mia Physis* ('one nature of the Word of God incarnate) (Donald, 1990:209) The 451 Council of Chalcedon was highly influential, and marked a key turning point in the Christological debates (Bindley, 1889:567). The council came up with what has become known as the Chalcedonian definition, which stipulates Christ's nature:

> "Jesus is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He was parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ;"(Schaff, 1885; XIV).

The Chalcedonian definition became the final definition of the person and the nature of Jesus. This became the church's Christological position. The second to the fifth century therefore seemed to have settled the Christological question- 'who do people say I am.' However, this definition was greatly informed and influenced by secular philosophy of the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Greco-Roman world that highlighted themes such as dualism, pre-existence, divine triad, reason, and the concept of logos. In my opinion, these settlements, although they addressed fundamental questions of who Jesus was and his role in salvation, served to make Christology abstract and metaphysical in nature and paid no attention to the everydayness of Jesus Christ in the life of the church. Jesus was therefore masked by the Greco-Roman metaphysical and dualistic worldviews. This conception has continued to dominate Western Christianity in Europe over the ages in attempting to make logical intelligibility of who Jesus is in their changing contexts occasioned by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, industrialization, secularism, and later in the empire project of colonization.

While the Chalcedonian definition provided theological clarity on the person and nature of Jesus, it also marked a decisive shift in how Christology was articulated by moving from the lived, experiential, and relational images of Jesus within early Christian communities to abstract, metaphysical formulations heavily influenced by Greco-Roman philosophical categories. Themes like dualism, pre-existence, the divine triad, and the Logos concept became dominant, often at the expense of a Christology rooted in the concrete realities of daily faith and communal life. This philosophical framing effectively "masked" Jesus behind layers of speculative theology that prioritized metaphysical precision over lived encounter. Over time, this Greco-Roman Christological heritage profoundly shaped Western Christianity's theological imagination, persisting through the epochs of the Reformation, Enlightenment, industrialization, and even into the colonial enterprise.

As the theological traditions of Europe expanded beyond their borders, particularly through mission and colonization, these Eurocentric and abstract conceptions of Christ traveled with them and thereby imposed Western Christological frameworks onto other

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

cultures. The next section explores this critical development by examining how Jesus was carried "from the West to the Rest," tracing the Eurocentric and colonial frameworks that continued to mask the lived and liberative images of Jesus in various global contexts.

2.3.3 Jesus from the West to the Rest- the Eurocentric and colonial frameworks

At the end of the third century, Jesus is now masked not only with Greco-Roman metaphysical and dualistic ideas, but also with imperial politics. He is *kyrios*- the Lord over lords in the Roman Empire, where the claim to lordship was the prerogative of the emperor (Rieger 2007:13). The contact with Western civilization added yet another layer of masking to Christology, this time in the form of a white supremacist mask. As Christianity moved deeper into the cultural, political, and intellectual currents of Western Europe, Christology became not only abstract through Greco-Roman metaphysical and dualistic ideas but also racialized within the framework of emerging Western imperial ideologies (Pindi & De La Garza, 2018:219). The theological imagination of Western Christianity began to depict Jesus through a distinctly European lens, often portraying him as white, male, and embodying Eurocentric ideals of civilization, morality, and authority (Pindi & De La Garza, 2018:219). This racialized imagery was not merely a matter of artistic representation but carried deep theological and ideological implications. It contributed to a theological framework that aligned Christianity with colonial expansion, imperial dominance, and systems of racial hierarchy.

As Pindi and De La Garza (2018) further argue, this development embedded Christology within the broader structures of empire and white supremacist ideology, making theological reflection complicit in systems of oppression rather than a tool for liberation and solidarity (Pindi & De La Garza, 2018:219). This whitewashed Christology served both as a

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

religious justification for colonial conquest and as a spiritual endorsement of racial superiority, legitimizing the subjugation of non-European peoples and cultures (Bussaja, 2024). In this sense, Christ was no longer simply masked by Greco-Roman philosophical abstractions but now also bore the mask of imperial and racial dominance. Thus, the spread of Western Christianity through missionary enterprises and colonial ventures carried with it not only the gospel message but also Western cultural norms, racial prejudices, and political interests (Bussaja, 2024).

Therefore, Christological teachings often became instruments of cultural assimilation and control, whereby both iconography (Blum and Harvey, 2012) and theological rhetoric (Rieger, 2007) served to construct and (re)produce a white Jesus. This social construction of a white Jesus (Ruether, 2012:102), begun in the Middle Ages. In tracing the genealogy of a white Jesus (Blum & Harvey,2012) observes that while there was no visual representation of Jesus in the first centuries of Christianity, iconography reached its peak during the Middle Ages with Catholicism and as such images of the 'ideal Jesus' was produced (2012: 15). Pindi & De La Garza (2018) further suggests that at inception, Christianity was not European religion but rather a marginalized group until in the fourth century when it came into contact with western civilization (Pindi & De La Garza, 2018:222). The result of this contact was the translation of the foundation of Christianity to European cultural and ideological sensibilities. This translation later becomes utilized as a justification for colonization (Pindi & De La Garza, 2018:219).

The white Jesus became an emblem for Christianity, and a decoy for colonization. No wonder Schleiermacher (1768-1834) the father of modern liberal theology in western Christianity defined the power of Christ in terms of attraction, and as such "attractive power,"

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

rather than "coercive power," (Schleiermacher 1884:91). Schleiermacher may not have been critical of such an ideology as entrenching hierarchy and underpinning colonization by portraying 'white Jesus' the emblem of European Christianity as 'attractive'. Moreover, J.D Fage (1995) notes that "in mid-and late-nineteenth-century Europeans were generally convinced that their Christian, scientific and industrial society was intrinsically far superior to anything that Africa had produced." (1995:322). Also, in his missionary memoir about Ethiopia, Rev Daniel Kumler Flickinger (1887) observed that "the only reason why our theological views are not as foolish and corrupting as theirs (Ethiopians), and that we are not believers in witchcraft, devil-worship, and a thousand other foolish things, is simply because the light of Heaven shines upon us" (1887:23).

It is on such an account that we can decipher the intricate connection between colonization and Christianity, in what has commonly been termed as the three C's of Colonialism: Civilization, Christianity, and Commerce (Fage, 1995:2). Hence the assertion that "Christians have often, through crusade, conquest, and commerce, used the name and power of Christ to promote and justify political, economic, and even military gain," (Rieger 2007: vi). This is the kind of power that missionaries viewed as "attractive power," rather than "coercive power," (Schleiermacher 1884:91), and which was necessary for the colonizer. Therefore, Ruether (2012) asserts that colonization "meant treating Africans as personally and culturally "primitive," their culture as backward if not demonic, thus seeking to strip Africans of their African cultural identity and to impose a Christianity and European language and culture seen as normatively human" (2012:107–108). To 'redeem' them, Africans brought to the Americas as slaves, Africans (in Africa), indigenous peoples of the Americas, and Asians

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

colonized by Europeans, have been given a Christology which not only looks 'white' but validates the dominating power of Western imperialism and colonialism (Ruether, 2012:111).

This kind of white supremacist portraiture of Jesus has also found consonance in theological adumbration. In particular, the three offices of Jesus have been utilized to justify white supremacist and the colonization of others. Rieger (2007) notes that the titles associated with the three offices of Christ have often fostered imperial and colonial attitudes (2007:198). Thus, asserting Christ's power as king, for instance, has led to images of Christ's kingship that resembled the political powers in control (2007:198). The title of priest has been used to valorize ideas of obedience and the acceptance of suffering. Schleiermacher notes, for instance, that "the priestly office is supposed to comfort us and remind us that we share His perfection, if not in execution, at least in impulse" (Schleiermacher 1884:455). He further notes that "Christendom as a whole . . . stands to the rest of humanity in the relation in which the priests stood to the laity," (Schleiermacher 1884:455). Rieger (2007) notes two critical things from this adumbration of the priestly office. First, suffering becomes the passive spirit of the victim, devoid of an active spirit expressed, for instance, in resistance and refusal; thus, the colonized remain victims without agency, dependent on the actions of others (2007:211). Secondly, it means that the white Christian community, as inseparable from Christ, appears before God for the whole races on earth and represents it 2007:212)

The third office of the prophet is also utilized in a like manner to the other offices. Rieger (2007) notes that Christ's work as prophet is defined by teaching, prophesying, and working miracles (2007:210). Perhaps this is why Schleiermacher observes that: "even if it cannot be strictly proved that the Church's power of working miracles has died out..., yet in general it is undeniable that, in view of the great advantage in power and civilization which

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

the Christian peoples possess over the non-Christian..., the preachers of to-day do not need such signs," (Schleiermacher, 1884:450). Schleiermacher seems to argue here that the white Christian invasion of other territories is God's miracle because they teach and bring to the colonized civilization. Rieger notes that it is evident that Schleiermacher's interpretation of the three offices of Christ introduces a problem of Christology in a modern European colonial framework. In this interpretation, Christ's power is expressed in the church, and we now have access to him only through the church (2007:213). This means that no one else has access to God and to salvation unless through the intervention of the whites. In a nutshell, this kind of ideological manipulation of the representation of Jesus Christ as white served and advanced racial hierarchy, racial exclusion that conferred power and agency to whites and disempowered and denied agency to the colonized.

The nineteenth century was a defining moment in the history of Christianity's contact with Africa. Although Christianity had been in some parts of Africa even before this moment (Isichei, 1995:42), this century was an epoch of the introduction of Western missionary Christianity, especially south of the Sahara. This contact was mediated by white missionaries from the Catholic Church as well as Protestant denominations (Gunda, 2020:367). This missionary's escape was motivated by the assumption that Africa had no religion and, by implication, had no way of knowing or thinking about God (Gunda, 2020:368). The implication of this assumption was that theology, including Christologies, was mediated through European experiences.

Therefore, Jesus from the West to the rest was certainly problematic in Africa. Such portrayals constructed a Christ who looked white, spoke the language of the colonizer, and operated through Western ecclesial and political institutions. This Eurocentric image of Jesus

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

was not just theological; it was ideological, serving as a tool to validate the superiority of Western civilization and delegitimize indigenous cultures and spiritualities. By framing salvation, divine authority, and moral legitimacy within the bounds of Western norms, colonized peoples were denied direct access to God unless mediated through white missionaries, churches, and colonial structures. This effectively stripped African peoples of their spiritual agency and cultural worth, presenting them as spiritually inferior and in need of Western redemption. As a result, Christianity, rather than being a liberating force, became complicit in entrenching racial hierarchies and socio-cultural exclusion, replacing rich African traditions with alien dogmas that masked themselves as universal truth.

In conclusion, the introduction of Western missionary Christianity into Africa not only brought with it a foreign faith expression but also imposed a Eurocentric, racialized Christology that dismissed and discredited indigenous African religious thought and spiritual agency. This Christ mediated through colonial structures and missionary institutions, became a symbol of Western dominance rather than a liberator for African peoples. The result was a deeply entrenched theological and cultural alienation, where African identities were subordinated to imported doctrines that portrayed Western norms as the standard of Christian faith and practice. This masking of Jesus within colonial and racial ideologies left a lasting legacy on African Christianity, a legacy that continued to shape church structures, theological education, and religious expressions even after the formal end of colonialism.

The dawn of African independence sparked a new era of theological reflection and critique, giving rise to what many have called "Christological crisis." African theologians, pastors, and communities began to interrogate inherited Western Christologies and question

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

their relevance to African contexts and lived realities. However, even as they sought to reclaim a more authentic and liberating image of Christ for their communities, they faced another enduring challenge: the patriarchal vestiges embedded in both Western missionary theology and traditional African cultures. The next section explores this critical moment of Jesus in Independent Africa by examining how the postcolonial quest for theological and cultural emancipation encountered both liberating possibilities and persistent patriarchal constraints

2.3.4 Jesus in Independent Africa- The "Christological crisis" and Patriarchal Vestiges

In the middle of the 20th century, a new intellectual climate emerged in tandem with agitation for independence (Bujo 1992:51). Therefore, African intellectuals and nationalists recognized that there would not be genuine political liberation without cultural liberation (Bujo, 1992:51). In order to regain political self-determination, a revitalization of the African Cultural heritage that had been demonized and eroded by missionary Christianity become a matter of priority (Van der Merwe 1989:256). Therefore, African culture and religious symbols became a means of awakening the African people's spirit of struggle towards political liberation (Munga 1998:41).

It against this backdrop that African theologians and biblical scholars started questioning the relevance and legitimacy of European theologies in addressing the existential problems that were being faced by Africans (Gunda, 2020:368). In the 1950s, the articulation and formation of modern African theology emerged and gained momentum in the 1960s (Mbiti 1998:146). The task of this theology was twofold. First it was meant to rehabilitate Africa and Africans in the light of centuries and decades of concerted attacks on the humanity of Africa and Africans by western missionary Christianity and theologies (Bediako 1992:1; Gunda, 2020:368). Secondly, it was meant to rectify the negative images about Africa and its

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

people that were embedded in certain missionary readings of some biblical texts, and the identifying of the presence of Africa and its people in the Bible and their contribution in biblical history (Gunda 2020:368). *In toto*, this theology curated a theological, methodological, and epistemic break with Western traditions and methods because they did not align with the African needs and mentality. However, in this period, the question of who Jesus was to an African did not become an immediate concern.

This period, which birthed the discipline of African theology, was primarily concerned with legitimating the use of African concepts and motifs in theology. No wonder, Diane Stinton (2011) observes that during this period, "theological endeavor focused on the gospel in relation to the African heritage, thereby delaying intensive Christological inquiry," (2011:23). She has called this phenomenon "Christological crisis"- lack of critical and systematic reflections on Jesus Christ by Africans in light of their own cultural inheritance and identity," (2011:18). Kwame Bediako (1995) also observes that systematic formulations of who Jesus was in Africa were conspicuously absent or minimal during the first phase of modern African Theology between 1950s to 1980s, (1995:59).

Therefore, from the 1980s onwards, Africa witnessed a significant proliferation of Christological reflections and theological writings that sought to reinterpret Jesus Christ in ways that resonated with African cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts (Bohache, 2008, Stinton 2011). This period marked the maturation of African Christian theology, as African theologians began to assert their voices in the global theological discourse, challenging Eurocentric paradigms and articulating Christologies rooted in African worldviews, communal values, and lived experiences (Bohache, 2008).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Further, according to Charles Nyamiti (2015) since 1980's, Christology has been most developed in African theology in the twin strands of inculturation and liberation theology (Nyamiti, 2015:4). He notes that whereas Inculturation Christologies examine the mystery of Christ from either the perspective of the African worldview, or from the angle of some particular theme or image taken from the African culture, Liberation Christologies have Jesus of Nazareth as the starting point (2015:5). In Liberation Christologies, stress is put on the historical background and biblical text concerning him. Thus, Jesus lived in a society which was oppressed and exploited by the Romans (Nyamiti, 2015:10. He was poor because of Roman exploitation and oppression. Jesus died in this fight against oppression. But by raising Jesus from the dead, God has shown that He was "for him" and "with him" in his struggle against oppression (2015:11).

Further, liberation and inculturation paradigms have offered Africa different motifs of Christ. The latter have images such as life-giver, healer, power, victor, liberator, mediator, savior, redeemer, among others. The former has images such as proto ancestor, ancestor, master initiator, chief, elder brother, among others (Gathogo, 2015:4). Further, Scholarship in the twenty-first century has challenged the categorization of African Christologies within the two frameworks. For instance, Gathogo contends that such categorization in the twenty-first century is a serious theological flaw because it fails to acknowledge that we are certainly in the era of postcolonial reconstruction (Gathogo, 2015:6). Gathogo therefore vouches for the reconstruction framework as the relevant paradigm for the twenty-first century.

Jesse Mugambi is the key proponent of the reconstruction framework in Africa. Jesse Mugambi, in his theory, presupposes that the future of African Christianity will be shaped largely by the extremely induced forces of rapid urbanization, industrialization,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

commercialization, and synchronization (Mugambi, 1995:2). Through the print and electronic media, he states that these forces are becoming much more influential than socialization through nurture at home and pastoral guidance by the church. Reconstruction would thus be a re-organization of society to facilitate more integration, and which pays attention to the foundations of the old culture as essential for the sustenance of the new society (Mugambi 1995:4). In locating Christology within the ambit reconstruction paradigm, Mugambi sees Christ as the African guest, who in the New Testament, is portrayed as one who is always at home with all peoples, cultures and languages (Mugambi 1995:73). Mugambi further argues that the uniqueness of Christ as a guest above other ordinary guests in the African context is seen in his emphasis on the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class and hierarchical barriers (Mugambi 1995:74). He justifies this claim by stating that as good African guest, Christ brings gifts, and one of the best gifts He brought is reconciliation between humanity and the maker – God; and even reconciliation between Jews and gentiles, blacks and whites, men and women, rich and poor, and so forth (Mugambi 1995:75).

Other reconstruction Christologians include Wachege (1992), Kä Mana (1993), and Ukachukwu (2003). Mugambi and these authors agree that as a reconstructionist, "Christ rebuilds the many walls that beg for attention; and this is seen through his ancestorhood, healing, reconciliation, elderhood and familyhood and is present as we wrestle with the vicissitudes of life," (Gathogo, 2015:9). It is easily noticeable that African Christologies of reconstruction is an integration of the other frameworks of inculturation, and liberation thereby reconstructing Africa as well as the world, in accord with emerging humane requirements. This is the reason why the Christological formulations as the motifs of Jesus Christ are similar and overlap in all three methodologies. Although paying attention to all the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Christological motifs in the three frameworks is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that these frameworks and their resultant motifs of Jesus have continued to be challenged as embedded in androcentric perspectives and imageries that are privileged in a patriarchal society (Oduyoye 1986, 1993, 2001; Kanyoro, 2001, Maseno 2004).

2.3.5. The African Women's Critique: Male voices alone do not suffice

Mercy Amba Oduyoye critically notes that the surge in African Christological literature was largely dominated by "male voices," which became the default Christological scripts in Africa (Oduyoye, 2001). Wasike further notes that these formulations often privileged patriarchal interpretations, overlooking the gendered dimensions of Christology and marginalizing the voices, experiences, and theological insights of African women (Wasike, 1989). As a result, early African Christologies, while culturally transformative in some respects, often reproduced male-dominated narratives and neglected the liberative concerns of women, especially around issues of oppression, marginalization, and embodiment (Wasike, 2015).

This male-dominated Christological discourse not only sidelined women's voices but also perpetuated theological frameworks that reinforced existing patriarchal structures within African societies and churches (Oduyoye, 2001). By centring male experiences and interpretations, these Christologies often depicted Jesus in ways that affirmed male authority and normalized the exclusion of women from theological leadership, ecclesiastical power, and critical reflection on faith (Wasike, 2015). Consequently, the liberative potential of African Christology was curtailed by its failure to challenge both the colonial and patriarchal legacies embedded in African religious and social life. As Oduyoye (2001) and other African feminist theologians have emphasized, a truly transformative Christology in Africa needed to engage

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

with the lived realities of African women, interrogate patriarchal theological assumptions, and reimagine the person and work of Jesus in ways that affirm the dignity, agency, and full humanity of all people, especially those marginalized by both culture and church.

Oduyoye and other African women theologians within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians responded by developing feminist and womanist Christologies that challenged both Western and male-dominated African theological frameworks (Gathogo, 2008) Gathogo notes that these women emphasized Jesus as one who identifies with women's suffering, affirms their dignity, and challenges unjust power structures (Gathogo, 2008:78). Oduyoye (1993) noted that although inculturation was important, it failed to take into account patriarchal elements found in African cultures (1993:109). Her assertion coalesces with Musimbi Kanyoro, who argues that "we African women theologians make the claim that inculturation is not sufficient unless the cultures we reclaim are analyzed and are deemed worthy in terms of promoting justice and support for life and the dignity of women (Kanyoro 2001:107).

Loreen Maseno (2004) also observes that "inculturation has been tacitly gendered from a male perspective since traditionally, an analysis of women's subordination has not been integrated in the task of inculturation,"(Maseno 2004: (Maseno, 2004). In view of this, Maseno further argues that "for inculturation in Africa to adequately account for human life, it has to contend with not only the lives and thoughts of African males but also of African females," (Maseno 2004:228). These three women theologians raise a valid argument that inculturation did not unmask the African cultures' vestiges of patriarchy. Further, the motifs of Christ therein are not inclusive of all people in regard to class, gender, and sexuality.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

These critical interventions broadened the scope of African Christological discourse and highlighted the need for more inclusive, contextually grounded theological reflections that capture the full diversity of the African Christian experience. These women's interventions also recovered and affirmed Christological expressions found in the oral traditions, everyday experiences, and embodied practices of African communities prior to the 1980s. One notable example of this recovery is the work of Afua Kuma.

Stinton notes that in the middle of the 'Christological crisis' and the prominence of male voices as default Christological scripts, there existed traces of indigenous oral and lived Christologies (Stinton, 2011:18). For example, Afua Kuma, who has been described in many writings as 'a non-literate Ghanaian woman' gifted the world with a repertoire of oral Christological formulations in her extemporaneous prayers superimposed upon her Akan context in Ghana (Fretheim 2018:4).

Afua Kuma (1900-1987) of Ghana (baptized Christiana Gyane) has been referred to as one of the first modern African female oral theologians who also doubled up as a village midwife, and a farmer (Stinton 2011:17). African women theologians have described her as: "a representative of the women who weave lyrics about Jesus and always pour their hearts out in prayer and praise and in all places, these women whose theology gets 'reduced' into writing by those who can write," (Oduyoye 2006:153). This assertion valorized the primacy of oral and lived Christologies among African women. Afua Kuma lived during a complex period of Ghana's history, from the end of the colonial period and into post-independence, and earned widespread recognition in Ghana for her gift for offering these oral praises, which she shared in a variety of Christian settings (Fretheim 2018:4).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Recent scholarship has defined her work as a display of "incredible theological and linguistic ingenuity in adapting a traditional chiefly praise format, familiar in her Akan culture, for vibrant, Christologically focused praise," (Fretheim2018:3). Beyond her culture, her conceptualization of Jesus has been described as emanating from 'two worlds (Akosua 2000:74).'Akosua Anyidoho (2000) notes therefore that Afua Kuma's praises reflect "the complexity of late-colonial and early post-independence Ghana, with imagery drawn expansively from her experiences with farming, midwifery, family, and diverse facets of traditional Akan life and culture, as well as more modern aspects of development, law, policing, education, and healthcare," (200:74). There are therefore three themes that are critical in exploring her oral Christology: gender, culture and how these inform her Christology.

First, her choice for oral medium of Christologizing through her songs and extemporaneous prayers gave her agency in a patriarchal setting. Sara J. Fretheim (2018) observes that "the significance of Afua Kuma's praises is the fact that traditionally, while women played a part in these processions, only men held the role of chiefly praise singers; and by contrast, Afua Kuma, a woman, confidently appropriated this genre and was widely respected and celebrated for sharing her gift," (2018:4). Her orality therefore allowed her to blur and blend socio-cultural boundaries that excluded women from leading religious processions, and thereby giving her agency in resisting patriarchal normative of her time. In one of her songs, she talks about this sort of agency given by Jesus:

> "Jesus has made his blood a rope
> to drag us all out of the pit! Thousands of tongues roar out His name
> —give Him praise for what He has done," (Kuma 1980:20).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

She seems to suggest in this piece that Jesus has given 'all women' the ability to arise from dungeons (such as patriarchy) and to flourish in their various contexts (thousands of tongues). In another song, she refers to the biblical story of the woman whom Jesus granted agency by allowing her to anoint him in her state of being rejected, and the agency of the women who defied the Roman empire to lead in the triumphant praises of acclaiming Jesus as king. She says:

> "But of them all, he is the leader, and the chiefs with all their glory follow after him
> He is the one for whom women lay down their cloths on the path, and pour sweet-smelling oil on his feet. They run to and fro amidst shouts of praise before him.
> It is true: Jesus is a Chief!" (Kuma 1980:20).

Secondly, her oral Christology uses word-pictures from her people's everydayness of life and depictions that are relatable (Akosua 2000:74). Kwame Bediako (1995) has asserted that in Afua Kuma's praises, "there is theology which comes from where the faith lives and must live continually, in the conditions of life of the community of faith, the theology of the living church, reflecting faith in the living Lord as present reality in daily life," (1975:73). She sings:

> "Drummers, bring your assorted drums and start playing the Atumpan.
> Let your strokes beat out proud rhythms to honor the name of Jesus, and join the earth to the heavens,"(1980:6) "O great and powerful Jesus, incomparable diviner, the sun and moon are your *batakari.* It sparkles like the morning star. *Sekyere Buruku* the tall mountain, all the nations see your glory,"(1980:6). "The great Rock we hide behind the great forest canopy that gives cool shade the Big Tree which lifts its vines to peep at the heavens, the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves encourage the luxuriant growth below," (1980:7).

Finally, her oral Christologies assert validity of production of theological knowledge from indigenous resources. Kofi Asare Opoku in reference to this kind of epistemology, comments that "we have a proverb in Ghana (*Twi* dialect): "Truth is like a baobab tree: one person's arms can't embrace it." … If we are to succeed in surrounding the baobab tree, we

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

must hold hands – Afua Kuma offers us one hand to grasp, and her view of Jesus enables us to see Jesus in a new way," (Opoku 2018:11). Afua Kuma therefore asserts that:

> "We are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ. We shall announce his many titles: they are true and they suit him well, so it is fitting that we do this," (1980:5).

Such incipient Christologies in their oral, lived, and perfumed forms cast a spotlight on today's institutional and traditional theologies produced by Western theologians and the post-independence African context of patriarchy. These oral formulations seem to be demystifying Christology in Africa. They seem to be questioning whether Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or Barth and great theological thoughts developed in pieces like *Summa Theologica* are a more valuable resource to communicate biblical truth to Africans and any other natives in any context. Contextualization and reclamation of indigenous resources and epistemologies, like in Afua Kuma's Christology, seem to be a critical accommodation of these resources in theological discourses.

Her oral, lived, and performed faith in Jesus seems to give her agency to overcome ideological and structural conditioning that has invisibilized, excluded, and minoritized other children of God. Jesus seems to be present in her everyday life through relatable themes and idioms. With this as an example, my study pays attention to the everydayness of Christologies proclaimed, lived, and performed among twenty-first-century ordinary women at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and health.

Finally, the interventions of African women theologians exemplified by figures such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Afua Kuma represent a vital deconstruction of both Western and patriarchal African Christological frameworks. By emphasizing Jesus as one who suffers with women, affirms their dignity, and disrupts unjust structures (Gathogo, 2008), these theologians reclaimed the legitimacy of oral, lived, and embodied African Christologies that

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

had long been marginalized. The work of Afua Kuma, in particular, illustrates how indigenous expressions of faith, grounded in everyday life and cultural idioms, can articulate profound Christological truths outside formal academic theology. Her prayers and praises served not only as theological reflections but as acts of resistance, reclaiming space for women's voices, agency, and experiences within African Christianity. These contributions challenge the sufficiency of inherited Eurocentric theological categories and call for a broader, more inclusive Christology, one that listens to the voices from the margins and integrates indigenous epistemologies and lived realities. As such, contemporary theological reflection, especially at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and health, must continue to pay attention to the ordinary, yet deeply theological, lives of African women.

2.4 A new Challenge: The 'Jesus of *Tongaren*' and other Kenyan Jesus' Stories

A recent growing phenomenon in Kenya is the emergence of a "Jesus figure" within the local communities, where men who openly claim the identity of Jesus Christ draw significant public attention. These contemporary "Jesus figures" do not remain on the fringes of religious life but rather position themselves visibly within Kenyan society. They are not only preachers but also public personalities who engage directly with the media, offer interviews, and explain their missions to curious journalists and intrigued communities. Unlike the theological Christ of church dogma, these figures present themselves in ways that are strikingly relatable: they are married, have children, claim miraculous abilities such as turning tea into wine, maintain a following of dedicated disciples, and function as leaders of small faith movements. Their self-presentation deliberately mirrors aspects of the biblical Jesus narrative, albeit contextualized within the social, economic, and cultural realities of contemporary Kenya (Gathogo, (2022).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

This phenomenon gained national and even international media coverage during the 2022 Advent season with the rise of "Jesus of Tongaren." Eliud Wekesa, widely known as *Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren*, emerged as one of the most prominent self-proclaimed Jesus figures in Kenya. His case captured the fascination of the public and media alike when he openly declared himself to be Jesus Christ (Lemiso, 2003:2). Unlike abstract theological debates on Christology within church or academic circles, Wekesa's claim stirred curiosity because of its boldness and the way it unfolded within a real-life communal setting. He was not just a man making personal claims of divine identity; he also established a structured religious community (Lemiso, 2003:4). Wekesa started his own church and handpicked twelve disciples, carefully naming them after the biblical descendants of Jacob. These disciples, like their biblical counterparts, were tasked with helping him run the ministry, lead worship, and spread his message (Lemiso, 2003:3).

What makes *Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren's* story particularly intriguing is his ability to tap into "a complex blend of religious expectation, cultural familiarity, and social disenchantment" (Gathogo, 2022). His rise reflects the deep yearning within many communities for direct, tangible religious experience, one that is not mediated by distant church hierarchies or inaccessible theological abstractions (Irizar, 2022). In a society grappling with widespread poverty, political instability, and spiritual longing, a figure like Wekesa offers an accessible image of divinity; one who lives among the people, speaks their language, and shares their struggles. For some, following such a figure is an act of religious devotion; for others, it is a search for hope and a sense of belonging in an increasingly fractured society. This raises important questions about the socio-religious factors that make such figures not only possible but appealing in modern Kenya (Gathogo, 2022).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Beyond the sensational headlines, the rise of Jesus figures such as Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren invites deeper theological and sociological reflection. First, it exposes the persistent human desire for a visible, relatable savior as an incarnate Christ who is not merely a theological concept but a living presence among the people (Schmitz, 2025). This desire echoes the early Christological formulations that sought to understand Jesus as both divine and profoundly human, deeply embedded in the lived experiences of his followers. However, these contemporary claims also bring to light the ways in which religious narratives can be appropriated within local contexts to meet both spiritual and material needs ((Schmitz, 2025). In the case of Wekesa, the choice to identify with Jesus and to structure his ministry around biblical imagery serves both to legitimize his leadership and to anchor his movement within familiar religious symbols.

Secondly, this phenomenon highlights a deeper crisis within institutional Christianity in Kenya (Parsitau, 2014). The rise of self-styled "Jesus figures" may be read as a critique, whether conscious or not, of traditional church structures that have become increasingly alienated from the grassroots. Established churches, often embroiled in internal politics, doctrinal rigidity, and scandals, may appear distant or irrelevant to the pressing needs of ordinary believers (Parsitau, 2014). Figures like *Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren* seem to fill a vacuum left by these institutions, offering a more immediate and personalized spiritual experience. This echoes broader trends in African Christianity where charismatic leaders and independent movements have gained popularity precisely because they resonate with the everyday struggles and spiritual aspirations of local communities (Csordas, 1997).

However, this phenomenon is not without its theological and ethical dilemmas. The self-identification as Jesus Christ raises significant concerns about theological orthodoxy,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

spiritual manipulation, and the potential for exploitation. While some may view figures like Wekesa as harmless religious eccentrics, others see in them a risk of cultic practices, spiritual abuse, or false hope (Pretorius, 2013). These concerns are not unfounded in a region where religious leaders have at times wielded unchecked authority over their followers, leading to harmful outcomes (Pretorius, 2013). The challenge for the broader church and theological community is how to engage with such movements, whether to denounce, ignore, or seek understanding of the deeper currents they reveal within Kenyan religious life.

The public discourse surrounding *Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren* and similar figures also sheds light on the media's role in shaping religious narratives in Kenya (Thiong'o, 2016). The media often oscillates between sensationalism and curiosity, portraying these figures either as comic relief or as dangerous impostors (Thiong'o, 2016). Rarely do media reports engage critically with the underlying social or theological questions these movements raise (Thiong'o, 2016). This creates a gap in public discourse, in which complex issues of faith, identity, and community are reduced to viral headlines and social media memes. Yet, these phenomena deserve more serious attention, not because they threaten mainstream Christianity per se, but because they reflect deeper undercurrents in the religious consciousness of contemporary Kenyan society.

In the broader Christological conversation, the phenomenon of figures like *Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren* challenges theologians to reconsider how Christ is represented, embodied, and encountered in local contexts (Ezigbo, 2010). It presses the question of whether African Christologies have adequately engaged with the everyday realities and spiritual needs of African communities (Ezigbo, 2010). He thus posed: have Christological reflections remained too abstract, too academic, or too tied to Western theological categories to speak meaningfully

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

to contemporary African contexts? Or are these new "Jesus figures" symptomatic of a deeper yearning for a Christ who is truly Emmanuel, God with us, in tangible, familiar, and accessible ways?

Further, the emergence of Kenyan "Jesus figures" like *Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren* underscores both "the creativity and the complexity of African religious expression (Jules-Rosette, 1980). It reveals a landscape in which faith is not merely inherited from missionary legacies or colonial Christianity but is constantly renegotiated, reimagined, and localized (Jules-Rosette, 1980). While such movements may raise legitimate concerns about theological soundness and pastoral responsibility, they also offer a mirror to the church and society reflecting the hopes, disillusionments, and spiritual hungers of a people searching for meaning, belonging, and divine encounter in their own terms (Jules-Rosette, 1980). Therefore, rather than dismissing such phenomena outright, they invite a critical but empathetic exploration of what it means for Christ to be present, recognized, and followed within the lived experiences of Kenyan communities today.

Adding to this unfolding narrative is Mwalimu Yesu wa Tongaren's explicit claim that he is the real Jesus Christ, sent on a divine mission to save the world. Wekesa asserts that God himself gave him the name Jesus to fulfill a unique mission for this century (Lemiso, 2003:2). This bold declaration situates him not merely as a prophet or spiritual leader but as the definitive messianic figure. Interestingly, the phenomenon of self-proclaimed messiahs or god figures is not entirely new in Kenya. Before the rise of Wekesa, other figures had emerged making similar claims, each capturing public imagination and sparking societal debates about faith, authenticity, and religious leadership.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

One notable figure preceding Wekesa was *Jehovah Wanyonyi*, a self-proclaimed god who resided in *Chemororoch* village in Uasin Gishu County, Western Kenya (Sitole, 2011). Known for his extraordinary claims, Jehovah Wanyonyi declared himself to be the Almighty God, identifying Jesus Christ as his son, and declaring Mount Elgon, a mountain near his home, to be Mount Zion (Sitole, 2011:3). Despite his passing on July 18, 2015, at the age of 91, his followers remained steadfast in their belief, claiming that he would soon return (Sitole, 2011:4). His story reveals how religious imagination in Kenya can accommodate radical reinterpretations of biblical narratives, often shaped by local geography, personal charisma, and communal faith dynamics.

Another prominent incident occurred in Nairobi in 1988, orchestrated by the renowned prophetess Mary Sinaida Akatsa (Mwaura, 2004). Known for her dramatic prophetic ministry, Akatsa had prophesied that the Messiah would visit her congregation (Mwaura, 2004). On June 11, 1988, during a service at the Jerusalem Church of Christ in *Kawangware* slums, Akatsa unveiled a man she introduced as "Jesus." This figure appeared in striking attire, tall, barefoot, bearded, dressed in white robes, with his head wrapped in a turban, and reportedly surrounded by a strange, sporadic light emanating from his head, feet, and body (Standard Newspaper, May 12, 2013). The gathered crowd of approximately 6,000 worshippers erupted in ecstatic shouts of "Jesus of Nazareth!" (Standard Newspaper, May 12, 2013). Akatsa herself was no stranger to extraordinary claims, having alleged that she had been resurrected after three days following her death by witchcraft at the hands of her mother-in-law.

These occurrences are further complicated by frequent claims that prophets and preachers receive visits from biblical figures or experience miraculous events that parallel

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

those recorded in Scripture. Figures such as Prophet David Owuor have claimed to undergo transfiguration experiences akin to those of Jesus in the gospels, further blurring the lines between biblical narrative, personal revelation, and public performance (Kajuma, 2019:4). Such events suggest a dynamic and often porous boundary between religious faith, personal charisma, and community belief, raising critical questions about authority, authenticity, and the socio-religious function of messianic figures in Kenyan society.

Altogether, these varied appearances of "Jesus figures," god-men, and transfigured prophets point to a larger religious phenomenon deeply embedded within Kenya's socio-cultural fabric. They reflect a spiritual landscape marked by both a hunger for tangible divine presence and a suspicion towards institutionalized religion. In a context where traditional churches are perceived as compromised by politics, corruption, or irrelevance, these alternative spiritual leaders offer a different narrative, one that promises direct access to the divine, immediate solutions to personal problems, and a sense of communal belonging. While the legitimacy and theological soundness of such figures remain highly contested, their existence challenges the church, theologians, and society at large to reflect on the spiritual yearnings and social dynamics that give rise to such movements.

Furthermore, these occurrences demonstrate that the search for Jesus Christ extends beyond formal, written Christological formulations. Bishop Henry Okullu's call to ground African theology in the lived experiences of ordinary people through prayers in homes, drumbeats in villages, songs, dance, art, and both sophisticated and simple preaching highlights the richness of grassroots expressions of faith (Okullu 1974:54). This perspective is equally relevant to African Christologies, which must take seriously the spontaneous, oral, and embodied ways African communities, particularly women, articulate and experience

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Christ. This study builds on this insight by exploring how African women, situated at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and health, locate and relate to the Christ figure in their everyday lives.

2.5 A Critical conclusion: *Qua vadis* Oral and Lived Christologies

This chapter has offered a critical survey of the shape of Christologies in particular epochs of Christian history. The first section has shown that the incipient and foundational Christologies of Christianity were oral and lived as demonstrated by the binitarian shape of spirituality and worship in the first century. In subsequent sections, using the motif of 'masking Jesus', I have argued that in different epochs, this shape of Christology has been intercepted and interrupted by abstract formulations due to Christianity's contact with dominant ideologies of those epochs. The second to fifth centuries brought the first masking with the Christian contact with the Greco-Roman world's philosophy. In this period, Jesus was masked with the Greco-Roman metaphysical and dualistic worldviews that were influenced by Stoic philosophies and Hellenistic sensibilities of those centuries. The second epoch was the contact of Christianity with Western/European civilization. With these contacts, Christology did not only become coloured by abstract, metaphysical, and dualistic ideas; it also became embedded in the empire and white supremacist ideologies.

The 19th and 20th centuries brought two shifts, especially in the African context. White missionaries' escapades to Africa were conditioned by Schleiermacher's idea that Christ's power is expressed in the church, and we only have access to him no longer directly but only through the church. He called this power "attractive power," rather than "coercive power." This meant that no one else had access to God and to salvation unless through the intervention of the whites. This kind of ideological manipulation of the representation of Jesus Christ as

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

white served and advanced racial hierarchy, racial exclusion that conferred power and agency to whites and disempowered and denied agency to the colonized. In response, African theology as a discipline emerged to rehabilitate Africa and African cultures from the wounds caused by attacks on the humanity of Africa and Africans by Western missionary Christianity and theologies. Through inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction motifs, Jesus became masked by androcentric and patriarchal perspectives that did not pay attention to women, and later on, to gender and sexual minorities in Africa, and so a wholesome community of God's people has not been achieved. In the twenty-first century, the conditions of the 'poor' and the 'marginalized' of Africa have only gotten worse, as occasioned by economic and political neo-liberalization convoluted with pandemics. This condition has particularly led to the rise of Christ figures in Kenya- a Christ we can see, and touch, and who is responding to our everyday needs.

Therefore, from the second century to the present day, Jesus has continued to be masked with various abstract, metaphysical, and hierarchical portraitures, and in the recent past, Jesus witness has become clouded and veiled by religious figureheads. While the former are devoid of the everydayness of Jesus Christ in the life of the church, and therefore do not resonate with the everyday life of believers, the latter are entrenching the exploitation of many people in the 'name of Christ.' The binitarian spirituality of the first century could therefore be a leitmotif for reimagining Jesus in the quest of answering the question 'whom do you say I am 'in Kenya today. In this shift, a new framework that answers the Jesus question "who do you say I am" in two simultaneous and interconnected levels: a macro, ideological, discursive level that addresses questions of Jesus identity, and significance, and a material, experiential,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

daily-life level that focuses on Jesus involvement in the micro politics of daily life such as in health, wellness, economy, governance, leadership, gender, sexuality etc., is inevitable.

Such a framework must be underpinned and embedded in the triple nature of African Religious experience: Orality, embodiment, and performativity. The framework must provide a hermeneutic of hearing and as such "having an ear to the ground to hear the pulse from the experiences of the grassroots people because this is where true and living faith in African Christianity can be seen," (Bediako, 200:17). It is must also provide a hermeneutic of speaking, and as such "speaking positively of oral, spontaneous, implicit or grass root theology, as theology which comes from where the faith lives, in the life situation of the community of faith," (Bediako, 2000:17). It must also provide a "hermeneutic of participation and as such call for academic theology to be in touch with, to listen to, to share in, and to learn from, but never to replace this spontaneous and grass root theology because the two are complementary aspect of reality (Bediako, 2000:18). It must the provide a hermeneutic of celebration and as such "celebrating oral and lived theologies (and in this case Christologies) as the stream in which the vitality of the people of faith in Africa, literate and illiterate is mediated (Pobee, 1989:88). The next chapter provides a detailed exploration of such a framework.

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CHAPTER THREE:

TOWARDS TALITHA CUM HERMENEUTICS AS A DECOLONIAL STORY TELLING METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous discussion by foregrounding Talitha Cum Hermeneutics, a framework that "re-tells" stories to liberate the oppressed and voiceless (Tshehla, 2012:11). It addresses the Jesus question in Mark 8:29 through a pluralistic and context-sensitive approach to Christology that highlights oral and lived expressions (Wasike, 2005). Rooted in Mark 5:21–43, Talitha Cum draws on the intertwined stories of Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman, emphasizing resistance, healing, and empowerment. The hermeneutic reframes "Talitha cum" as a call to awaken agency among African women, resisting patriarchy, colonialism, poverty, and social exclusion. It centers embodied practices, communal wisdom, and lived experiences over dogmatic formulations. Building on African religious epistemologies of orality and performativity, the chapter foregrounds African women theologians as they reclaim interpretive authority (Oduyoye, 2009; Dube, 2012; Phiri, 2004). Talitha Cum Hermeneutics combines with narratology to analyze voice, perspective, and power in biblical and oral narratives (Wasike, 2013). The chapter draws on personal and communal stories, including the author's grandmother's faith journey, as examples of lived Christology that challenge clericalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. It highlights how ordinary experiences, rituals, and storytelling inform theological reflection. The hermeneutic resists Eurocentric, patriarchal distortions of Jesus, reclaiming scripture and Christology for African women. It frames Christology as dynamic, contextually rooted, and socially transformative.

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Talitha Cum serves as both methodology and praxis of resistance, affirming dignity, agency, and resilience. This approach illuminates how lived faith, embodied knowledge, and communal practices generate Christological insight. By integrating Talitha Cum with narratology, the chapter demonstrates pathways for liberative theological reflection. Ultimately, it positions Christology as a site of social renewal, empowerment, and contextualized theological imagination in African settings.

3.2 The Necessity of a Methodological Shift

A methodological shift, especially in theology, can be conceptualized as a deliberate change in the ways theological questions are approached, studied, and interpreted (Reichel, 2023). Traditionally, theology has often relied on formal, academic, and doctrinal frameworks, privileging written texts, rational analysis, and hierarchical authorities to define religious truths. A methodological shift challenges these conventions by emphasizing alternative sources, perspectives, and practices, such as lived experiences, oral traditions, embodied faith, and the insights of marginalized communities (Reichel, 2023). This present study foregrounds Talitha Cum hermeneutics as one such methodological shift. This is precisely because Talitha cum hermeneutics re-tells (as opposed to merely 'rote-reciting') stories in a manner that facilitates freedom for the oppressed, the voiceless, the unnamed characters of both ancient and modern times (Tshehla 2012:11).

Based on Tshehla's assertion, this approach shifts theology from a monopolistic, top-down enterprise to a participatory, lived, and embodied practice, in which marginalized voices are recognized as legitimate sources of theological insight. By emphasizing narrative, lived experience, and embodied agency, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics challenges conventional epistemologies and expands the scope of Christological reflection beyond formal creeds or

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

dogma. In doing so, it aligns with the broader goal of methodological shifts: to create space for multiple ways of knowing God, situating theological inquiry within the realities, struggles, and resistances of everyday life

For this study, this shift pays attention to the ways in which the Jesus question in Mark 8:9 'and who do you say I am,' continue to be answered in that diverge from a monopolistic approach to theology to a pluralistic approach, and from a history of Christology to a history of Christologies," (Wasike, 2005: 104). In this regard, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics is preferred as a theoretical framework to identify, theorize, highlight, and analyse oral and lived Christologies that are utilized in everyday life to promote adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health within the context of the triple threat challenge. Rooted in the Gospel of Mark 5:21–43, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics draws upon the intertwined stories of Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman to emphasize resistance, healing, and empowerment. It reframes "Talitha cum" ("Little girl, arise") as a call to awaken agency, particularly among African women, and as a metaphor for rising against systemic and structural forms of death such as patriarchy, colonialism, poverty, and social exclusion. This hermeneutic approach is particularly suited to articulating Christologies that emerge not from dogma or doctrine, but from embodied practices, oral traditions, and the lived experiences of African women and youth.

Building on the previous chapter's argument that African religious epistemologies, marked by orality, embodiment, and performativity, are crucial in unmasking Jesus from colonial and patriarchal overlays, this chapter foregrounds the contributions of African women theologians to developing Talitha Cum Hermeneutics as a liberative interpretive strategy. Emerging from a context in which women's experiences have historically been marginalized

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

within theological discourse, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics offers a reading posture that emphasizes the agency, voice, and lived realities of African women. Inspired by the biblical story of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter with the words "Talitha Cumi" (Mark 5:41), this hermeneutic invites a re-reading of scripture and tradition through the lens of resurrection, dignity, and liberation of women. African women theologians, notably Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musa Dube, have articulated how this method resists both colonial biblical interpretations and patriarchal theological constructions by centering African women's stories, communal wisdom, and embodied knowledge (Pui-Lan, 2004). Talitha Cum Hermeneutics becomes both a theological method and praxis of resistance, allowing African women to reclaim scripture and reframe Christology in life-affirming ways.

To further deepen the methodological rigor of Talitha Cum Hermeneutics, this chapter integrates narratology, which is "the study of narrative structure and function" (Wake, 2013), as a critical analytical tool. While Talitha Cum Hermeneutics foregrounds lived experience and the liberative encounter with scripture, narratology sharpens this by providing categories for examining how stories are constructed, who speaks, who is heard, and how power circulates within the narrative world (Wake, 2013). Key narratological concepts such as voice (who tells the story), focalization (from whose perspective the story is seen), and power dynamics (how control and agency are assigned or withheld) (Wake, 2013) enrich the reading of both biblical texts and African women's oral narratives. By applying narratology, this chapter proposes that African women's interpretive practices not only reclaim agency within theological discourse but also dismantle dominant narrative frameworks that have historically silenced marginalized voices. This dual engagement of Talitha Cum Hermeneutics with

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

narratology opens up transformative possibilities for Christological reflection rooted in both text and context.

Once more, the study turns to my grandmother's journey with Jesus as a living narrative that brings these concepts to life. Her story, shaped by oral transmission, communal memory, and embodied faith practices, exemplifies how African women negotiate faith, survival, and dignity within systems that have often sought to render them invisible. As a prelude to the critical engagement that follows, her narrative serves as a hermeneutical lens demonstrating how personal and communal stories act as theological texts in their own right. By weaving together my grandmother's journey with Talitha Cum Hermeneutics and narratology, the study aims to illustrate how African women's lived faith experiences can illuminate new pathways for theological reflection and contribute to the ongoing task of unmasking Jesus from imposed interpretive frameworks.

My grandmother and mother's fireplace was not the only space where they articulated their theology. Both their fireplace 'school of theology' and their prayers, testimonies, and public engagements have shaped my 'university theology.' A case in point again is my ordination service. Ordination services in the Anglican Church of Kenya are always very formal and highly structured services. With her Jesus story, my grandmother brought the messiness of everyday reality in this religiously privileged space during my ordination service on the 17th of December 2017. Her speech was disruptive.

She began with an exhortation that I must 'not exchange Jesus' with my 'collar,' and that she wanted 'to see Jesus in me.' She said in Luo *'kik iwil yesu gi kola ma omiyino, wadwa neno Yeus kuomi'* – literally to mean that I must not tread Jesus with my ordination, instead my life should make Jesus known to people. Although this was not in any way demeaning the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

office of a priest, it carries undertones suggesting that some bearers of the office might have failed to make Jesus known through their ministry and actions. Moreover, this exhortation never came without her reminiscing about her life journey of knowing and walking with Jesus. She narrated how Jesus helped her to overcome the 'ways of the whites' in her teenage life. She remembered how Jesus gave her a husband who never slapped her or brought a second wife, even though it took her a long time to give birth to boys. She narrated how Jesus empowered her to face the death of my mother, and to keep her alive to see my ordination into ministry. She then asserted that the same Jesus had given her a platform of 'jodongo' (a Luo word used to refer to old men, but also to clergy) to speak about her journey with Jesus during her grandchild's ordination ceremony. She finished by singing her favorite Jesus' song - number 84 in the Luo Anglican hymn book: - Yesu Ohera Jakony Mapako (Jesus has loved me; He is my ever-present *help whom I glorify).*

In her story, my grandmother was challenging clericalism, colonialism, and patriarchy with her Jesus story of her everyday life. She may not have used these same words, but from her speech we see how her knowledge of Jesus is shaped by her life experiences that were conditioned by colonialism (ways of the whites as she calls it), patriarchy (preference of giving birth to boys), and clericalism (platform of *jodongo* as she calls it). This chapter explores how such oral, embodied, and performed knowledge of Jesus is produced in African contexts, particularly among African women theologians and faith practitioners. Central to this exploration is the recognition that African religious epistemologies rooted in orality, communal memory, embodiment, and storytelling offer rich resources for constructing Christologies that emerge from lived realities rather than abstract theological formulations. These forms of knowing challenge dominant Western theological models that have

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

historically privileged written texts, detached rationality, and institutional authority. By turning attention to everyday experiences, embodied spirituality, and oral narratives, this chapter underscores the creative and dynamic ways African communities, especially women, come to know, experience, and interpret Jesus in their lives. In undertaking this task, the chapter pursues two interrelated goals. First, it explores Talitha Cum Hermeneutics as a theological and theoretical framework developed by African women scholars and practitioners, and how it becomes an indispensable framework for articulating lived and oral Christologies. Emerging from the liberative struggles of African women, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics draws deeply from the biblical story of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41), where the Aramaic words "Talitha Cumi" ("Little girl, arise") become a symbol of restoring dignity, voice, and life to those marginalized by socio-religious systems.

African women theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2009), Musa Dube (2012), Isabel Phiri (2004), Nyambura Njoroge (1997), and others have extended this metaphor into a theological method that prioritizes African women's experiences, embodied knowledge, and communal wisdom. In this hermeneutic approach, the lived faith, storytelling traditions, rituals, and daily struggles of African women become primary sources for Christological reflection (Oduyoye, 2009; Njoroge, 1997), challenging both colonial theological constructs and patriarchal biblical interpretations that have historically rendered women voiceless or invisible in theological discourse (Phiri, 2004).

Second, this chapter foregrounds Talitha Cum Hermeneutics as a decolonial lens for both unmasking and reimagining Jesus in African contexts. As a decolonial framework, this approach actively resists Eurocentric theological distortions that have portrayed Christ in ways alien to African realities, often through images and doctrines that reinforced colonial,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

patriarchal, and clerical dominance (Oduyoye, 2009). The colonial missionary enterprise, with its Eurocentric Christologies, tended to depict Jesus as a distant, imperial figure aligned with white supremacy, patriarchy, and Western cultural superiority (Chenault, 2022). This distorted image often silenced indigenous spiritualities and denied African women's theological agency (Phiri, 2004). Talitha Cum Hermeneutics confronts these distortions by reclaiming interpretive authority for African women, enabling a re-reading of scripture and Christology that centers African women's voices, cultural knowledge, and spiritual insights (Dube, 2012).

By combining lived experience with critical reflection, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics advances liberative interpretations of Jesus that challenge oppressive narratives while affirming the dignity, wisdom, and agency of African women. This chapter, therefore, not only highlights Talitha Cum Hermeneutics as a methodology of theological inquiry but also positions it as a transformative practice that bridges faith, resistance, and social renewal. In doing so, it opens space for imagining Christologies that are contextually rooted, theologically robust, profoundly liberative, and grounded in the vibrant faith practices and resilient wisdom of African women.

3.3 Talitha Cum Hermeneutics

When African women academics in Religion and Theology came together in 1989 in Ghana to form the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter referred to as the Circle), they did so with a clear vision to create a platform that would amplify African women's voices in theological scholarship, advocacy, and faith practice (Phiri, 1997). The founding of the Circle was a watershed moment in African theological history, not only because it gathered women from across the continent and the diaspora, but also because it deliberately positioned African women's lived experiences, struggles, and spiritualities at the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

heart of theological reflection and discourse (Phiri, 1997). Central to their theological inspiration and methodological orientation was the story of the twelve-year-old girl presumed dead in Mark 5:21–43, whom Jesus addresses with the Aramaic words, *Talitha cumi*— "Little girl, arise" (Njoroge, 2001).

Nyambura Njoroge (2001) reflects that this gospel narrative became the Circle's wake-up call, providing both a symbolic and practical impetus for their engagement in theology (Njoroge, 2001:247). The story of Jairus' daughter resonated deeply with the Circle's founding members, who saw in the little girl a metaphor for African women's condition within both church and society as silenced, presumed dead, and marginalized within patriarchal, colonial, and ecclesial structures (Phiri, 1997). In choosing this biblical text, the Circle declared its intent to speak life into the silenced spaces of African women's lives and to awaken both the academy and the church to the realities and insights of African women (Njoroge, 1997). This narrative provided a theological and symbolic foundation upon which they could articulate a theology that is both liberative and restorative, giving rise to what would later be known as Talitha Cum Hermeneutics (Dube, 2012).

The formation of the Circle was also a direct response to the exclusion of African women's voices from mainstream theological discourse, both within African contexts and globally (Njoroge, 2013). For decades, theology in Africa had been dominated by male voices, whether in the academy, the church, or in the missionary enterprise, resulting in the marginalization of women's experiences and perspectives (Oduyoye, 2001). The Circle, therefore, emerged not just as a scholarly network but as a movement of resistance and reclamation, seeking to challenge systemic injustices within theological spaces and beyond

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

(Njoroge, 1997). Thus, by anchoring their mission to the Mark 5 story, the Circle emphasized that African women are not passive recipients of theological knowledge but active contributors to theological thought and praxis, capable of articulating insights drawn from their lived realities, cultural contexts, and spiritual experiences.

Moreover, the narrative of the little girl became an enduring metaphor for the Circle's broader vision: awakening, empowerment, and transformation (Njoroge, 1997). Just as Jesus' words*, "Talitha cumi," restored the little girl to life and community, the Circle envisioned their theological work as a means of calling African women to rise,* reclaim their agency, assert their dignity, and participate fully in theological discourse and social transformation (Phiri, 1997). This metaphor of resurrection became a rallying cry for African women theologians to critique oppressive systems, challenge patriarchal interpretations of scripture, and offer alternative readings that affirm life, justice, and equality for women in both church and society (Dube, 2012).

Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi Knayoro (1990) further reiterate that like African Jairus' daughter, African women theologies came to life after centuries of (African) theological scholarship presuming it was not existing (1990:7). She was rising as that missing voice that was concerned deeply about the erosion and destruction of human dignity and life, all life, in Africa (Njoroge, 1997: 80). Ever since, Talitha has become the African women's portraiture of not only that twelve years old girl, she is also that woman who has been haemorrhaging for twelve years, she is one and she is many, she is young and old, naïve and experienced (Tshehla, 2019:3) In this study, I revisit these foundational and ongoing portraitures of Talitha, and her rising (cum) for hermeneutical considerations in explicating

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

everyday Christologies of African women today in the context of the triple threat challenge in Kenya.

It is in the synoptic gospels, where the story of Jesus raising a dead girl named Jairus' daughter, which is interwoven with the account of the healing of a bleeding woman, that provides the source text and context for the phrase 'Talitha cum.' Although only the gospel of Mark's account in Mark 5:21-43 uses the phrase, a similar storyline can also be found in Matthew 9:18–26 and Luke 8:40–56. Bible scholars have particularly noted that the Lukan and Matthean accounts of the story are derived from the Markan account and are a typical example of a Synoptic triple tradition (Zwiep, 2015, p. 356). These two stories, although interwoven, are distinct yet again with similarities. Both refer to women in life-threatening situations, and also women whose names are not mentioned except in reference to their situation, and in one case to her father (Getty-Sullivan, 2001:56).

Still, both are ritually unclean but interact with Jesus through physical touch as an act of resistance and agency (Getty-Sullivan, 2001:56). It is in this context that the meaning of 'Talitha cum' is situated. In Mark's account, the Aramaic phrase "*Talitha koum," transliterated from the Greek phrase: ταλιθα κουμ,* and reportedly meaning, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" is attributed to Jesus as seen in Mark 5:41 (George 2002:124). Tshehla (2019) notes that the very literary context from where *Talitha* comes, the word does not simply mean 'little girl' (Mk 5:41) but also gives *thugatēr* (daughter) as yet another loving way by which both Jairus (Mk5:23) and Jesus (Mk 5:34) assume affirming roles over the females in their charge (2019:3). It is on such accounts of women's situation, women's agency, and active participation with Jesus in affirming life that Talitha cum has emerged as an important refrain within gendered African theological scholarship (Tshehla 2019:5). This is because as Esther

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Mombo (1998) notes, African women's experiences of oppression in the hands of religion and culture (1998:219) do so resonate with these two tangled stories.

The resonance is such that African Women's Bible reading strategies have come to be referred to as 'Talitha cum African women's biblical hermeneutics or some interrelated variant thereof (Tshehla 2019:3). Some of these variants include Hermeneutics of life (Okure, 1995:55-67; 2000:194-214), Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics (Kanyoro, 2001:101-113), A spirituality of resistance and transformation (Njoroge 2001:66-82), Talitha Cum Hermeneutics of liberation (Dube 2012:29-42) among others. I pay attention to some of these methodological insights by using the variant of Talitha cum hermeneutics. The Talitha cum framework is preferred because it captures a uniquely empowering theological vision that resonates with the lived realities of African women, particularly in contexts marked by gendered marginalization, cultural silencing, and systemic exclusion (Malowa, 2024)

Further, the invocation of Jesus' Aramaic words to the young girl— "*Talitha cum*, little girl, arise" (Mark 5:41) serves not merely as a metaphor for liberation, but as a direct summons to life, voice, and agency. Unlike some alternatives that emphasize critique (Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics) or resistance (spirituality of resistance), Talitha cum hermeneutics centers resurrection and healing as theological acts of empowerment that affirm dignity and subjectivity (Tshella, 2019). This framework thus integrates both the social and spiritual dimensions of liberation, foregrounding the body, experience, and sacred worth of African women in biblical interpretation. It offers a hermeneutic of hope that not only reads against the grain of oppressive texts and traditions but dares to call forth life where death has reigned.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

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This present study frames Talitha cum hermeneutics as an African women strategy of justice-seeking and life affirming reading of both written and oral canons (Dube 2012:29). It has also been called as the hermeneutics of life because of its goal of wholesome wellbeing for all people in Africa (Okure 1995:53). Talitha Cum hermeneutics therefore refers to "the art of living in the resurrection space: the art of continually rising against the powers of death —the powers of patriarchy, the powers of colonial oppression and exploitation, the powers that produce and perpetuate poverty, disease and all forms of exclusion and dehumanization," (Dube 2012:17). This concept was coined by Musa Dube in her reflection and recapitulation of the works, struggles, quests, aspirations, milestones, and the future of African women engagement with structural systems of injustice as undergirded by Eurocentric, androcentric and patriarchal rendering of religious texts, contexts, and practices.

This hermeneutical framework comes from Jesus own words within a literary context of two tangled stories in the Gospel of Mark 5- the healing of a woman with a flow of blood, and the raising of Jairus' daughter (Dube 2012:18). As used by African women theologians, a discursive stretching of the literal meaning '*little girl arise'* is done to encamps the agency of the little girl in 'rising' against death, and that of the bleeding woman (whose identity changes to 'daughter) in 'rising' against invisibility and appear in public against the norms of the day, and claiming her healing without permission by touching the helm of Jesus garment (Tshehla, 2019:5). Jesus in these two stories identifies as one who engages women as women, and as a person with valid existential concerns (Tshehla, 2019 :6).

The African woman Talitha cum hermeneutics is therefore a methodological resource that makes African people's lived realities in their religious and social cultural contexts the subject of interpretation. In so doing, the task of this methodology is threefold.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

First, it is used to name forces, and systemic structures of oppression that vandalize human dignity and subvert flourishing of life (Dube 2012:18). Secondly is to highlight the agency of ordinary people in rising against these forces and structures by promoting a culture of naming and affirming the contributions of women (and other oppressed) people in shaping new epistemologies (Tshehla 2012:7). Thirdly is to formulate a hermeneutic that is liberative, transformational and which reappraises biblical tradition and African worldviews, cultures and lived experiences, with the purpose of correcting the effect of the religious, cultural, and ideological conditioning that have invisibilized, excluded and minoritized other children of God (Kanyoro 2001:112).

As applicable for this study, Talitha cum hermeneutics is an appropriate framework to identify, theorize, highlight, and analyze oral, and lived Christologies that are utilized in everyday life to promote Adolescents and Youth Sexual and reproductive health in the context of the triple threat challenge- Gender based violence, Teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections. Further, it is useful in offering critiques on the hermeneutical privilege, hegemony and ideological stranglehold; that textual and academic formulations of the identity and significance of Jesus in the Kenyan context. The study locates these two goals within the broader context of African Christological frameworks. In Chapter Two, the study argued that the three major strands of Christological frameworks in Africa, namely: inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction frameworks, are largely based on two instances in Jesus life- incarnation and atonement. As such, they remain deeply embedded in dualistic sensibilities that masked Jesus with Greco-Roman world metaphysical worldviews that shaped Christian theologies.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

The effect of such conceptions is that the resultant images of Jesus have not found resonance with the everyday life of believers, and as such remain only academic, traditional and binary formulations which are inaccessible to those outside the world of academic theology. In this case, the Jesus of the "two Talithas" in Mark 5:21-43, the Jesus of my grandmother's walking in the neighborhood and empowering her to resist structure that denied her life in abundance as an African woman, and the Christologies of the *Nyamreche* remain unaccounted. Yet these Christologies, through their theological contributions, participate in disrupting the intellectual, linguistic, social, and economic frameworks by which colonial power and privilege perceive, interpret, and construct knowledge about the world through the lens of the life and work of Jesus.

From the discussion, it is most likely that Talitha Cum Hermeneutics offers a critical and liberative lens for engaging African lived and oral Christologies, especially within contexts that grapple with complex social challenges such as gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections. By centering narratives of everyday faith, embodied spirituality, and community-based interpretations of Jesus, this hermeneutical approach disrupts the dominance of abstract, dualistic, and Greco-Roman-influenced Christologies that have historically marginalized the lived experiences of ordinary believers, particularly African women and youth. Talitha Cum Hermeneutics does not merely critique theological hegemony; it reclaims theological space for voices, stories, and expressions of faith that have been dismissed or overlooked by traditional academic discourse.

By situating these reflections within the broader African Christological discourse and exposing the limitations of existing inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction frameworks, this study affirms the transformative potential of grassroots, embodied Christologies that

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

emerge from the daily struggles, resistance, and resilience of African communities. These "other" Christologies, those of the two Talithas, of my grandmother, and of countless unnamed women and youth who navigate faith and life in hostile contexts, are not peripheral to theological inquiry. Rather, they are critical sites of theological production that challenge colonial, patriarchal, and elitist interpretations of Jesus. In honouring these voices, this study advocates for a Christology that is rooted in the everyday, accessible to the marginalized, and responsive to the urgent social realities that continue to shape the African experience of faith.

Building on this foundation, it becomes evident that Talitha Cum Hermeneutics is more than a methodological tool for interpreting lived Christologies. It is also a critical decolonial pathway. Having explored how traditional African Christological frameworks have often remained bound within metaphysical, dualistic, and patriarchal lenses inherited from colonial theology, it is necessary to further examine how Talitha Cum Hermeneutics actively resists these frameworks. The next section, therefore, delves deeper into Talitha Cum Hermeneutics as a Decolonial Pathway, analyzing how it challenges colonial epistemologies, reclaims interpretive agency for African women and marginalized communities, and fosters liberative, contextually grounded theological discourse. This move marks a shift from merely highlighting lived Christologies to interrogating the power structures that have historically silenced or distorted them, paving the way for a transformative engagement with theology that is authentically African and radically liberating.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

3.4 Talitha Cum Hermeneutic as a Decolonial Pathway

In the introduction to *Out of the Dark Night*, Achille Mbembe lays important groundwork for understanding decolonization (Mbembe, 2021). He begins by acknowledging the emergence of decolonial thought and activism in the early 21st century, particularly among

younger generations in the Global South and within formerly colonized contexts as a critical turning point in the history of the world (2021:2). This emergence, he argues, signalled both a reckoning with colonial afterlives and a desire to imagine futures beyond the limitations imposed by colonial modernity (2021:4). But also more than a historical process, Mbembe notes that decolonization is an on-going and multifaceted struggle with profound philosophical, political, and existential implications (2012:3). This means that decolonization is not just something that happened in the past, but an on-going and complex struggle that should inform how we think, govern, and understand our place in the world today. It involves deep questions about identity, power, freedom, and how we relate to one another beyond colonial ways of thinking.

Mbembe situates this project of decolonization within a broader crisis of meaning, identity, and relationality. As such, he contends that the colonial experience left deep epistemological, affective, and institutional scars that continue to shape how the world is known, governed, and inhabited (2013:4). He further argues that the colonial archive not only organized hierarchies of race, culture, and power but also normalized violence and exclusion as modes of ordering the world; such that true decolonization, is not simply about reversing or rejecting colonial legacies but also involves dismantling the colonial logic embedded in our ways of knowing, being, and relating (2021:5)

Mbembe's assertions resonate with Walter Mignolo's (2013) conceptualization of decolonization as "…. not simply about rejecting the colonial legacy but about inaugurating 'an-other thought'—a radically different way of understanding and engaging with the world. It involves creating 'an-other logic,' 'an-other language,' and 'an-other thinking' that challenges the dominance of Euro-American hegemony and fosters liberation from its

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

constraints," (2013: 7). Here, Mignolo seems to be arguing that decolonization is not just about saying no to colonial history, but about starting a completely new way of thinking and living. He also seems to be arguing that decolonization creates different ways of understanding the world, speaking about it, and making sense of it in ways that break free from the control of Western ideas and open space for true freedom and new possibilities.

In a separate publication with Catherine Walsh, Mignolo juxtaposes two concepts- "coloniality and decoloniality" (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). They assert that decoloniality is "a mindset or praxis; and an orientation toward culture marked by a commitment to root out that which remains in culture, education, society, and so on from the colonial era," (2018:73); As such, decoloniality "disobeys, and delinks from the colonial matrix of power, and constructing paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living," (2018:74). They note that this shift is predicated with the idea that "colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized people by disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world," (2018: 75).

These decolonial thinkers and theorists seem to be arguing that decolonization is a deep and ongoing process that challenges not only political and historical legacies, but also the very foundations of how knowledge, identity, and power are structured. For Mbembe, it is a multifaceted struggle that calls for dismantling the lingering colonial logics that continue to shape our world today. Mignolo complements this view by emphasizing the need for a radical shift toward "an-other thinking" that disobeys and delinks from the colonial matrix of power. Together, their insights call for the creation of new ways of knowing, being, and relating that are rooted in the lived experiences, histories, and worldviews of those long

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

marginalized by colonial systems. Decolonization, then, is both a refusal and a reimagining a path toward freedom, justice, and the possibility of truly alternative futures. But what is the place of Theology in this ongoing process?

Esther Mombo and Godfrey Owino Adera (2025) argue that theology, particularly in formerly colonized contexts like Africa, cannot remain neutral or detached in the decolonization process (2025:408). They argue that theology must critically examine its own entanglements with colonial histories and ideologies, and participate in this decolonial shift by reimagining faith, scripture, and religious practice in ways that affirm life, dignity, and liberation (2025:411). The further note that theology must become a site of resistance and reconstruction that disrupts Eurocentric frameworks and opens space for contextual, indigenous, and liberative expressions of the sacred (2025:414). In this way, theology contributes not only to the critique of coloniality but also to the healing and reweaving of meaning, community, and hope in a decolonial future (2025:418).

Mombo and Adera's assertions resonates with Chammah Kaunda's (2015) postulation that a theology of "decoloniality distinguishes itself from theoretical paradigms that have emerged from Euro-American imperial history; and accomplishes such a task by its insistence that the epistemic locale for theologizing must emerge from the embodied and embedded theological experiences of the ex-colonized religio-cultural milieu," (2015:77). With this premise, Chammah further asserts that "the imperative of the decolonization of the mind should be a top priority on the agenda of theological education in Africa as an urgent task in which African theology can facilitate political and economic development as social transformation in Africa," (2015:79)

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

On the same note, Musa W. Dube (1999) critiques the colonial impact on theological work such as Bible translation in Setswana, focusing on how the indigenous term *Badimo* which refers to respected ancestral spirits is mistranslated as "demons" in passages like Matthew 8:28–34, 15:22, and 10:8 (1999:37). She argues that this mistranslation acts as a "colonial cultural bomb," violently distorting and discrediting African spiritual systems through Western Christian lenses (1999:45). By doing so, the translation not only imposes foreign theological meanings but also contributes to the erasure of African cosmologies and identities. Dube therefore calls for decolonizing biblical interpretation that honors African worldviews and resists the lingering effects of colonial missionary influence (1999:50).

From these arguments and postulations, it seems that some contours of decolonization in theology are marked by three key commitments: affirming agency, recovering both indigenous and marginalized forms of knowledge, and enabling social transformation. First, a decolonized theology reclaims the capacity of oppressed and marginalized communities "to theologize from their own lived realities, thereby affirming their right to define God, truth, and salvation on their own terms, outside the confines of Eurocentric logic" (Ward, 2017). Secondly, decolonization requires the "recovery and affirmation of indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual epistemologies, respect local cosmologies and reclaim indigenous theological wisdom," (Kaunda, 2015). This recovery expands the sources of theology beyond Western traditions to include "oral traditions, rituals, proverbs, and ancestral practices that have long carried theological meaning in African contexts" (Resane, 2023). Thirdly, decolonizing theology must be committed to social transformation. Theology cannot remain an abstract discipline but must function as praxis for justice, healing, and liberation (Pui Lan, 2023). In summary, the contours of decolonization

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

in theology reflect a shift toward a more just, inclusive, and grounded theological practices that empowers local agency, reclaims indigenous and marginalized wisdom, and catalyzes societal transformation in pursuit of liberated futures.

Based on the contours of decolonization in theology, Talitha cum hermeneutics emerges as a powerful decolonial theological pathway that concretely enacts these commitments. Talitha cum hermeneutics centers the agency of African women such as *Nyamrerwa*, "whose experiences, bodies, and voices have been historically excluded or silenced in both African and global theological discourses," (Oduyoye, 2001). Drawing from the Gospel stories of Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman (Mark 5:21–43), it reclaims "Talitha cum" ("Little girl, arise") not only as a biblical resurrection moment but as a metaphor for awakening, resistance, and empowerment. This hermeneutic affirms the capacity of African women to "theologize from their own lived realities, directly challenging the colonial and patriarchal structures that have marginalized them, thus embodying the call to reclaim theological agency" (Oduyoye, 2001).

Furthermore, Talitha cum hermeneutics embraces and revitalizes indigenous knowledge forms by privileging African women's embodied experiences, oral traditions, and spiritual resistance. It resists Eurocentric and androcentric interpretive frameworks by honouring "local cosmologies and ways of knowing that have been suppressed by colonial and missionary discourses," (Kaunda, 2015). By critically engaging with both scripture and lived cultural realities, this hermeneutic works to reinterpret theological meanings in ways that resonate with and empower African contexts, much like Musa Dube's call to decolonize biblical translation and interpretation.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Finally, Talitha cum hermeneutics is committed to social transformation by positioning theology as a praxis for liberation that confronts systems of death such colonialism, patriarchy, poverty, and the triple threat challenge, and thereby affirming life, dignity, and justice. It moves theology "beyond academic abstraction into the concrete struggles of African women and communities, emphasizing the need for theological education and practice to contribute to social change and healing," (Cady Linel, 2014). This aligns with Mbembe's and Mignolo's vision of decolonization as dismantling colonial logics and inaugurating new ways of knowing, being, and relating. In sum, Talitha cum hermeneutics concretizes the contours of decolonial theology by insisting that theology must rise from the margins, and as such, be embodied, contextual, and life-affirming. It disrupts dominant Eurocentric paradigms by "centering African women as theologians and agents of transformation, creating a liberative theological vision where theology is both a call to arise and a mode of sustained resistance against oppressive systems," (Phiri, 1997).

From the discussion, it is most likely that decolonizing theology demands a shift toward practices that empower marginalized voices, retrieve suppressed wisdom, and engage faith as a tool for societal change. Talitha Cum Hermeneutics exemplifies this by giving prominence to the lived experiences of African women, valuing indigenous spiritualities, and positioning theology as a force for liberation and justice. Rather than remaining bound to colonial or patriarchal frameworks, it fosters a transformative theological approach rooted in the realities and aspirations of those at the margins thereby affirming their role as theologians and agents of change within both church and society.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

3.5 The intersections of Talitha Cum Hermeneutics and Narratology method

This section explores the confluence of Talitha Cum hermeneutics; "a feminist and liberationist interpretive lens rooted in the healing encounter between Jesus and the unnamed girl in Mark 5:4," (Dube, 2012), and the narratology method, which focuses on the structure, function, and voice within both biblical narratives and everyday practices of telling stories (Ditte, 2020). By bringing these two frameworks into conversation, this study aims to uncover how marginalized voices, particularly those of women and girls, and in this case *Nyamreche,* can be recovered and empowered within sacred texts and everyday life. The Talitha Cum approach emphasizes the embodied, communal, and transformative dimensions of biblical storytelling, while narratology offers tools for analyzing the mechanics of narration, focalization, and character agency. Together, they offer a powerful methodology for re-reading Scripture in ways that challenge dominant interpretations and affirm life-giving alternatives for the excluded and silenced.

The value of stories and storytelling as a means of producing and disseminating knowledge cannot be glossed over in a study such as this that is interested in every day lived, and oral expressions of faith. Such a scientific utility of stories in research is premised on the argument that stories not only provide a critique to conventional academic ways of knowing, they are also a legitimate component of scientific research (Nadar, 2014:20). It is in this regard that in most recent scholarship, Sarojini Nadar (2014) has suggested that stories are data with soul (2014:27). As such, she notes that stories are a tool of knowledge gathering as well as knowledge sharing and therefore can engender a yearning for change that can be translated into a working for social transformation (2014:23).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

To valorize this aspect of 'data with soul,' in an African context in particular, Ngugi wa Thiong'o observed in 1986 that stories are woven out of the substance of human experience, struggles…... and wrestling with the mysteries of existence, and life or death (1986:4). Chinua Achebe further underscores the importance of stories as data with soul when he notes that:

> "...It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story ...that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us," (Achebe, 1987: 50).

In this excerpt, Achebe like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sarojini Nadar highlights the importance of stories in Africa as a means that facilitates embodied engagement and understanding of people's situations, convictions, and aspirations. But how do we glean various kinds of knowledge like Christologies from stories? I utilized Narrative ethnography as a methodological approach to hearing and analysing stories. Ditte Andersen (2020) notes that Narrative ethnography is a methodology tailored to study stories in the context of their telling (2020:293). This methodology is based on the fact that "people are storied beings and to generate a more in-depth understanding of people and their experiences, researchers need to begin with their stories," (O'Toole 2018:180).

As utilized for my study, I used this methodology first to explore how Jesus is present with women who are on the frontlines of advocacy for sexual reproductive health and rights in their everyday lives, what this presence means, what this presence does, and how this presence is known and described. Secondly, to explore how such religious knowledge is important for them in dealing with how patriarchy and clericalism are utilized in the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

production of the anti-rights, anti-gender, and anti-equality rhetoric in access to sexual and reproductive health services and information among girls and key populations. In this study, I focused on three tenets of narrative ethnography as proposed by Haydon and van der Riet (2017). These are Temporality – the time of the experiences and how the experiences could influence the future; Sociality – cultural and personal influences of the experiences; and Spatiality – the environmental surroundings during the experiences and their influence on the experiences (2017: 85–89). Therefore, for six months (August 2024 to February 2025) I engaged the women (described in subsequent sections) in telling their stories, focused group discussions, dialogues, writing and recording stories, and clarifying concepts, in different spaces of their daily engagements, such as the church, their homes, and stations of work.

The emergence of *Talitha Cum* hermeneutics within African women's theological discourse is deeply rooted in a narrative moment that resists erasure, the story of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:21–43. This story became a theological cornerstone for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, who interpreted the girl's rising as emblematic of African women's awakening within religious scholarship. Nyambura Njoroge (2001) refers to this as the Circle's "wake-up call," a symbol of reclaiming voice and presence after long silencing in African theological spaces. In this story, Talitha is not only the twelve-year-old girl presumed dead but also a composite figure representing African women's lived realities, bleeding, silenced, and unnamed, yet intimately engaged in acts of faith and resistance (Tshehla, 2019). These intertwined biblical portraits resonate powerfully with African women's experiences of marginalization through patriarchal, cultural, and ecclesiastical systems, and thus Talitha Cum hermeneutics has evolved as a reading strategy committed to dignity, healing, and agency. This approach does more than interpret; it animates scripture by

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

insisting that African women are not passive subjects but narrating agents of their own liberation and theological knowing.

When paired with narratology, a method attentive to the structures, functions, and voices within storytelling, Talitha Cum hermeneutics gains further depth and methodological clarity. Narratology enables critical engagement with narrative devices and power dynamics within texts, particularly with how voice, focalization, and agency are distributed or denied. This becomes especially significant when reading biblical texts where women, such as Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman, remain unnamed and known primarily through male associations or their afflictions. The narratological method allows us to interrogate these silences while also recognizing the subversive power of narrative structure, such as how the bleeding woman interrupts the official male plea, reframing the scene around her embodied act of faith. In combining Talitha Cum's embodied and liberative vision with narratology's analytical tools, this study foregrounds African women's everyday stories, oral theologies, and Christological expressions as legitimate and transformative modes of knowledge. It affirms that stories are not just data, but "data with soul" (Nadar, 2014), crucial to constructing a theology that rises like Talitha herself against the forces of death, exclusion, and silence.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that Talitha Cum Hermeneutics is more than a biblical reflection; it stands as a robust theological and theoretical framework for identifying, analyzing, and amplifying oral and lived Christologies that speak directly to contemporary social challenges. Specifically, within the context of adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health in Kenya, an environment deeply affected by the triple threat of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections, Talitha Cum

Hermeneutics emerges as a critical tool. Rooted in the intertwined narratives of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:21–43, this hermeneutical approach reclaims Jesus' words, *"Talitha cum"* ("Little girl, arise"), as a prophetic call for liberation and empowerment. It positions this phrase not just within the confines of a biblical miracle but within the lived realities of African girls, women, and youth, urging a rising from systemic, structural, and spiritual forms of violence that continually rob them of life and dignity.

Throughout this chapter, it has become evident that centering African women's lived experiences, embodied spirituality, and theological agency opens up transformative possibilities for doing Christology "from below," a Christology attentive to the voices, struggles, and hopes of those often excluded from formal theological discourse. Unlike dominant theological traditions that tend to prioritize abstract doctrines, dualistic metaphysics, or patriarchal interpretations, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics situates theology within the ordinary, everyday resistances and affirmations of life among marginalized communities. It insists that theology is not a detached academic exercise but a living, breathing discourse deeply intertwined with the social, cultural, and political contexts of people's lives.

This perspective reveals that African women and youth are not merely passive recipients of theological knowledge produced elsewhere but are active agents and theologians in their own right. Through their stories, faith practices, and communal engagements, they shape Christological visions that affirm healing, dignity, and social transformation. In this regard, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics echoes the broader trajectory of liberation theologies, yet it brings a distinct African feminist and decolonial lens that underscores the importance of location, gender, and cultural specificity in theological reflection. This lens challenges

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

inherited Eurocentric and androcentric theological paradigms, offering instead a Christology that resonates with African realities and affirms the agency of those historically silenced.

Moreover, this chapter has illuminated how Talitha Cum Hermeneutics aligns naturally with the broader imperatives of decolonial theology. At its core, decolonial theology seeks to dismantle the epistemic and cultural dominance imposed by colonial and missionary frameworks, which have long shaped theological discourse in Africa. Talitha Cum Hermeneutics participates in this project by recovering and affirming indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual epistemologies, and cultural expressions that were suppressed or dismissed by colonial religious enterprises. By doing so, it validates African cosmologies, wisdom traditions, and spiritual practices as legitimate sources of theological reflection and Christological insight. The call to "rise" symbolized by *Talitha cum* thus becomes a multi-layered call to spiritual awakening, to cultural reclamation, and to intellectual emancipation from imposed theological worldviews.

This approach also critiques the lingering effects of metaphysical dualisms introduced through Greco-Roman and Eurocentric theological constructs, which have often rendered theology as overly abstract, detached from daily life, and complicit in systems of oppression. By emphasizing embodied experiences and contextual narratives, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics offers a counter-vision as a theology of presence, of proximity, and of lived engagement with the realities of African communities. It situates Jesus not as a distant metaphysical figure defined by abstract debates but as the companion of those who suffer, resist, hope, and rise amid life's everyday struggles.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

One of the distinctive contributions of this chapter has been the integration of narratology as a methodological partner to Talitha Cum Hermeneutics. Narratology—concerned with the structures, voices, and power dynamics within stories enhances the critical rigor of this hermeneutical approach. It offers tools for analyzing not just what stories say but how they are told, who gets to tell them, and whose perspectives are centered or marginalized. By applying narratological analysis, this chapter has shown how both biblical texts and African women's oral narratives serve as sites of theological meaning-making. Narratology uncovers the silences, interruptions, and hidden resistances within these stories, providing a richer, more layered understanding of how theology emerges from and speaks to lived realities.

Through this combined lens, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics does not merely offer a critique of dominant theological traditions; it actively reimagines theological discourse as a participatory, dialogical, and liberative practice. It calls theologians, faith communities, and scholars alike to engage theology in ways that are responsive to the lived experiences of those at the margins, particularly women and youth, and to recognize the sacred in everyday acts of resistance, resilience, and hope. Theology, therefore, becomes praxis and as such a space where reflection and action meet, where faith seeks understanding in the context of struggle, and where healing and justice are pursued not as abstract ideals but as tangible realities.

This chapter has also underscored that the liberative potential of Talitha Cum Hermeneutics lies in its insistence on theology as an embodied and contextual practice. The narrative of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus' daughter offers a profound image of how faith, healing, and liberation are interconnected and how Jesus' ministry was deeply attentive

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

to the lives and bodies of marginalized individuals. In the same way, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics challenges contemporary theology to be attuned to the embodied realities of African girls, women, and youth—to see their stories, struggles, and aspirations as central to theological reflection and social action. The Christology that emerges from this lens is not static or doctrinally fixed but dynamic, responsive, and intimately connected to the quest for life in its fullness.

Further, this chapter affirms that Talitha Cum Hermeneutics serves as a critical tool for both theological inquiry and social transformation. It invites a reimagining of theology that is not only academically rigorous but also socially engaged, culturally grounded, and spiritually liberating. By centering marginalized voices, recovering indigenous epistemologies, and committing to social transformation, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics exemplifies what it means to do theology in a way that truly affirms life, justice, and dignity. It stands as a prophetic call for theology to rise—alongside those who bleed, those who hope, and those who dare to dream of a world marked by healing, equity, and liberation.

As this study moves forward, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics provides a compelling foundation for analyzing how theology can engage the pressing issues of adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health in Kenya and beyond. Its emphasis on lived experience, contextual relevance, and liberative praxis offers a vital pathway for crafting theological responses that are not only intellectually sound but also socially transformative and spiritually empowering. This hermeneutic challenges both scholars and practitioners to move beyond abstract theological constructs and to embrace a theology that rises from the ground, rooted in the lived realities, hopes, and resistances of African communities, particularly their women

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and youth. In this way, Talitha Cum Hermeneutics continues to carve a decolonial pathway, calling theology itself to arise, resist, and heal in the face of persistent injustices.

CHAPTER FOUR:

REFRAMING AN EVERYDAY DIAKONIA CHRISTOLOGY OF THE NYAMRERECHE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter constructs an Everyday Diakonia Christology, a theological perspective that emerged through eight months of ethnographic engagement with a group of ten *Nyamreche* in Siaya County, Kenya. These women, often marginalized or entirely absent from formal theological discourses and ecclesiastical platforms, embody and articulate a vibrant Christology deeply woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. Unlike traditional doctrinal formulations derived from ecclesiastical councils or theological treatises (Sanders, 2015), the *Nyamreche* understanding of Jesus emerges from their lived experiences, and as such experiences that are shaped by daily struggles, communal interactions, embodied spirituality, and the wisdom handed down through local oral traditions (Abrahams, 2011).

This construction draws its theological foundation from Nasimiyu Wasike's assertion that African women require a Christology grounded in a holistic and integrated view of life:

> "The African woman's experience calls for a Christology that is based on a holistic view of life. She needs the Christ who affects the whole of her life, whose presence is felt in every corner of the village and who participates in everything and everybody's daily life (Wasike 2015:3).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Wasike's insight critically challenges any abstraction of Christ from the lived, material, and communal realities that define African women's existence (Wasike, 2015:2). For Wasike, Christ cannot be understood through metaphysical speculation alone, nor through theological language that fails to engage with the actual life struggles and spiritual aspirations of women in African contexts. Instead, she proposes a theology of Jesus that is woven into the very fabric of everyday life as one that moves beyond Sunday sermons and doctrinal declarations and instead affirms the immanent presence of Christ in kitchens, gardens, birth rooms, marketplaces, and healing circles (Wasike, 2015:3).

This resonates profoundly with the theology (specifically Christology) embodied by the *Nyamreche*, who live in ways that reflect this holistic vision of Christ. Their understanding of Jesus is not compartmentalized into sacred and secular spheres; instead, Jesus is experienced as fully present in all dimensions of their lives from farming and caregiving to mourning and resisting injustices. This presence is not merely symbolic; it is concrete, empowering, and participatory. Whether invoking Jesus in prayer before tending their crops or calling upon his name in moments of illness or crisis, the *Nyamreche* demonstrate a deep spiritual intimacy with Jesus that is mediated through daily practices rather than removed from them. Their homes, fields, and communal spaces become sacred sites of theological articulation, where Christology is not spoken about Jesus, but enacted with Jesus in real time.

Everyday Diakonia Christology, then, emerges not only as a description of their lived Christology but also as a critical and constructive theological category that redefines Christological reflection from the ground up. It aligns with broader African feminist theological imperatives that seek to decentre Eurocentric, patriarchal, and clericalist interpretations of Christ in favor of Christologies that arise from the margins, thereby

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

producing Christologies that are embodied, contextual, and life-affirming (Joziasse, 2020; Yafeh-Deigh, 2020). It also connects to liberation theological trajectories that emphasize praxis over speculation and communal struggle over isolated belief (Welch, 2017). But what distinguishes the *Nyamreche* theology is its diakonian character: "a focus on compassionate service, relational care, and social advocacy that constitutes not only moral obligation but theological expression" (Pillay, 2022).

4.2. Theological Significance of *Nyamreche* ways of Knowing

To appreciate the transformative power of Everyday Diakonia Christology, we must name the radical theological shift it introduces. This Christology does not merely add another voice to the discourse. Rather, it disrupts, reorders, and reclaims the very foundations of how theology is constructed, who gets to produce it, and what counts as legitimate revelation. Its implications are profound. First, it demands a re-evaluation of theological sources. Rather than privileging written texts or ecclesial decrees, it affirms oral histories, daily practices, and communal rituals as authentic sites of theological knowledge (Iheanacho, 2021). This move not only disrupts colonial hierarchies of knowledge but also honors the epistemologies that have sustained African women's spiritual resilience across generations (Malowa, 2024). It calls for scholars, church leaders, and educators to take the wisdom of grandmothers, caregivers, herbalists, and peasant farmers seriously as theological interlocutors, people whose lives articulate profound understandings of God's presence, healing, and justice.

Second, Everyday Diakonia Christology underscores the intersection of theology and justice (Chung, 2025). Thus, the Christology articulated by the *Nyamreche* does not separate salvation from social reality. Instead, salvation is understood holistically as healing from physical ailments, deliverance from oppressive structures, restoration of communal harmony,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and empowerment for personal and collective agency. Jesus is not a figure removed from suffering, but one who enters it with them and works through them to bring about change. Their Christology speaks not only of "who Jesus" is but also "what Jesus does" and even more, "what Jesus empowers them to do." It invites a redefinition of Christ's mission as one of presence in the ordinary and commitment to the everyday struggles of those who are systematically silenced.

Third, this Christology is deeply feminist in orientation, even if not framed in explicit feminist terms. By privileging women's experiences, bodies, work, and knowledge as sources of theological insight, Everyday Diakonia Christology challenges the gendered exclusions that continue to define much of Christian theology. It confronts the androcentric assumptions that have long shaped Christological thought and insists on a Jesus who not only sides with women but reveals himself through them (Johnson, 1985). In this sense, the *Nyamreche* Christology is both theological and political, and, as such, reveals how power operates within the economy of religious knowledge and opens space for alternative articulations that affirm the dignity, agency, and spirituality of African women.

Furthermore, the construction of Everyday Diakonia Christology through ethnographic engagement affirms the importance of participatory and co-constructed theological research. The Christology presented here is not imposed upon the *Nyamreche* nor extracted from them for academic consumption. Rather, it is co-produced in dialogue with their stories, their rituals, their prayers, and their labor. This method affirms not only the validity of their Christology but also the ethical imperative of theological work that listens, respects, and walks alongside communities as they make sense of their faith amid complex realities (Reaves, 2024).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

In sum, Everyday Diakonia Christology reflects a contextual, feminist, and liberationist approach to Christology born of African women's lived realities. It embodies Nasimiyu Wasike's vision for a theology of Christ that is not abstracted from life but intimately interwoven with the everyday realities of women (Wasike 2015:3). Through their practices of care, healing, advocacy, and communal engagement, the *Nyamreche* offer a Christology that is radically present, deeply rooted, and profoundly liberative. This Christology invites the wider theological community to reconsider what counts as legitimate theological knowledge, who gets to articulate Christ, and how Jesus continues to be revealed in places often ignored by the academy and the church. In so doing, it not only amplifies marginalized voices but also enriches the global understanding of Christ through the lens of everyday African women's lives.

This understanding is particularly urgent and transformative for African women, whose faith is often forged in the crucible of economic hardship, cultural expectations, and resilient hope (Marla,2003). This Christological construction emerges from the theological and methodological foundation laid in the previous chapter, where Talitha Cum Hermeneutics was proposed as a liberative and decolonial framework for identifying, analyzing, and affirming oral and lived Christologies in everyday life.

Talitha Cum Hermeneutics, as outlined in Chapter Three, serves three core purposes in this analysis. First, it names and challenges the systemic forces of oppression, such as gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections, that compromise the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and youth. Second, it recognizes and uplifts the agency of ordinary people, particularly African women, in resisting these forces and constructing alternative epistemologies. Third, it formulates a hermeneutic that is both transformational

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and rooted in lived African experiences, offering a corrective to religious and cultural traditions that have historically marginalized women and other vulnerable groups.

By interpreting their lived experiences through the lens of Talitha Cum Hermeneutics, this chapter highlights how these women resist erasure and reclaim theological agency. They articulate a vision of Jesus that is not abstract or distant, but present in every facet of daily life. Talitha Cum Hermeneutics is here complemented by narratology, a method that is utilized in the study to pay critical attention to the structure, function, and power dynamics embedded in the women's storytelling

Narratology helps to interrogate who speaks, whose voice is centered or marginalized, and how theological meaning is constructed and transmitted through story. This combination of hermeneutics and narratology ensured that the lived theologies of the *Nyamreche* are not only documented, but also engaged as sites of theological production and resistance. These women's stories reveal how Jesus is invoked as healer, protector, provider, and companion in ways that contest dominant Christological paradigms shaped by colonial, patriarchal, and ecclesiastical traditions. The *Nyamreche* narratives reflect a Diakonian Everyday Christology, grounded in daily acts of caregiving, spiritual mediation, healing, advocacy, and moral leadership.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

4.3 Situating the *Nyamreche* within Their Context of Theological Meaning-Making

Having outlined the theological significance of the *Nyamreche* ways of knowing, it is essential to ground this Christological expression within the socio-cultural and communal spaces that shape their lived theology. The *Nyamreche,* located in Siaya County, Kenya, represent a subset of grassroots women whose daily engagement in community care forms the fertile ground from which their Christological imagination emerges. These women and in

contemporary contexts, men who have entered this vocation, are locally referred to as *Nyamrerwa* (Wambinya, 2023:3*)*. Traditionally known for safeguarding community well-being (Wakana, 2014), today *Nyamreche* function as community-based health workers. To distinguish them from medically trained personnel such as public health officers, this group is now formally identified as Community Health Promoters (CHPs) (Njiraini & Hussein, 2020:3).

By government regulations, the CHPs deliver services in a defined geographical area location called a Community Health Units which are composed of approximately 5,000 people (or 1,000 households) and are served by approximately 10 CHPs (Njiraini & Hussein, 2020:3). CHPs are supervised by Community Health Extension Workers (CHEWs), who are government employees mandated to provide health services at the household and community levels and make referrals and linkages to health facilities (Njiraini & Hussein, 2020:5). As of end of 2019, Kenya had approximately 6,000 Community Health Units out of an expected 10,000. These Community Health Units are supported by 86,000 CHPs. CHPs are supported by 1,569 Community Health Extension Workers (CHEWs) (Njiraini &Hussein, 2020:4).

In the same year, Siaya County had 2,128 Community Health Volunteers (CHPs) registered and contracted by the county government of Siaya (Wambinya, 2023:3). The volunteers are well distributed across Siaya County with Bondo Sub County having up to 363 CHPs, Gem Sub County 394 CHPs, Rarieda Sub County 397 CHPs, Siaya/Alego Usonga Sub County 518 CHPs, Ugunja Sub County 214 CHPs and Ugenya Sub County up to 242 CHPs (Wambinya, 2023:3). The CHPs are trained and certified on six basic modules including: - health and development in the community; community governance and leadership; communication, advocacy and social mobilization; best practices for health promotion and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

disease prevention; basic health care and life saving skills; and management and use of community health information and community disease surveillance (Njiraini & Hussein, 2020:2). Further, the County Government of Siaya working with partners has also trained the health volunteers on nine technical modules with components such as: - integrated community case management; gender based violence, water, sanitation and hygiene; maternal and new-born care; contraception and family planning; HIV, TB and Malaria; nurturing care for early childhood development; community nutrition; household indoor pollution and management of non-communicable diseases (Wambinya, 2023:3).

Out of this available population of 2,128 CHPs in the entire region/Siaya county, the study targeted CHPs in the Siaya sub-county/Alego Usonga. This sub-county is selected because it has the highest number of CHPs (518) in the region and has recorded notable progress in combating the "Triple Threat" of teenage pregnancy, new HIV infections, and gender- and sexual-based violence among adolescents and young people. According to the National Syndemic Diseases Control Council (NSDCC, 2021), Kenya's HIV epidemic has markedly declined from a national prevalence of 10.5% in 1996 to 5.9% in 2020, with key populations continuing to account for approximately 30% of new annual infections. However, Siaya County remains disproportionately affected, recording a significantly higher HIV prevalence of 13.2%, (NSDCC, 2021). This data is more than double the national average, thus underscoring the need for targeted, community-driven interventions.

Further, the study targeted CHPs who are women and involved in church life as lay or ordained ministers. The selection of this subset of women was important for the study to establish whether and how their knowledge of Jesus Christ is performed in their daily lives as community health volunteers. Secondly, to explore how such interplay between faith and life

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

is expressed in verbal articulations and embodied practices, offering relatable Christologies from a tripartite perspective of gender, sexuality, and health. Throughout the study, I acknowledged that issues around religion, gender, health, and sexuality are still surrounded by a culture of silence in the church, and therefore, strategies to maintain confidentiality and anonymity needed to be negotiated with each participant depending on their circumstances. Most participants agreed that data should be presented without anonymity.

Further, official institutional permission for my study was sought and obtained from St. Paul's University's research ethics committee, and the government of Kenya through the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI). Before the commencement of the study, I developed an introductory letter and an informed consent form, which was verified by the university's research ethics committee. These forms were discussed verbally with the participants before conducting any interviews or observations. The discussions involved addressing any concerns and informing the participants that their participation was voluntary and, therefore, they could withdraw their participation at will at any point of the study without incurring any negative consequences. I did the recording of interviews and transcriptions myself, and they shall only be shared with the supervisors and the participants. In summary, my study complied with all the ethical requirements of research provided by the University and the government of Kenya. All required permits were obtained, signed, and submitted before the study was conducted.

This qualitative study was not set out to test a hypothesis about a broad population, but to develop an initial understanding of a small and under-researched population; that is, oral and embodied and performed Christologies from community health workers/*Nyamreche*. This required that only *Nyamreche* who are persons of faith and especially leaders of Christian

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

faith communities be selected. As such, purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling method was appropriate. As used in qualitative research, this method is utilized to gain a "detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than make statistical inferences, or where the population is very small and specific," (McCombes, 2023:5). In my case, I sought to pay attention to voices and agency of *Nyamreche* as a subset of grassroots women curating diakonia Christologies in their everyday work in dealing with life-threatening situations of diseases and violence. To minimize the sampling bias and risks associated with this sampling method, the study developed a sampling frame of all the CHPs in the Siaya Sub-county. Out of the 518 CHPs, 498 identify as Christians from various denominations within Siaya. Of the 498 CHPs who identify as Christians, 12 have pastoral leadership roles in their churches. My interviews targeted only these 12 leaders. They were selected because of their leadership role which gives them a greater chance (as compared to others) to frame and shape knowledge about Jesus in dealing with the triple threat challenge.

Data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews blended with focused group discussions with twelve members of the research population for a period of eight months. This method was appropriate firstly because it allowed me to communicate directly with the respondent and ask the questions already listed in the questionnaire, and secondly because of the qualitative nature of the data that I needed. A face-to-face interview is an appropriate method of qualitative data collection because it gathers non-numerical information, such as words, images, and observations, to understand individuals' attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and motivations in a specific context (Bhandari, 2023:3). I used an open-ended questionnaire in these interviews to avoid restricting respondents to a set of predetermined answers and therefore to gain a better context for the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

research data by helping me to see things from the respondent's point of view (George, 2002:5). An open-ended questionnaire administered through the face-to-face interview formed a relevant method for data collection for my study because I sought to understand the relationship between faith and everyday life in the context of health practices related to gender and sexuality through in-depth exploration and analysis of *Nyamreche* perspectives, experiences, and narratives.

The study employed thematic analysis as an appropriate method of analyzing the qualitative data that I collected from *Nyamreche,* who are also Christian community leaders in Siaya Sub-county. Thematic analysis was an appropriate approach to my research because I was trying to find out information about *Nyamreche's* views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, and values from a set of qualitative data from my interview transcripts. I closely examined the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly using a six-step process: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (George, 2002:5). In the preceding section, I present Christological themes from *Nyamreche* as lived and performed in the daily rhythm of life."

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

4.4 The Jesus of the *Nyamreche*: Actively ever present in all Areas of life

In this section, I present the *Nyamreche* Jesus story through excerpts from the entire transcripts. As a native speaker of the Luo Language, I transcribed and translated the data alone. This presentation is anchored on Abhya Flavian Xaxa's poem, "I am not your Data" (Abhya, Xaxa,2016):

> "I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank, I am not your project or any exotic museum object, I am not the soul waiting to be harvested, Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested, I am not your cannon fodder or the invisible worker, or your

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> entertainment at India Habitat Center, I am not your field, your crowd, your history, your help, your guilt, medallions of your victory, I refuse, reject, and resist your labels, your judgments, documents, definitions, your models, leaders, and patrons, because they deny me my existence, my vision, my space, your words, maps, figures, indicators, they all create illusions and put you on a pedestal, from where you look down upon me, So I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar, I make my own tools to fight my own battle, For me, my people, my world, and my Adivasi self!" (Abhya, F.X. 2016).

This is a poem by Abhya Flavian Xaxa. An Adivasi Rights Activist and Sociologist by training. Abhay has worked with grassroots organizations, campaigns, NGO's, media, and research institutions in different capacities on the issue of Adivasi land rights in central India. Adivasis is the collective name used for the many indigenous peoples of India who live as a minority group (Abhya, F.X. 2016). The choice of Abhya Flavian Xaxa's poem *"I Am Not Your Data"* as the anchor for presenting the *Nyamreche* Jesus story is both methodologically and theologically significant. Xaxa's poem embodies a powerful resistance to objectification, reductionism, and epistemic violence, the very tendencies that often accompany academic research, especially in contexts involving indigenous and marginalized communities (Brunner, 2021).

Abhya F.Xaxa's emphatic rejection of being rendered a statistic, a project, or a passive subject of inquiry resonates with the methodological stance of this study: that the *Nyamreche* narratives of Jesus are not to be mined as mere data points for theological theorizing, but must be encountered as living, dynamic testimonies of faith embedded in everyday life. This aligns with participatory and decolonial research ethics, which call for centering the voices, visions, and lived experiences of communities, rather than subsuming them under external academic frameworks (Castillo& Pattathu, 2023; Melo, 2025).

Furthermore, Xaxa's declaration, "I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar," frames the way the Nyamreche articulate their understanding of Jesus not through

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

imposed theological categories but through their own linguistic, cultural, and spiritual expressions. The *Nyamreche* Jesus, actively present in all areas of life, reflects a Christology that is contextually constructed and communally lived, much like Xaxa's insistence on defining his own identity and narrative. In this way, the poem functions as a hermeneutical key for both data collection and analysis, guarding against the temptation to universalize or sanitize the *Nyamreche's* voices and instead amplifying their agency in narrating their faith. Thus, Xaxa's poem not only critiques epistemic domination but also affirms the transformative power of self-representation, making it an apt anchor for engaging with the *Nyamrech*e lived Christology.

Through interviews and focused group discussions, the Nyamreche shared how they encounter and interpret the presence of Jesus in their struggles, joys, labor, relationships, and caregiving. Their narratives, practices, and theological reflections construct a portrait of Jesus not as a distant redeemer, but as an active, ever-present companion one who walks alongside, listens, empowers, heals, and sustains. These images of Christ challenge Western-leaning, patriarchal, and often intellectualized Christologies that can fail to account for the daily spiritual economies and embodied experiences of African women (Malowa, 2024).

From some of their stories, Jesus is 'not locked' up in church. He is walking in the neighborhood as a disruptive volunteer, who is ever-present in all areas of life. One of the women said:

> "If you walk around the community, you see a very bad situation. I can even do this work of health, nutrition and sanitation without a pay because the situation is bad. But the church does not see these things as very important. They only say that these are signs that Jesus is coming back soon. Some preachers even say that these are punishment from God because we have done so many bad things. I think Jesus is not in those places. He is walking in the villages healing the sick, giving food to the hungry, wiping away tears and touching those who are tired and have no hope. He is

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> going everywhere. He is talking to that person living with HIV. He is encouraging that girl to have hope in life. He is preaching about peace so that we do not fight in our homes. He is walking in the villages dealing with bad things. No one is paying him. He is doing what his father asked him to do. He is my example in my work. We must walk in every place, in every home so that we can help people in the community*," (Nyamrerwa*, P06)

From this, excerpt it seem like the *Nyamrerwa* is challenging the church about theologies and Christologies that are not in touch with the realities of the people. She seems to suggest that such theologies do not align with the ministry of Jesus, who is constantly with the people, dealing with their life-threatening situations. She reframes Jesus not as a distant judge but as an active, compassionate healer embedded in the rhythms of village life. Jesus is not found in sermons of condemnation or theological abstraction, but in acts of mercy such feeding the hungry, comforting the sick, and walking with the hopeless. This participant's idea about Jesus and theologies that pay attention to the daily realities of life agrees with the assertion of Nasimiyu Wasikee- a renowned African women's theology that the African person's experience calls for a theology (Christology) that is based on a holistic view of life, and a Christ who affects the whole of her life, whose presence is felt in every corner of the village and who participates in everything and everybody's daily life (Wasike, 2005:3)

Apart from a Jesus who is actively ever-present in the everyday life of a people, the *Nyamrerwa* Jesus makes room for all and inspires agency for the marginalized. One participant observed:

> "I was just a woman to be seen and not heard. At times in my own house there was a lot of violence but I could not speak. I prayed to Jesus to give me a voice and opportunity do more because I could see a big problem in the community. I was tired of still births; I was tired of witnessing children die at infancy. During my trainings I got to understand why there were still births and deaths of children at infancy. Women never went to clinics. HIV was with us but people were quiet about it. After my training with the Catholic mission, my prayers got answered. I was able to do more than just being a midwife. Jesus opened a door for me in so many spaces. I had a voice and a platform to speak and challenge our people to act differently. Even in my church,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> I speak about family planning, I speak about living together in love and peace. I also talk about HIV and antiretroviral medication," *(Nyamrerwa*, P05).

From this excerpt, it seems like the Nyamrerwa is reiterating that the presence of Jesus with her gives her a voice, a platform, and a mission to meaningfully participate in the transformation of her own family and society. Through her journey from silence and domestic violence to empowered leadership, we see Jesus as not confined to spiritual abstraction but is actively present in the practical, embodied struggles and aspirations of women. Her prayer for a voice is answered through community health training, which becomes a site of divine encounter and liberation, enabling her to transcend traditional gender roles and address critical issues like stillbirths, HIV stigma, and family planning. In so doing, Jesus enhances the agency of marginalized African women through his inclusive ministry, challenging patriarchal norms, affirming their dignity, and advocating for justice. His teachings and actions serve as a source of empowerment, encouraging women to reclaim their identities, engage in leadership, and pursue social justice within their communities. It also emphasizes the need for theologies that create room, or put differently, 'gate-opening theologies' rather than 'gate-keeping' theologies.

The community health volunteers also challenge theologians to do theology in solidarity with the oppressed, with home keepers and care givers, and with those without theological language. One of the participants observed:

> "Jesus does not want people to die. He therefore does not want violence, or to see us die in diseases. Jesus does not want our girls to drop out of school. He wants them to be in class to be taught so that one day they can be of great help to the society. Let us not discriminate these girls, let us show them love like Jesus would do. When we say these girls are immoral, we are also saying that the whole community is immoral because it takes all of us to make one girl pregnant. There is something each of us is doing or not doing that enables these cases of pregnancy. Jesus will ask us to cast a stone on them, and we will all walk away in shame," *(Nyamrerwa*, P07).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

From this, excerpt it seem like the *Nyamrerwa* is bringing to the fore the fact that they operate in marginalized communities where oppression and life-threatening situations are prevalent. Here, Jesus is portrayed not only as a spiritual figure but as a life-affirming presence who opposes violence, disease, and systemic injustices such as school dropout, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based stigma. She invokes Jesus as a champion of education, compassion, and communal accountability, rejecting moralism in favor of a collective ethic of care that mirrors Jesus' love and inclusivity. They therefore advocate for a form of theology that recognizes and addresses the lived experiences of the oppressed. Their call for solidarity encourages theologians to engage with those marginalized by traditional theological discourses, ensuring their voices and stories are included in theological discussions.

Other women saw Jesus' presence as an expiator of the guilt associated with our taboos. Two of them observed that:

> "Our realities today require that we must do things differently. Our culture did not allow us to speak about so many things that matter such as sex, health and diseases, domestic fights and such like things. This come with shame, guilt and silence on many issues. This is why we have so many girls getting pregnant because they do not get the right information from the right people. HIV swept so many of us because we were made to believe it was chira (Chira is a health condition believed to be occasioned by breaking of taboos and which is treatable by taking traditional concoctions called manyasi). But now Jesus has saved the world by removing all these silences on perceived taboo subject. We can now speak and give the right information without any shame or guilt (Yesu ogolo kweche mang'eny e piny tinde wanyalo wuoyo)," *(Nyamrerwa*, P01).

> "Many girls are also defiled and made pregnant by relatives, and they are conditioned to be quiet because of the burden to preserve 'family honor.' Why did they not think about 'family honour' when they were manipulating the girl and forcing their way into the girl? When you beat your wife mercilessly and everybody say that it is bedroom affair, what do we expect to happen? Jesus doesn't like people to suffer and be killed in suffering and at the hands of others. He wants us to speak and act," *(Nyamrerwa*, P03)

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

These two *Nyamreche* seem to be articulating a profoundly contextual and liberative Christology that positions Jesus as a transformative presence who breaks cultural silences and confronts systemic injustices. They name the oppressive cultural taboos that have historically silenced vital conversations around sexuality, health, gender-based violence, and HIV/AIDS; silences that have contributed to widespread harm, particularly for girls and women. The invocation of Jesus as one who "has saved the world by removing all these silences" reframes salvation not as abstract doctrine but as the liberative power to speak truth without shame or guilt. Here, Christ is seen as the enabler of public truth-telling and the champion of justice within intimate, familial, and community spaces.

Jesus active presence in all areas of life is also seen among these women as a practical fulfilment for the promise of life in abundance. One of them asserted that:

> "I want to see people in my community having good life. I don't want to see violence, I don't want to see diseases, I don't want to see anyone left out in accessing health services. I therefore do not see a conflict between my work and my faith. My faith enables me to do much more because I know I am making my contribution in offering life in abundance to all people. This is doing the work that Jesus came to do. When the devil came to steal, to kill and destroy, Jesus came to give life in abundance. I call him *nyamrecha* because he is healer. He is dealing with all situations that make us not to have life in abundance. These situations are many. Poverty is number one. It is poverty that creates so many things. Children get pregnant because poverty pushes them to look for better lives. In looking for better lives, they are deceived by bad men and they do a bad thing that brings the problem we have today. Poverty makes people lack peace in the house. They fight because the man cannot provide but the woman needs food for the children. Let everybody have Jesus with them. Because even with poverty or not, he heals the wounds of our hearts so that no one will look for another help. He gives us everlasting hope by turning every situation around. Hope is the only thing we should not loose in life. We can get it in Jesus when he heals the wounds in our hearts and give us satisfaction," *(Nyamrerwa*, P05).

This testimony articulates a lived Christology rooted in the everyday experiences of African women, revealing Jesus as an ever-present, life-affirming force who confronts and transforms the social, economic, and emotional wounds of the community. By identifying

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Jesus as *Nyamrecha* (Luo word for healer), she affirms a contextual Christology where faith and public service are not separate, but intertwined expressions of divine mission. Her understanding of abundant life transcends spiritual wellbeing to include physical health, economic stability, emotional peace, and communal flourishing. Poverty, violence, and exclusion from healthcare are named as forces that obstruct the promise of life in abundance, and Jesus is invoked as one who confronts these structures through human agency and compassion.

Jesus is also seen as actively present to give love, affirmation and break all forms of exclusion and discrimination. One of the women observed that:

> "I hear LGBT issues only on TV or radio. I don't think those issues are around us here. But even if they were there, I would not know. Everybody lives their lives without writing who they truly are on their foreheads. When I am offering any service, I do not know anything else apart from a person who needs to be assisted. As a Christian, I know that Jesus does not send anyone away. He loves us all and wants us to be one in him. He accepts everybody and gives them a hand to help and to make them restored to God. He says that his father's home there are many houses for us all. We accept this as the truth and therefore we should work for people knowing that Christ is also working in them and for them," *(Nyamrerwa*, P06).

This reflection from this particular *Nyamrerwa* reveals a grassroots Christology shaped by lived experience rather than formal theological debates. Her statement underscores a relational, inclusive, and service-oriented understanding of Jesus as one who does not discriminate or reject but embraces all who come to him. This echoes the *Nyamrerwa's* Christological imagination of Jesus as actively ever present in all areas of life, as such a Jesus who transcends labels, categories, and the politics of identity. The woman's emphasis that she assists people without knowing or needing to know their identities highlights a Christology grounded in unconditional acceptance and service, reflective of Jesus' own boundary-breaking ministry. Rather than framing LGBT persons as outsiders or theological problems, her words

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

suggest an instinctive, practical theology of radical hospitality, mirroring Jesus' open invitation in the Gospels. In relation to her reflection, another *Nyamrerwa* noted that:

> "Diseases does not discriminate. A poor person gets sick, a rich person gets sick. Issues of violence too does not discriminate. Any woman can be violated. Challenges in life too does not discriminate. Every person you know has one challenge or the other. What all of us need is love, care and support. In my work I have seen a lot of things that you cannot discriminate anyone. I have learnt this from Jesus. He goes to the homes of the rich and the poor, he interacts with everyone too. He interacts with women like the woman with the flow of blood, and others like Mary and Martha who had a dead brother. He heals the sick in rich homes like the Jairus and the centurion. Everybody meets his compassion and love. Jesus does not discriminate anyone. If we have to be the true light and salt of the earth, then we too must not discriminate. We must go to everyplace and ever person. We must see them like Jesus would do. Jesus has broken all the walls that separate us and therefore we are able to interact with everyone" *(Nyamrerwa*, P08)

These reflections highlight a deeply inclusive and compassionate Christology in which Jesus is understood as actively present in breaking down barriers of exclusion, discrimination, and stigma. The testimonies frame Jesus as one who loves unconditionally, embraces the marginalized, and affirms the dignity of all, regardless of identity or social status. This understanding extends into the women's daily work in health and community service, where they reject discriminatory practices and model Christ's impartial compassion. One woman draws from her Christian faith to argue that since Jesus does not reject anyone, Christians must also treat everyone regardless of sexual orientation, social class, or life situation, and do so with equal care and respect. Another emphasizes the universality of suffering and the need for collective compassion, invoking Jesus' interactions with a diverse range of people in scripture as a model for radical inclusion.

Jesus' active presence also sets women apart for effective service and invites the society to a communal view of life where no one is left behind. Some of the women asserted:

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> "Women are still blamed for teenage pregnancy, women are blamed for domestic violence, women are blamed for domestic violence, women are blamed when their children turn to things like drugs, or this new thing of same sex love. Men are kings they bear no burdens. In fact in this community men who have more wives are called 'ruodhi' (kings). In such as society, Jesus has called me as woman and has given me ability and wisdom to be a vessel of honour in his hands. He is using me to teach our girls about their health in relations to reproduction. He is using me in community dialogues with young people to talk about these new issues affecting them. I have boys who are champions of safe sex in the community because of community dialogues. I feel that without knowing Jesus, I wouldn't be able to do my work well. He has called me, he has set me apart and has given me work to do in my community" *(Nyamrerwa*, P09)

This testimony deepens the *Nyamrerwa* Christological narrative by highlighting Jesus as an empowering presence who calls women into transformative leadership within their communities. The woman's reflection frames Jesus not only as an inclusive saviour but also as a disruptor of oppressive cultural norms, especially those that scapegoat women for societal problems like teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, or even emerging issues like same-sex relationships. In a patriarchal setting where men are celebrated as "ruodhi" (kings) and bear little social responsibility, the woman reclaims agency by asserting that Jesus himself has set her apart, gifted her with wisdom, and entrusted her with a mission of community care and empowerment. This view of Christ reflects a lived Christology in which Jesus is not distant or abstract but intimately involved in affirming the dignity, agency, and leadership of marginalized voices, particularly women.

Moreover, her account shows how the *Nyamreche* experience of Jesus animates a communal ethic of responsibility and dialogue, transcending the culture of blame and exclusion. The fact that she works with both girls and boys helping them navigate issues of reproductive health, safe sex, and contemporary social challenges, signals a holistic ministry shaped by Christ's active engagement in all aspects of life. Her statement resonates with the spirit of Abhya Xaxa's poem by rejecting imposed societal labels and roles, instead embracing

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

a self-defined, Christ-empowered identity that challenges dominant power structures. In the *Nyamrerwa* context, this Christology affirms Jesus as one who calls, equips, and sustains ordinary people, particularly women, to become vessels of justice, healing, and hope within their communities. In relation to this, another woman noted:

> "Jesus for me is a special gift to my work as Nyamrerwa because he shows me how to do my work of reaching out to everybody in the community. When I read the bible, Jesus gathers everybody to himself. No one is left behind. No one is far away that Jesus cannot reach them. He leaves the ninety-nine to look just for one person. The only way to be a Christian and a Nyamrerwa is to leave no one behind. You must reach out to everybody regardless of age, gender, or class in the society" *(Nyamrerwa*, P010)

This particular reflection underscore a Christology rooted in radical inclusivity, empowerment, and social transformation, portraying Jesus as actively present in challenging patriarchal norms and affirming the dignity and leadership of women. This testimony further crystallizes the heart of *Nyamrerwa* Christology as a vision of Jesus as the inclusive shepherd whose ministry models an unrelenting commitment to reaching every person without exception. The woman's emphasis on "no one is left behind" echoes the biblical image of the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one, a profound symbol of radical care, attention, and pursuit of the marginalized. For the *Nyamrerwa*, Jesus is not merely a spiritual figure but a living guides whose example defines their communal ethos and approach to service.

This interpretation challenges exclusionary practices, calling instead for a discipleship marked by active outreach, inclusivity, and justice across social divisions such as age, gender, and class. In this lived Christology, faith is inseparable from practice, and as such being a follower of Jesus means embodying his radical openness in the daily work of community engagement. The women therefore critique deeply ingrained gender injustices that

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

scapegoat women for a wide range of societal problems from teenage pregnancy to domestic violence and queer identities; while men remain largely unaccountable. Against this backdrop, Jesus is seen as a counter-cultural figure who calls and empowers women, such as *Nyamreche* to become agents of transformation and vessels of honor. By enabling them to lead reproductive health education and community dialogues, Jesus is not merely a distant figure but a living presence who guides and sustains their work.

Through Talitha Cum Hermeneutics and narratological analysis, these stories emerge as vibrant sites of theological resistance and production. They contest dominant Christological paradigms shaped by colonial, patriarchal, and ecclesiastical traditions. They model an intersectional, faith-based approach to liberation, and one that enables communities to contest, rise, live, and thrive with courage, dignity, and hope. Thus, the *Nyamreche* articulate a deeply contextual, lived Christology that is oral, embodied, and performed. Rather than drawing on abstract theological doctrines, their understanding of Jesus emerges from everyday experiences of struggle, healing, and hope within their communities. Through names like *Nyamrecha* (healer) and testimonies of transformation, Jesus is encountered in compassionate acts such as feeding the hungry, offering healthcare, and confronting stigma. Further, their Christologies are enacted in their daily lives as community health promoters, caregivers, and leaders, revealing a performative faith that integrates body, spirit, and culture.

These Christologies are also rooted in a hermeneutic of life and flourishing, affirming the dignity of marginalized women and youth. These women, therefore, resist oppressive religious and cultural narratives by reinterpreting salvation as the empowerment to speak, live, and thrive without shame or fear. As such, life in abundance is not defined solely in spiritual terms but also encompasses emotional peace, economic stability, physical

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

health, and social justice. In such a context, Jesus is seen as a liberating presence who rejects moralism and embraces everyone, especially those excluded due to gender, sexuality, or health status.

These Christologies also empower women with the agency to respond to the triple-threat Challenge. By reclaiming their voice, leadership, and theologically grounded action, these women nurture an intersectional, faith-based movement for social transformation. Their Jesus is not confined to church sermons but walks alongside them in clinics, family planning education, HIV stigma work, and community dialogues. By modeling Jesus' unconditional love and service, they embody a theology that cares, heals, and includes. Their health and justice ministries reflect a divine mission rooted in collective care, compassion, and accountability, and thereby challenging systems that harm and exclude.

4.5 Form and shape of *Nyamrereche* Christologies

The previous section has asserted that the *Nyamreche'* Christologies do not emerge from formal theological institutions or academic discourse, but from the lived realities of African women navigating the intersections of faith, gender, health, and socio-economic struggle. It has further asserted that such theologies are embodied and shaped by their daily acts of caregiving, community health work, and resistance against exclusionary religious and cultural narratives, thereby producing Christologies that are oral, embodied, performed, and grounded in a hermeneutic of life and flourishing. Building on these insights, which are drawn from Talitha Cum Hermeneutics and the narrative testimonies of the Nyamweru women, this next segment explores the specific form and shape of their Christologies through the lens of diakonia and everyday theological praxis.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Dawne Moon (2004) refer to everyday theologies as "people producing understanding of what is right and what God demands everyday as they work to make sense of a changing world in terms of what they know as God's truth," (2004:14). This concept is particularly useful in understanding the theological work of the *Nyamreche* women, whose Christologies emerge organically from their daily lives and struggles. As they navigate the challenges of poverty, gender-based violence, HIV stigma, teenage pregnancies, and exclusion from healthcare, these women draw on their faith to interpret what God requires of them and how Jesus accompanies them in their work. Thus, their Christologies reflect a dynamic and responsive engagement with divine truth as it is lived, performed, and narrated in everyday life, and, as such, embody a theology that is not only about God but also about how to live faithfully and justly in a world marked by rapid change and structural injustice.

On the same note, Musa Dube (2002) has noted that Talitha cum hermeneutics is the practice of living daily in confrontation with international (and local) oppression of the past and present; gender oppression of the past and present; physical wounds of the past and present: a confrontation of sickness and death, which must give way to healing (2002:36). In this way, Talitha cum becomes a missiological praxis based on the life and ministry of Jesus. It becomes a praxis-based understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus. This approach to Jesus ministry aligns with the meaning of everyday theology, where faith is not abstract or confined to formal doctrine, but is shaped through daily experiences and actions. For example, the *Nyamrerwa* women, understanding and following Jesus happens through practical engagement with the needs of their communities, such as healing the sick, advocating for justice, educating youth, and challenging harmful norms. Their Christology is therefore both every day and missional.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Nyamrereche's understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus, therefore, invites us to Christological formulations which are grounded in the reality of who Jesus is in the lived experiences of humanity, and in the reality of what Jesus is doing through the church to bring meaning and dignity to the lives of everyone. This kind of Christ's presence and action in the world, through the church, and with the church has been conceptualized as Jesus diakonia. In ancient Greek, diakonia means an assignmentsuch as a messenger or a go-between (WCC, 2022:44). The New Testament uses three so-called *diak*-words. These include *diakonia, diakonein*– the verb: to do diakonia, and *diakonos*– the person who performs diakonia (WCC, 2022:43).

With this conception, the term itself does not indicate what kind of activities the task entails, rather, its focus is the relation to the one in whose service the *diakonos* stands and who authorizes and instructs for action (WCC, 2022:44). The three so-called *diak*-words are used as key words in central passages that take up the nature of the ministry of Jesus and how his example models the life and service of his followers (WCC, 2022:43). For instance, in the Gospel of Mark 10:45, Jesus affirms that he "did not come to be served (*diakonethenai*), but to serve (*diakonesai*), and to give his life as a ransom for many" (WCC 2022:44). In this regard, his mission, or diakonia, is his active presence in the midst of human reality, walking around, teaching, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

A diakonia framework of Christology is therefore paying attention to the ways in which Jesus is present with the people in their everyday life, what this presence means, what this presence does, and how this presence is known and described. In reference to African women's experiences, it refers to what Nasimiyu Wasike (2015) describes as: "the African

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

woman's experience calls for a Christology that is based on a holistic view of life. She needs the Christ who affects the whole of her life, whose presence is felt in every corner of the village and who participates in everything and everybody's daily life (2015:3). It means what Gustavo Gutierrez (1984) said: "to be followers of Jesus requires that [we] walk with and be committed to the poor; when [we] do so, [we] experience an encounter with the Lord who is simultaneously revealed and hidden in the faces of the poor (1984:38). The poor in this sense does not simply means economic depravity, but people to whom systems and structures of injustice have assigned otherness as their only place and identity.

This kind of framework takes the form of appropriating the Christ-event and seeing oneself in the daily drama that Jesus lives from cradle to cross and beyond. Kaunda Chammah (2018) looks at Jesus diakonia as a prophetic resistance to sin, making the Christ-event central to the Christian imagination (2018:12). In this regard, the lordship of Jesus over the world is demonstrated through his service to humanity by bringing to naught all the powers and authorities that do not serve to improve the status and the lives of those who are weak and underprivileged (Kaunda, 2018:13). Although this framework focuses on how Christ is present with the people in their everyday life, it also upholds the integrity of the divinity and humanity of Jesus in his diakonian task of salvation. Jesus is fully human and identifies with the vulnerability of humans to structural sin, which makes them estranged from God and from themselves. He is fully God because Him alone is able to deal with the problem of structural sin. He is impeccable, therefore has the power and authority to deal with sin and the effects of sin in the world today. Christ wrestles with structural sin that estranges people from their own human selves, enslaves them, and denies them full humanity. These structural sins from my

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

grandmother's story include colonization, patriarchy, clericalism, and other forms of hierarchical relationships.

Through Jesus diakonia, *Nyamrerecha* are not passive in the struggle, but actively involved. They are able to name these forces that subvert flourishing of life, they are able to claim and highlight their agency and that of other ordinary people in rising against these forces, and through their oral, lived, and performed faith in Jesus, they are able to formulate a hermeneutic that is transformational of these ideological and structural conditioning that have invisibilized, excluded and minoritized other children of God. The diakonia Christological framework as underpinned by the Talitha cum story in Mark 5:21–43, and the *Nyamrerwas'* stories of Jesus, therefore offer a model of transforming power, which calls for the involvement of the powerless (the little girl and the woman with the flow of blood), and the powerful (Jesus and Jairus). It is a model that involves reaching out to touch and being touched. It suggests that the powerful and the powerless must work together to redistribute power (Dube 2001:6).

Such participation is immersed in life and its everydayness. Both Jesus and the people participate in a journey of transformation. He is both a host and a guest among the people. It is with this example that the presence of Jesus among the people in their everyday lives brings down these oppressive structures by instilling humility and converting power and authority into service and responsibility.

Based on these conceptions of diakonia Christology and the everyday theologies of the *Nyamreche,* the shape and form of their Christology are deeply embodied, service-oriented, and grounded in the daily struggles, resilience, and hopes of African women. Their

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Christology emerges not from academic treatises or distant doctrinal formulations, but from the lived realities of caregiving, communal solidarity, and active resistance to social injustices. It is a Christology forged in the fires of experience, such as walking with the sick, sitting with the grieving, advocating against gender-based violence, and offering practical support in the face of societal neglect. Jesus is encountered not as an abstract theological idea but as a living presence animating their work of healing, reconciliation, and empowerment. Their faith does not call them to retreat from the world's pain but compels them to meet it head-on, embodying the compassion and justice of Christ in every sphere of their lives.

Therefore, undergirded by Jesus' model of *diakonia* as a humble service and self-giving love, the *Nyamreche* women's Christologies reclaim faith as a summons to public engagement and transformative action. In their understanding, Jesus is not confined to the walls of church buildings or reduced to the content of Sunday sermons; instead, he walks beside them into clinics offering health care, into family planning sessions addressing reproductive justice, into HIV stigma-reduction initiatives, and into community dialogues fostering healing and inclusivity. Their Christology extends Jesus' presence into all areas of communal life, breaking down barriers of exclusion and embodying a faith that heals, cares, and builds community. By modeling Jesus' radical love and diaconal service, these women present a theology that is not only contextually relevant but also a prophetic witness, and as such, one that challenges oppressive structures while nurturing a community where dignity, justice, and care are paramount. In this way, their everyday theology becomes a living Christology of hope, action, and liberation.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Further, their understanding of Jesus is deeply integrated with their daily acts of love, care, and justice, forming a Christology that is embodied, practical, and oriented toward human flourishing. Jesus is encountered as a healer, companion, protector, and advocate who walks alongside them in the routines of community caregiving and resistance against societal structures that marginalize. This everyday Christology affirms that theological meaning is not only thought or taught but lived, narrated, and enacted in spaces often overlooked by institutional theology. Framed by the Talitha Cum Hermeneutic, their Christologies reflect a deep commitment to transformation and collective healing.

Therefore, in *Nyamreche* Christologies, Jesus' ministry becomes a model of diakonia defined by a humble, relational service that confronts systems of exclusion while restoring dignity to the vulnerable. In this sense, the *Nyamreche* do not simply speak about Jesus; they participate in his mission through their own prophetic actions. Their Christologies are both a testimony and a praxis, naming the structural sins that hinder life, such as poverty, patriarchy, and healthcare inequality, while embodying hope and resistance. Through their lived faith, they reveal a Jesus who is not distant but present in the ordinary, calling for shared responsibility to dismantle injustice and redistribute power. This diakonia Christology is not merely descriptive but transformative, reminding us that theology is most authentic when it serves, liberates, and uplifts the broken places of our world.

In sum, the everyday diakonia Christology articulated by the *Nyamreche* of Siaya County unveils a living Christology that is immediate, embodied, and deeply rooted in the everyday struggles and hopes of African women. Their narratives reveal Jesus as actively ever-present not confined to church rituals or doctrinal affirmations, but walking in homes, clinics, farms, schools, and villages as healer, liberator, advocate, and companion.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the Christology co-produced with the *Nyamreche* is both contextual and decolonial, rooted not in academic abstraction but in the everyday, lived realities of African women navigating complex intersections of faith, health, gender, and social injustice. Engaging the community's theological reflections through a Talitha cum hermeneutical lens, one that invites marginalized voices to rise, speak, and be heard and employing narrative ethnography as both method and mode of analysis, this study has uncovered how the *Nyamreche's* spontaneous testimonies, oral performances, and lived expressions of faith constitute a robust theological discourse in their own right. These everyday enactments of faith are not incidental or peripheral to theology; they are theology embodied, spoken, and performed in contexts often neglected by formal Christological frameworks.

The *Nyamreche* Everyday diakonia Christology, as uncovered in this chapter, affirms a Jesus who is "actively ever present" and, as such, a Jesus who walks alongside them in the mundane and the extraordinary: in caregiving, in resistance to societal injustices, in communal healing, and in the daily pursuit of justice and dignity. This Christological imagination challenges traditional, often top-down theological formulations that have historically rendered African women's experiences invisible, secondary, or theologically irrelevant. By centering the stories, perspectives, and ministries of the *Nyamrerwa,* this chapter reveals a Christology that emerges organically from the soil of lived experience and, as such, a theology of life, shaped by the pressing realities of health work, gendered violence, family responsibilities, community dialogue, and cultural expectations.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

This Christology is not only contextual but deeply grounded in Africa's religious triple heritage of orality, embodiment, and performativity. Theological reflection in this context is not merely a cerebral or textual exercise; it is an act of communal articulation spoken in marketplaces, sung in community gatherings, embodied in acts of care, and performed through advocacy and resistance. The *Nyamrerwa* testimonies illuminate at least four key hermeneutical contours that challenge traditional theological boundaries. The first hermeneutical contour is hearing grassroots experiences as legitimate sources of faith and theological insight. This contour becomes a call to affirm that the lived realities of marginalized communities are not mere data points but bearers of divine revelation.

The second hermeneutical contour is speaking spontaneous theologies in community, where theology is a shared, living conversation rather than a monologue of the elite or the academically trained. The third hermeneutical contour is participating in theological reflection without academic displacement, meaning that the voices of grassroots women are neither filtered through nor subordinated to formal theological discourses but are recognized as valid theological contributions in their own right. The fourth hermeneutical contour is to celebrate lived faith as central to Christian vitality, thereby challenging the dichotomy between "lived religion" and "formal theology" by showing that the vitality of Christian faith often springs from everyday practices of care, resistance, and communal solidarity.

Further, in reclaiming theological space through soil (rootedness in land and culture), sweat (labor and service), suffering (resilience amid injustice), and song (celebration and communal expression), the *Nyamreche* offer not only a theology of presence but a theology of transformation. Their Christology is a site of critical engagement and, as such, does not

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

passively mirror or reflect their context. Instead, it critiques the oppressive norms of their society, reimagines alternative possibilities for communal living, and reshapes theological imagination by making Jesus known not only through scripture and sacrament but also through their stories, bodies, and shared struggle for dignity and flourishing.

At the heart of this transformative Christology is a radical affirmation of Jesus as both companion and catalyst. As such, he is the one who not only accompanies but also empowers the marginalized to reimagine their agency in personal, communal, and theological spaces. For the *Nyamreche,* Jesus is the healer in clinics, the comforter in community dialogues on reproductive health, the advocate in struggles against gender-based violence, and the companion in HIV stigma work. This expansive vision of Christ's presence dismantles the artificial boundaries between the sacred and the secular, the theological and the practical. It insists that Christ is already present wherever people labor for justice, care for the vulnerable, or work for healing and community transformation.

This chapter has also illuminated how the *Nyamreche* embody a public theology of diakonia. This is a theology that is neither confined to personal piety nor limited to ecclesial spaces but spills over into public engagement and community transformation. In this theology, faith is inseparable from action, and belief is lived out in tangible acts of care and advocacy. Their Christology thus becomes a praxis-oriented faith, one that stands in solidarity with the oppressed, challenges systemic injustices, and fosters spaces for healing and hope. This is a Christology that not only *interprets* the world but seeks to *change* it, echoing liberationist commitments while remaining deeply attuned to the cultural and social specificities of the *Nyamreche* lived experiences.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

The significance of this Christology is further amplified when viewed through a decolonial lens. By centering the voices and experiences of African women who are often marginalized both in Western theological discourse and in patriarchal African church structures, the *Nyamreche* disrupt dominant theological narratives that have historically been shaped by colonial, patriarchal, and Eurocentric frameworks. Their testimonies challenge theological colonization by affirming indigenous modes of knowledge production, community-based epistemologies, and the legitimacy of grassroots theological reflection. This decolonial approach refuses to view African women as passive recipients of theological concepts but positions them as active theologians and authors of their own Christological narratives, rooted in their own contexts, struggles, and hopes.

Moreover, the *Nyamreche* Christology challenges narrow ecclesiastical understandings of ministry and theological authority. By embodying a theology of unconditional service and inclusive love, they redefine leadership, discipleship, and pastoral care in ways that are accessible, relational, and grounded in community engagement. Their ministry is not predicated on formal ecclesial endorsement but on the compelling call of Jesus, who, in their words and works, calls them, equips them, and walks with them. This redefinition unsettles hierarchical models of ministry and invites a reconsideration of how theological authority is discerned, practiced, and affirmed within the wider Christian community.

The chapter also underscores the power of narrative ethnography as a methodological and analytical tool for theology. By allowing the stories of the *Nyamreche* to speak in their own voice, the study affirms the epistemic value of narrative, testimony, and oral performance in theological reflection. It validates the lived experiences of African women as both data and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

discourse, as sources of theological wisdom, and as active agents of meaning-making. This method aligns with participatory action research and feminist theological methodologies, emphasizing collaboration, shared authority, and the ethical imperative of honoring community voices without extraction or distortion.

In sum, the Christology emerging from the *Nyamreche* is a living theology of presence, action, and hope. It is a theology that speaks to the heart of African women's experiences and resonates with broader struggles for justice, dignity, and community transformation. It is a Christology that refuses abstraction, resists marginalization, and insists on the visibility and agency of grassroots women as theologians of their own lives. It embodies a faith that is neither domesticated nor detached but is fiercely engaged with the realities of life, bearing witness to a Jesus who walks among the people, especially in places of pain, struggle, and hope.

This chapter calls for a broader theological reimagining, one that recognizes and honors the everyday theologies of marginalized communities not as peripheral but as central to the life and witness of the global church. It challenges theologians, practitioners, and faith communities to move beyond tokenistic inclusivity toward genuine theological partnerships with grassroots voices. By listening deeply to the stories of the *Nyamreche* and embracing their Christology of active presence and diakonia, the church is invited into a deeper, more faithful expression of its calling. This kind of expression reflects the radical inclusivity, love, and justice of Jesus Christ. In embracing this Christology, we are reminded that theology is not merely a scholarly pursuit but a lived, communal, and transformative practice. The *Nyamreche* show us that theology happens in the fields, clinics, marketplaces, and homes

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

wherever people gather to serve, to heal, to resist injustice, and to hope together. Their Christology affirms that Jesus is not a distant figure confined to doctrinal statements or ecclesiastical rituals but is dynamically alive in the ordinary and extraordinary acts of faith, love, and community. This Christology calls the church to rediscover its heart in service, in solidarity, and in the shared journey toward justice and human flourishing.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER FIVE:

NYAMRECHE CHRISTOLOGIES AND THE TRIPLE THREAT RESPONSE: A FAITH, HEALTH, AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO SRHR

5.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the preceding discussion of Everyday Diakonia Christology by examining its transformative implications within the field of Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR). Inspired by Walter Mignolo's (2007) call for decolonization as the emergence of "an-other thought" and "an-other logic" beyond dominant epistemic frameworks, this chapter explores how the *Nyamreche* lived Christologies offer an alternative theological imagination capable of reshaping SRHR discourse and practice in Kenya. While Chapter Four highlighted how *Nyamreche* locates Jesus in the ordinary, relational, and justice-oriented spaces of daily life, this chapter extends that insight into the concrete socio-health crisis known as the Triple Threat: teenage pregnancy, new HIV infections, and gender- and sexual-based violence among adolescents and youth.

It argues that the *Nyamreche* embodied Christologies do not remain in the realm of personal devotion or ecclesial reflection; rather, they inform decolonial, faith-rooted, and justice-centered engagement with SRHR. Their Christological praxis challenges the entrenched dichotomy between faith and rights-based advocacy, reframing SRHR as a sacred mandate grounded in communal care, dignity, healing, and accompaniment. By engaging their narratives, ministries, and interventions, this chapter demonstrates how these women mobilize faith as a tool for social transformation, pastoral care, and prophetic resistance. In doing so, they inaugurate "another way of thinking" about SRHR, one that centers African women's agency, theological wisdom, and grassroots leadership in addressing the Triple Threat.

5.2 Foregrounding An-Other Thought, An-Other Logic, An-Other Language.'

Building on Mignolo's call for decolonial epistemic shifts, this section explores how the *Nyamreche* Everyday Diakonian Christologies generate "an-other thought, an-other logic, an-other language" in the realm of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Mignolo asserts that:

> "Decolonization is about inaugurating 'an-other thought' 'an-other logic an-other language,' 'an-other thinking,' (Mignolo, 2007:453).

Mignolo's assertion emphasizes that decolonization is not merely the removal of colonial powers or structures but the active creation of alternative ways of knowing, reasoning, and communicating in what he terms "an-other thought, an-other logic, an-other language." It calls for a profound epistemic shift that challenges the universality of Western colonial knowledge systems, exposes their limits and biases, and makes space for marginalized voices and local epistemologies. In this framework, decoloniality involves rethinking the categories, frameworks, and assumptions through which knowledge is produced, valued, and transmitted.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Applied to SRHR, Mignolo's insight underscores the need to move beyond top-down, externally imposed health and rights discourses that often ignore local cultural, spiritual, and gendered realities. By foregrounding the lived experiences of the *Nyamreche* and their theological imaginations, Everyday Diakonian Christologies embody this "an-other thinking" by producing knowledge and practices rooted in community, faith, and relational ethics, thus offering a radically contextualized and liberative approach to SRHR advocacy.

Taking this call seriously to think otherwise, this chapter critically engages how the *Nyamreche* Everyday Diakonia Christologies present a unique and contextual framework for addressing the Triple Threat Challenge: teenage pregnancy, new HIV infections, and gender- and sexual-based violence among adolescents and youth (Adera, 2025). These interconnected challenges not only threaten the well-being and future of young people but also expose the socio-economic, gendered, and spiritual fault lines within Kenyan society (Adera, 2025). Therefore, this chapter contends that the *Nyamreche's theologies, as rooted in their roles as community health workers, faith leaders, and cultural custodians, forge a faith-affirming, justice-centered* response to these threats that reimagines Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) advocacy as both a sacred obligation and a communal responsibility.

Building on the insights of the previous chapter, which illuminated the contours of the *Nyamreche* everyday diakonia Christology, this chapter shifts focus to examine how their theological imaginations intersect with SRHR advocacy and community interventions. The previous analysis showed that the *Nyamreche* conceptualize Jesus as actively ever present in the realities of caregiving, communal healing, resistance to injustice, and diaconal service. Now, this chapter extends that discussion by exploring how their Christologies empower them to directly engage in addressing the triple threat crisis, often moving against societal norms,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

religious stigmas, and institutional barriers. In so doing, the chapter demonstrates how these women construct liberative and transformative Christologies that not only inform their faith but also shape their engagement with critical health and rights issues affecting adolescents and youth.

Importantly, these Christologies are not confined to abstract theological discourse or Sunday sermons; they are dynamic, embodied, and lived theologies that take shape in the context of the *Nyamreche* everyday engagements with the community as health volunteers and promoters. They emerge from what this study terms Talitha cum hermeneutics: a reading and living of faith that calls the silenced and marginalized to rise and claim their space in theological and communal life (Mombo, 2003; Mombo, 2015). Through this lens, the *Nyamreche* enact Jesus' model of diakonia as a practice of radical service, accompaniment, and solidarity with those most vulnerable to the triple threat. As Klaassen (2020) emphasizes, diakonia is not mere charity or service but a profound expression of walking alongside others in their struggles and hopes, embodying the compassion and justice of Christ in action (2020:44).

Thus by embodying diakonia Christologies, the *Nyamreche* curate an intersectional, justice-oriented faith praxis that bridges the domains of theology, health, and human rights. Their praxis gives rise to a contextual Christian response to SRHR. This kind of response transcends the sacred-versus-secular binary and challenges the often Eurocentric framing of SRHR as a purely rights-based, policy-driven agenda. (Jones, et al, 2017). For the *Nyamreche,* responding to issues of teenage pregnancy, HIV infections, and gender-based violence is not merely a development mandate or a health campaign; it is an extension of their discipleship, a living out of the radical love and justice embodied by Jesus. In this way, their Christologies

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

enable them to hold together their faith commitments with their advocacy work, providing a critical bridge between the church, the community, and public health initiatives.

Moreover, the *Nyamreche* Christologies challenge the widespread perception within many African contexts that SRHR advocacy is a Western-imposed, secular agenda that stands in opposition to Christian faith and African cultural values (Butcher, & Hallward, 2021). Instead, these women reframe SRHR concerns as intrinsic to their faith identity and ministry, positioning themselves as both spiritual caregivers and community advocates. They reclaim SRHR as a sacred and communal responsibility and as such a theological imperative to protect life, uphold dignity, and accompany young people in their journey toward holistic well-being (Adera, 2025). This approach not only deconstructs colonial and patriarchal narratives that often pit faith against rights but also models a decolonial praxis where theology serves as a liberating force in social and health justice work (Rieger & Das eds., 2025).

Further, in the rural context where they work, the *Nyamreche* everyday diakonia Christology is "inaugurating 'an-other (SRHR) thought' 'an-other (SRHR) logic an-other (SRHR) language*,"* (Mignolo, 2007). This is because the triple threat of teenage pregnancy, HIV infections, and gender-based violence disproportionately affects adolescents and youth, particularly young women and girls in rural and marginalized communities (Maughan-Brown, et al, 2025). Further, in Kenya, these challenges are compounded by intersecting factors such as poverty, harmful cultural practices, patriarchal gender norms, and inadequate access to youth-friendly health services (Maughan-Brown, et al, 2025). Still in this context, traditional church responses have often been moralistic, focusing on abstinence messages or issuing condemnations, while health interventions frequently sideline the spiritual and communal dimensions of these challenges (Adera, 2025). Therefore, the *Nyamreche* Christologies offer

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

a compelling alternative, which is a holistic, integrative approach that recognizes the multifaceted nature of the triple threat and responds with empathy, theological depth, and practical action.

Thus, the central question in inaugurating another (SRHR) thought, another (SRHR) logic, another (SRHR) language becomes: **"**Who is Jesus in the context of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights advocacy, interventions, and programming in mitigating the effects of the triple threat challenge?" This is not merely a theological inquiry but a critical exploration of how faith can inform, transform, and sustain grassroots engagement with some of the most pressing health and justice issues of our time. The *Nyamreche* responses suggest that Jesus is not a distant spiritual figure disconnected from the realities of adolescent struggles but an active companion who calls, equips, and empowers his followers to engage in compassionate, justice-driven action.

In unpacking this question, the study examines several thematic areas emerging from the narratives and practices of the *Nyamreche* First, that Jesus is a Companion in Advocacy and Caregiving**.** Data presented under this them shows how the *Nyamreche* perceive Jesus as walking alongside them in their SRHR work, empowering them to speak out, advocate for change, and provide holistic care to adolescents and youth. Secondly, that Jesus is a Healer and Reconciler. Data presented under this theme show how the Nyamreche Christologies frame SRHR interventions as acts of healing, and, as such, as healing bodies, relationships, and communities fractured by stigma, violence, and neglect.

Thirdly, that Jesus is a Justice-Bearer. Data presented under this theme shows how the *Nyamreche* draw on their faith to challenge societal norms and institutional structures that perpetuate the triple threat, seeing their advocacy as a form of prophetic witness against

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

injustice. Finally, Jesus is a Model of Radical Love and Inclusion**.** Data presented under this theme shows how the *Nyamreche* embody a Christology that embraces all, including those marginalized by sexual stigma, cultural taboos, or systemic neglect. In engaging these themes, this study argues that the *Nyamreche* lived Christologies offer a powerful model of how faith, health, and rights can intersect to produce transformative social action. Their example challenges both the church and the broader society to rethink assumptions about SRHR, faith-based advocacy, and the role of women as theological agents of change.

This kind of discussion on SRHR and faith response, especially through the work and Christologies of grassroots women such as Nyamreche, seeks to contribute to ongoing conversations in theology, public health, and human rights by foregrounding the voices of African women who are reimagining the intersection of faith and justice in their daily lives. By amplifying the Christological reflections and practices of the *Nyamreche,* this chapter asserts that the work of decolonizing theology and advancing SRHR in African contexts must be rooted in the lived experiences, cultural wisdom, and spiritual agency of grassroots communities. It affirms that another way of thinking, as a decolonial, faith-affirming, and justice-oriented way, is not only possible but already being practiced by women like the *Nyamreche* on the frontlines of community transformation.

Through this exploration, the study invites theologians, practitioners, faith leaders, and policymakers to listen deeply to the theologies emerging from the grassroots and to embrace collaborative, contextually grounded approaches that honor the complexity of the human experience (Mwaura, 2015). In doing so, it hopes to expand the possibilities for a theology that is liberative and life-giving, capable of engaging the urgent challenges of our time with both courage and compassion (Mwaura, 2015). The study, therefore, focuses on

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

how these Christological constructions actively challenge religio-cultural structures and narratives that (re)produce and perpetuate theological frameworks that create barriers to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights-related work. Specifically, it examines how these alternative theological visions can be mainstreamed to enhance the Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Affordability (AAAQ), and Quality of SRHR information and services in the struggle against the triple threat challenge.

In the first section, the study examines the intersections between Christian theology and Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR), emphasizing how theological frameworks influence discussions around these subjects in contexts such as Kenya. In the second section, the study examines how the *Nyamreche* everyday diakonia Christologies, as rooted in Jesus' life-affirming engagement with marginalized individuals, especially women and girls can be utilized in framing an intersectional approach to SRHR that encompasses faith based, health-based, and rights-based interventions to SRHR issues such as the Triple Threat challenge.

The third section examines how these Christologies are lived out and enacted in response to the Triple Threat itself, tracing how *Nyamreche* embody their theological commitments through concrete actions: mentoring teenage mothers, providing home-based care for HIV-positive persons, mediating in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and advocating for more inclusive and justice-based health practices. This section argues that, by centering *Nyamreche* Christologies within AYSRHR discourse, we uncover a liberative theological praxis that demonstrates how grassroots faith communities can meaningfully address pressing health and justice issues in contemporary African contexts.

ST PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

5.3 Relationship between Theological Discourses and SRHR in Kenya

The conceptualizations of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), alongside Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR), as articulated by leading scholars and practitioners, provide a critical framework for understanding the intersecting issues of health, rights, agency, and social justice in global and African contexts. Among these contributions, the works of Ghebreyesus and Kanem (2018), as well as those of Esther Mombo and Godfrey Owino Adera (2024), offer particularly illuminating insights that are foundational to this section.

Mombo and Adera (2024) define SRHR as "a framework that encompasses a range of human rights related to sexuality and reproduction, including the right to access sexual health information and services" (2024: 38). This conceptual framing recognizes SRHR not merely as a health intervention strategy but as a comprehensive human rights issue that directly impacts human dignity, well-being, and agency. By positioning SRHR within a human rights discourse, Mombo and Adera highlight the inherent link between access to sexual health information and broader societal freedoms, including the right to education, healthcare, and freedom from discrimination. This framing is particularly critical in contexts where cultural, religious, and legal systems have historically marginalized or criminalized certain sexual and reproductive health choices, especially among women, adolescents, and other vulnerable populations.

Building on this foundation, Ghebreyesus and Kanem (2018) expand the scope by emphasizing additional critical dimensions of SRHR. They assert that SRHR also includes "the right to bodily autonomy and integrity, the right to make decisions about reproduction

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

free from coercion or violence, and the right to live free from discrimination in matters related to gender and sexuality" (2018: 2586). Their framing underlines the intrinsic link between SRHR and the broader agenda of gender justice and human rights. The emphasis on bodily autonomy and freedom from coercion or violence draws attention to persistent global challenges such as gender-based violence, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, reproductive coercion, and systemic discrimination against sexual minorities. Ghebreyesus and Kanem's articulation affirms that achieving comprehensive SRHR requires addressing these intersecting social injustices and structural inequalities that restrict individuals' ability to make informed and autonomous decisions about their bodies and lives.

When the focus shifts specifically to Adolescent and Youth SRHR (AYSRHR), the urgency and complexity of these issues become even more pronounced. Dick et al. (2024) argue that AYSRHR is an area of intensified concern, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where adolescents and youth face unique vulnerabilities (2024:88). Mombo & Adera further note that "in many contexts, including African contexts, young people and adolescents are often caught in a triple-bind of cultural silence, religious moralism, and policy neglect" (Mombo & Adera, 2024: 40). This triple-bind profoundly affects their access to accurate information, youth-friendly services, and supportive environments necessary for exercising their sexual and reproductive rights.

The first aspect of this triple-bind, which is cultural silence, refers to "the widespread reluctance or outright refusal within many societies to openly discuss matters related to sexuality, reproductive health, and rights, particularly with adolescents and young people," (Macleod, 2016). Cultural norms often dictate that "sexuality is a taboo subject, unfit for open

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

dialogue, especially within family and educational settings" (Lehn & Chahboun, 2025). This silence fuels misinformation, myths, and stigma, leaving young people ill-equipped to make informed decisions about their health and relationships (Lehn & Chahboun, 2025). Consequently, cultural silence perpetuates cycles of ignorance and vulnerability, increasing the risk of early and unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gender-based violence, and unsafe abortions among adolescents (Pauline, 2015).

The second factor, which is religious moralism, adds another layer of complexity. In many African contexts, religious institutions play a significant role in shaping societal values and norms regarding sexuality and reproduction (Amadiume 2006; Tamale, 2014; Cense & Visscher 2018). While faith communities can be powerful allies in promoting dignity and care, they have also been at the forefront of moralizing discourses that stigmatize sexuality, restrict access to contraception, oppose comprehensive sexuality education, and marginalize sexual minorities (Tamale, 2014). Consequently, religious moralism often translates into rigid moral codes that are weaponized against young people, particularly adolescent girls and young women, undermining their autonomy and fostering environments of shame and fear around issues of sexual health (Amadiume 2006).

The third dimension, which is policy neglect, refers to the systemic failure of governments and policymakers to adequately address the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents and youth (Lynch, Chiweshe, & Moore, 2024). This neglect manifests in inadequate policy frameworks, lack of budgetary allocations, weak implementation of existing policies, and limited availability of youth-friendly services (Lynch, Chiweshe, & Moore, 2024). Even where policies exist on paper, young people often face barriers such as a lack of

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

confidentiality, judgmental attitudes from healthcare providers, and inaccessible service points (Lynch, Chiweshe, & Moore, 2024). Policy neglect also intersects with broader issues of poverty, gender inequality, and education access, further marginalizing young people and placing them at heightened risk of poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Shaw, 2009).

The intersection of these three factors creates an environment where adolescents and young people are systematically denied their rights to information, services, and supportive care. This has profound implications not only for their individual well-being but also for broader societal development. As Mombo and Adera (2024) argue, ensuring SRHR for adolescents and youth is a critical pathway toward achieving health equity, gender justice, and sustainable development (2024;40). Their assertion is echoed by Dick et al. (2024), who emphasize that failing to address AYSRHR constitutes a significant barrier to realizing the rights and potential of young people in Africa and beyond (2024:88).

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that SRHR and AYSRHR are not stand-alone issues but are intricately linked with other human rights concerns, including education, freedom from violence, access to justice, and economic empowerment (Peters & Bijlmakers, 2024). For instance, access to comprehensive sexuality education equips adolescents with critical knowledge and skills, empowering them to make informed decisions and protect themselves from harm (Mombo & Adera, 2024). Similarly, access to youth-friendly health services that are confidential, non-judgmental, and responsive to their specific needs fosters trust and encourages health-seeking behaviour (Mombo and Adera, 2024).

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Equally critical is the role of community engagement and policy advocacy in transforming the socio-cultural and policy environments that currently undermine SRHR and AYSRHR (Aibangbee, et al., 2024). Multi-stakeholder approaches that bring together governments, civil society, faith leaders, educators, healthcare providers, and young people themselves are essential for creating enabling environments (Mombo & Adera, 2024). Such collaborative efforts can challenge harmful norms, influence policy reforms, strengthen service delivery, and empower young people to exercise their rights confidently and safely.

These conceptualizations of SRHR and AYSRHR provided by Ghebreyesus and Kanem (2018), Mombo and Adera (2024), Dick et al. (2024), and many other aforementioned scholars above offer a comprehensive lens through which to understand the intricate interplay of rights, culture, religion, and policy in shaping sexual and reproductive health outcomes. By framing SRHR as a fundamental human rights issue and highlighting the vulnerabilities faced by adolescents and youth, these scholars underscore the urgent need for rights-based, culturally sensitive, and youth-responsive interventions. Addressing the triple-bind of cultural silence, religious moralism, and policy neglect is not only a matter of health but also a profound justice imperative that speaks to the heart of human dignity and societal progress.

Compounding the challenges surrounding SRHR and AYSRHR is the persistent framing of sexual and reproductive rights as "Western," immoral, or anti-Christian (Glass, 2023). Such claims delegitimize SRHR discourse and create significant barriers to access, expression, and rights advocacy (Mombo & Adera, 2024: 40). This dismissal does not occur in a vacuum but is deeply embedded in religious, cultural, and political discourses that seek to control sexuality, particularly that of women and young people. Kaoma (2018) underscores

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

this dynamic by observing that "religion in general as a social institution plays a critical role in framing, producing, and disseminating public discourses and pedagogies," (2018: 48). In matters of sexuality and reproductive health, religion often provides not only the language but also the moral scripts that inform both policy debates and community attitudes (Tohit & Haque, 2024). Consequently, religious rhetoric frequently serves to legitimize restrictive laws, justify harmful practices, and silence critical conversations on SRHR, especially within conservative societies (Tamale, 2014).

Ironically, as Mombo and Adera (2024) argue, this religious framing contradicts the broader teachings of many faith traditions. Their survey of Islamic and Christian texts reveals that several religious scriptures historically promote knowledge, dignity, care, and community service and values that naturally support sexual and reproductive health (2014:3). However, despite these theological foundations, contemporary religious narratives have often become some of the most significant obstacles to effective SRHR interventions (Mombo & Adera, 2024: 29). This contradiction highlights a troubling shift where religious authority is leveraged not to empower but to restrict, especially concerning issues of bodily autonomy, gender equity, and youth access to sexual and reproductive health services. Addressing this tension requires critical engagement with religious narratives and fosters theological reflections that uphold justice, dignity, and holistic well-being as principles deeply rooted in many faith traditions yet frequently overlooked in current SRHR discourses.

Further studies have demonstrated that theologies, sermons, religious texts, and pastoral practices often serve as the primary sources of moral guidance, especially for youth navigating complex questions about identity, sexuality, and reproduction (Vanderbeke, Marianne, 2023). Consequently, religious narratives do not merely reflect community values;

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

they also actively shape the cultural and institutional landscapes in which SRHR policies and interventions unfold. According to Vik, Ingrid, and Christian Moe (2019), despite scriptural foundations that could be interpreted to support SRHR, contemporary religious rhetoric often emphasizes moral regulation and sexual control, framing SRHR as foreign, sinful, or incompatible with faith (2019:10). This dissonance reveals a critical gap between theological potential in promoting holistic wellness and lived religious practice in the context of the triple threat challenge.

In order to underscore this unique role of Theology in framing AYSRHR, it is necessary to first delineate the nuanced relationship between the triple threat challenge and anti-SRHR rhetoric in Kenya (National AIDS Control Council April, 2022). In line with Sustainable Development Goals, the government of Kenya has committed to "end HIV and AIDS as a public health threat and teenage pregnancies by 2030, and gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, by 2026" (ICPD 25, Nairobi, Kenya). In 2023, an increase in the "overlapping challenge of new HIV infections among adolescents, growing cases of teenage pregnancies, and rampant sexual and gender-based violence among young people, is undoubtedly impeding progress towards achievement of the goals," (The National Syndemic Diseases Control Council, February 2023).

These challenges not only highlight a complex web of vulnerabilities to adolescents and young people but also profoundly impact health, population, and development, including education, economic opportunities, and the overall well-being of individuals. It is for this reason that the National Syndemic Diseases Control Council (NSDCC), a State Corporation that is mandated to lead and coordinate multi- sectoral partnerships in HIV response and other syndemic diseases come up with the term 'triple threat' (The National

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Syndemic Diseases Control Council, February 2023). Triple threat is therefore a term used in the Kenyan context to capture how HIV infection, Sexual and Gender based violence (SGBV), and teenage pregnancy cluster together and affect one another among adolescents and young people. The term syndemic refers to the "clustering of two or more health problems within a population that contributes to, and results from, persistent social and economic inequalities" (Singer 2009:28).

In the Kenyan context, triple threat as a syndemic concept focuses on instances in which HIV infection, SGBV, and teenage pregnancies as multiple health problems interact with each other and the sociocultural, economic, and physical environment. Therefore, strategies towards addressing these has brought to the fore 'end the triple threat campaign' as an intervention strategy in many governmental multiagency consultations as a whole government approach to ending the three health problems (Jervin, 2022:1). The National AIDS Control Council (NACC) and the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) have recognized the urgent need to address the triple threat facing adolescents and youth (National AIDS Control Council, April 2022). In response, these bodies have collaborated with National Government Administration Officers (NGAO), county governments, faith-based organizations, and other implementing partners to develop integrated, community-based strategies that address the root causes of risk and vulnerability among young people (National AIDS Control Council, April 2022).

A critical component of these strategies includes addressing the drivers of risk and vulnerability in this population as a way of eliminating the triple threat (National AIDS Control Council April 2022). One such drivers of risk that has been identified are cultural and religious barriers that underpin anti-SRHR rhetoric (National AIDS Control Council April

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

2022). One clear example of cultural and religious barriers is the widespread resistance to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). Kevin Nderaba (2023) notes that in multiple counties across Kenya, religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, have openly opposed the inclusion of CSE in school curricula by arguing that such programs promote sexual immorality and undermine traditional and religious values (2023:60).

This has led to resistance, which includes petitions against the Ministry of Education, community protests (Ndereba, 2023:61). In 2020, for instance, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops publicly condemned CSE, calling it a foreign agenda designed to corrupt African youth, and instead advocated for abstinence-only programs (Wangamati, 2020). This resistance has significantly slowed the rollout of CSE programs in public schools, despite growing evidence of their effectiveness in reducing early pregnancies and STIs among adolescents (Ndereba. 2023, 62). Yet CSE has been part of the Kenyan education system since the 1960s (Panchaud *et al.,* 2019). Panchaud *et al* notes the evolution of CSE from the first stage (1960–1980) of biological and anatomical education to the second phase (1980–1994) of population and developmental issues to the third phase (1994–2000) of social aspects of sexuality, to the fourth phase (2000–2015) of human rights, as a key agenda in sexuality education (2019: 281). The persistent theological resistance has hindered the effective implementation of CSE, thereby limiting young people's access to accurate, rights-based information crucial for their health and well-being. As a result, efforts to end the triple threat of new HIV infections, unintended pregnancies, and gender-based violence among adolescents remain significantly undermined.

Another example is the stigma surrounding adolescent access to contraceptive and maternal health services. Through and ethnographic study in Kilifi, *et.al*., (2020) notes that in

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

many rural and peri-urban areas, young, unmarried girls who seek contraception or visit clinics for antenatal care are often met with moral judgment from healthcare workers influenced by religious norms (2020:6). Håkansson, *et al* (2018), from an ethnographic study in Kisumu, notes that in some cases, faith-based health institutions, which make up a significant portion of Kenya's healthcare infrastructure, refuse to offer contraceptive services to unmarried adolescents on religious grounds (2018:10). They further observe that this trend is common in Catholic run health facilities and some evangelical church clinics, where service provision is strictly aligned with the theological teachings of the institution (2018:10). Such restrictions have resulted in young people avoiding health facilities altogether or seeking services in unsafe, informal contexts (2018:13). This stigmatization and denial of services push adolescents away from formal healthcare systems, exposing them to unsafe and informal alternatives that jeopardize their health. Consequently, these barriers seriously hinder national efforts to eliminate the triple threat by denying young people the preventive care and support they urgently need.

Additionally, Kenyan LGBTQ+ youth face compounded barriers in accessing SRHR services due to religious teachings that portray non-heteronormative identities as sinful or unnatural (George et *al*. 2020). Thus, Adera 2022 notes that theological narratives have been a driving force in anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, which in turn influence public policy and social attitudes (2022:660). For example, some pastors have mobilized congregations against organizations providing SRHR services to LGBTQ+ youth, claiming that such groups are promoting "Western sexual immorality, (Moore, 2022:680). These religiously fuelled narratives have contributed to the marginalization and criminalization of LGBTQ+ youth, severely limiting their access to safe, inclusive SRHR services. As a result, efforts to end the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

triple threat are undermined by the exclusion of one of the most vulnerable youth populations from critical health interventions and rights-based education.

Moreover, religious opposition also manifests in national policy debates, where church lobby groups have sought to influence legislation against adolescent reproductive rights (Orenje, 2013). During the development of the Reproductive Health Bill (2021), religious institutions led a strong opposition campaign, misrepresenting provisions for youth access to reproductive health services as "legalizing abortion and promoting sexual promiscuity," (Givens, 2023:52). When it was passed as the 2022-2032 Reproductive health policy, it framed reproductive health issues within religious and cultural language, and thereby placing restrictions on access to reproductive healthcare services, particularly for young people and marginalized communities (The Ministry of Health- MOH, 2025). In particular, the policy's emphasis on abstinence, coupled with a lack of comprehensive sex education, has been criticized for exacerbating teenage pregnancy and hindering access to contraception and abortion services (Obhai, 2025:77). It seems like this religious influence on policy has resulted in a framework that prioritizes moral conservatism over evidence-based public health strategies, limiting the scope and effectiveness of reproductive health interventions for youth. Consequently, such policy environments perpetuate the triple threat by failing to provide young people, especially those from marginalized groups, with the tools, knowledge, and services they need to protect their health and rights.

In this section, the chapter has explored the complex and often contested intersections between Christian theology and Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR), with a particular focus on how theological frameworks shape conversations and interventions in contexts such as Kenya. By examining how theology

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

engages or resists engaging with AYSRHR issues, it becomes evident that Christian thought is not a neutral backdrop but an active participant in shaping societal attitudes, policy responses, and community practices concerning young people's sexual and reproductive health. On one hand, Christian theology has historically provided profound moral guidance, emphasizing care for the vulnerable, the sanctity of life, and the importance of community support. These values, when rightly interpreted, hold the potential to foster compassionate responses to the needs and rights of adolescents and youth. They also offer a framework for holistic human flourishing, grounded in respect, justice, and mutual responsibility.

However, the examples discussed in this chapter also illustrate that, in many instances, Christian theology functions through rigid doctrines, entrenched institutional authority, and the gatekeeping power of religious leadership. These dynamics often translate into moralistic stances that marginalize young people's voices and ignore their lived realities. Instead of serving as a space for dialogue and care, theological interpretations of sexuality and reproduction have frequently been weaponized to police behavior, enforce silence, and sustain exclusionary norms, particularly against young women, sexual minorities, and adolescents navigating complex socio-cultural environments. The influence of such theological rigidity extends into policymaking, public health interventions, and community attitudes, reinforcing stigma and restricting access to critical SRHR services. Therefore, addressing barriers to AYSRHR demands more than just technical policy adjustments or health sector reforms; it calls for sustained theological reflection, critical engagement with religious teachings, and the fostering of faith-based dialogues that seek to reinterpret and reimagine Christian doctrines in light of contemporary human rights and health justice concerns.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

In this regard, the Christological reflections offered by *Nyamreche* present a transformative theological lens worth serious attention. The *Nyamreche* approach to Christology challenges traditional doctrinal interpretations that have contributed to exclusion and instead proposes a vision of Jesus that is deeply attuned to the lived realities of marginalized communities, including adolescents and youth. Their Christologies emphasize the liberative, compassionate, and justice-seeking aspects of Jesus' ministry, and this becomes a theological vision that resonates with the struggles young people face in navigating sexuality, health, and rights within restrictive religious and cultural contexts. By foregrounding a Christ who stands with the marginalized and affirms human dignity, *Nyamreche* theological insights open up new possibilities for faith communities to engage with AYSRHR not as a threat to religious values but as an expression of Christian commitment to justice, care, and the flourishing of life. Such an approach invites churches, theologians, and faith-based institutions to become allies in the struggle for the health, rights, and holistic wellbeing of all young people as a vision that is both theologically grounded and socially transformative.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

5.4 *Nyamreche* Vision for Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality of SRHR

Building on the preceding analysis of how Christian theology both shapes and, at times, hinders the realization of Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR), this section turns toward a constructive theological response aimed at reimagining how faith communities might engage SRHR in ways that affirm dignity, justice, and holistic wellbeing. Specifically, this section draws on *Nyamreche's* articulation of everyday diakonia Christologies, which is a theological approach rooted in Jesus' consistent,

life-affirming engagement with marginalized individuals, particularly women, girls, and vulnerable youth. *Nyamreche* Christological reflections emphasize Jesus' ministry of presence, healing, and boundary-crossing compassion, challenging rigid institutional interpretations of theology that often alienate rather than embrace those at the margins. By foregrounding Jesus' active solidarity with the oppressed, *Nyamreche* present a vision of Christian discipleship and community care that is fundamentally liberative, inclusive, and responsive to human need.

Nyamreche Christologies offer a critical resource for reframing SRHR discourse within Christian contexts, especially in societies where theology has been mobilized to oppose or stigmatize sexual and reproductive rights. Rather than viewing SRHR as a threat to religious values, *Nyamreche* invites theological reflection that sees the advocacy for SRHR, particularly for adolescents and youth, as a faithful response to Jesus' call to love, justice, and the protection of life. Central to this vision is the application of the Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality (AAAQ) framework, commonly used in public health and human rights advocacy (Homer and Castro *et al., 2018), but reimagined here* through a theological lens.

Availability, within this framework, means that SRHR information and services should be present and offered in communities where young people live (Homer and Castro *et al,* 2018), and as such, a mandate that resonates with the diakonia imperative to serve where people are. Accessibility requires that these services be provided without discrimination, and with consideration of the economic, geographic, and social barriers young people face (Homer and Castro *et al,* 2018), thus echoing Jesus' practice of making care accessible to all, regardless of status or stigma. Acceptability speaks to the cultural and social sensitivity of

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

SRHR interventions, ensuring they align with the dignity and values of those served (Homer and Castro *et al,* 2018), much like how Jesus met people in ways that respected their context and humanity. Lastly, Quality underscores the importance of SRHR services being effective, evidence-based, and delivered with respect and competence (Homer and Castro *et al,* 2018), mirroring the compassionate excellence demonstrated in Jesus' healing ministry.

By proposing an intersectional theological framework that integrates faith-based compassion, public health imperatives, and human rights principles, this approach acknowledges the multifaceted realities faced by adolescents and youth, especially within African contexts marked by systemic inequalities, religious conservatism, and socio-economic challenges (Ekong, 2024). Such a framework does not pit theology against rights or health; instead, it envisions theology as a vital partner in advancing justice, care, and human dignity (Mombo and Adera, 2024). Importantly, this model also addresses pressing contemporary concerns such as the Triple Threat (the intersection of HIV infection, adolescent pregnancy, and sexual and gender-based violence) by insisting that Christian theology must move beyond abstract doctrines to tangible acts of solidarity, advocacy, and service (Mombo and Adera, 2004). In doing so, *Nyamreche* vision calls on churches, faith leaders, and theologians to reclaim diakonia not as passive charity but as active, justice-oriented engagement with the most vulnerable. This theological posture offers a contextual, transformative pathway forward that re-centers care, justice, and inclusion both in theological reflection and in practical ministry, thereby creating faith-informed spaces where the rights, health, and agency of all young people are fully affirmed and safeguarded.

The concepts: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality of SRHR have been jointly referred to as AAAQ framework (ESCR Committee 2008). This framework was

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

developed by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR) in the year 2000 (ESCR Committee 2008). Subsequently, the framework has been adopted by a number of United Nations (UN) Treaty Monitoring Bodies and domestic courts in assessing states' obligations under the right to health (Center for Reproductive Rights 2025). The framework provides member states with clear guidance on the measures they must take to fulfil their human rights obligations in relation to safeguarding the right to health (Center for Reproductive Rights 2025). The right to health (Article 12) was defined in General Comment 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a committee of experts, responsible for overseeing adherence to the Covenant (Lodeiro, (2021).

According to the ESCR Committee, availability "requires an adequate number of functioning health care facilities and services with trained medical and professional personnel and skilled providers who are trained to perform the full range of sexual and reproductive health services." (ESCR Committee, Gen. Comment No. 22, para 13; Center for Reproductive Rights 2025). On the same note, accessibility "requires that services related to sexual and reproductive health care should be accessible to all individuals without discrimination and free from procedural, practical, and social barriers interfering with access to such services." (ESCR Committee, Gen. Comment No. 22, para 2, 15, and 24; Center for Reproductive Rights 2025). Acceptability on the other hand requires that "all sexual and reproductive health services be respectful of the culture of individuals, minorities, peoples and communities and sensitive to gender, age, disability, sexual diversity and life-cycle requirements." (ESCR Committee, Gen. Comment No. 22, para 20; Center for Reproductive Rights 2025).

Notably, the ESCR Committee recognizes that acceptability "cannot be used to justify the refusal to provide tailored facilities, goods, information and services to specific

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

groups, (ESCR Committee, Gen. Comment No. 22, para 20; Center for Reproductive Rights 2025). Further, according to ESCR Committee, quality requires "that sexual and reproductive services and goods are evidence-based and scientifically and medically appropriate; drugs and equipment are scientifically approved and unexpired; and that health care personnel are trained. (ESCR Committee, Gen. Comment No. 22, para 21; Center for Reproductive Rights 2025). The ESCR Committee makes clear that "failure or refusal to incorporate technological advances and innovations in the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, jeopardizes the quality of care," (ESCR Committee, Gen. Comment No. 22, para 21; Center for Reproductive Rights 2025).

Nyamreche Christology, rooted in Jesus' compassionate and liberative ministry among the marginalized, offers a vital theological foundation for reimagining the AAAQ framework in the context of Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR). In their conception of everyday diakonia, Christ's actions are not abstract doctrines but embodied practices of healing, presence, and advocacy for those on the margins. This theological lens speaks directly to the issue of availability by demanding that sexual and reproductive health services be as tangibly present and as responsive as Jesus was in his ministry. For example, one of the participants argued that:

> "As you talk about these sensitive issues, you meet a lot of opposition and gossip. I talk about family planning and contraceptives; I talk about adherence to anti-retroviral medication; I talk about hygiene and sanitation; I talk about the need of teenage mothers to go for prenatal and postnatal clinics; I talk about gender based violence; I talk about health and healthy living for all people; but these are not easy discussions. Many churches in our area do not accept these conversations. There are also people who think our cultures as Luos do not accept that we talk about these things. It is a real struggle but we must save our community. As a Christian, I see Jesus on my side because he wants everybody to have a good life. He does not want us to hide in suffering. He knows and sees these girls in their situation. He wants us also to know them and see them with love. Jesus knows that I am not doing a bad thing. He knows me and know that my heart is bleeding for my community. He sees me in my work.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> He covers me so that I can be able to overcome all the challenges that come with this work. One day when we are called in heaven to say the work we did on earth; I will be happy to say how I worked hard to save our community. Jesus will approve of this work,"(Nyamrerwa, P01)

From her argument, she seems to be asserting that just as Christ made himself available to the sick, women, children, and social outcasts, so too must health systems and faith communities ensure that there are adequate, functional, and equitably distributed facilities, personnel, and resources to meet the SRHR needs of all adolescents, particularly girls, youth, and youth living in poverty. In a context where SRHR information is deliberately suppressed, this *Nyamreche* ensures its availability by initiating conversations that others avoid, bringing critical health knowledge into spaces traditionally marked by silence. This *Nyamreche* narrative powerfully illustrates how faith-inspired action can challenge cultural and religious barriers to adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (AYSRHR). By openly discussing topics such as family planning, adherence to anti-retroviral medication, hygiene, prenatal and postnatal care, and gender-based violence, she disrupts the silence enforced by both church teachings and cultural norms. Her persistence in making information and care available, despite opposition and gossip, reflects a deep commitment to community wellbeing. Rooted in her Christian faith, Nyamrerwa frames her work as an act of service that aligns with the example of Jesus, who sees, knows, and loves the marginalized. In her eyes, faith is not a barrier but a source of strength and a mandate for action, giving her the courage to challenge stigma and ensure accessibility, even when social and institutional structures resist.

Her Christological vision reinforces this commitment, portraying Jesus as a companion who supports and validates her work, rather than condemning it. This liberative theology reframes what is culturally and religiously deemed acceptable, emphasizing that true

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Christian witness involves addressing real human needs with compassion and justice. By centring her actions on care, dignity, and holistic wellbeing, this *Nyamreche* work embodies a quality of engagement that prioritizes both ethical integrity and the lived realities of her community. Her narrative shows how the intersection of theological reflection, faith-based compassion, public health principles, and human rights advocacy can create a transformative space to address the pressing challenges facing adolescents and youth — a space where faith and justice move hand in hand.

Further, through *Nyamreche* lens, accessibility is seen not only as a legal and public health requirement but as a moral and theological imperative. One of the participants argued that:

> "I want to see people in my community having good life. I don't want to see violence, I don't want to see diseases, I don't want to see anyone left out in accessing health services. I therefore do not see a conflict between my work and my faith. My faith enables me to do much more because I know I am making my contribution in offering life in abundance to all people. This is doing the work that Jesus came to do. When the devil came to steal, to kill and destroy, Jesus came to give life in abundance. I call him *nyamrecha* because he is healer. He is dealing with all situations that make us not to have life in abundance."(Nyamrerwa, P01).

In this argument, we see a reflection of Jesus ministry; a ministry which was marked by "his dismantling of social, religious, and cultural barriers to inclusion, touching the untouchable, welcoming the outsider, and affirming those excluded from communal life," (Thumma, 2012). In the same way, *Nyamreche* Christology insists that churches and healthcare systems eliminate any form of discrimination, stigma, or gatekeeping that prevents youth from accessing SRHR services. Therefore, through this *Nyamreche* lens, accessibility transcends its conventional definition as a public health standard or legal right; it becomes a deeply rooted moral and theological obligation. The participant's reflection underscores this by linking the

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

desire for community well-being, anchored in freedom from violence, disease, and exclusion, to their faith in Jesus as the giver of abundant life.

Thus, accessibility here is not just about removing practical barriers such as cost, distance, or stigma; it is about embodying a theological commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind in receiving care, support, and healing. The participant's statement, "I therefore do not see a conflict between my work and my faith," redefines faith as a driving force for making healthcare accessible to all, rather than a source of judgment or exclusion. This theology positions the work of expanding access to health services as a direct continuation of Jesus' ministry and as such a concrete expression of offering life in abundance to all people.

Moreover, by calling Jesus *Nyamrecha* (the healer), the participant situates their advocacy within a culturally resonant theological framework that portrays Christ as actively addressing situations that rob communities of life, dignity, and wellbeing. This reinforces the idea that barriers to health access are not only structural injustices but spiritual assaults on the fullness of life that Jesus came to restore. Thus, accessibility in this context is both a social justice imperative and a theological witness, rejecting the false dichotomy between faith and rights-based advocacy. In this vision, expanding access to SRHR services becomes a faithful response to the Christian calling, deeply woven into the mission of healing, justice, and life-affirming ministry within the community.

Further, *Nyamreche* promotes a theology of radical openness and accompaniment, where the Church becomes a space of belonging and advocacy, working to remove both structural and cultural barriers to healthcare. Moreover, one participant noted that:

> "Our realities today require that we must do things differently. Our culture did not allow us to speak about so many things that matter such as sex, health and diseases,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> domestic fights and such like things. This come with shame, guilt and silence on many issues. This is why we have so many girls getting pregnant because they do not get the right information from the right people. HIV swept so many of us because we were made to believe it was *chira (Chira* is a health condition believed to be occasioned by breaking of taboos and which is treatable by taking traditional concoctions called *manyasi*). But now Jesus has saved the world by removing all these silence on perceived taboo subject. We can now speak and give the right information without any shame or guilt (Yesu ogolo kweche mang'eny e piny tinde wanyalo wuoyo)"," (Nyamrerwa, P04).

This narrative further deepens the understanding of accessibility by showing how cultural silence, shame, and taboo have historically restricted access to vital information about sexuality, health, and disease. The participant acknowledges that entrenched cultural norms prevented open conversations on critical life issues, resulting in harmful consequences such as unintended teenage pregnancies and widespread HIV infections. By linking these barriers to misinformation and societal silence, the narrative highlights that accessibility is not merely about physical or economic access to services but also about creating open, safe spaces for truthful dialogue. The assertion that "Jesus has saved the world by removing all these silences on perceived taboo subjects" frames accessibility as a liberating theological act where Jesus dismantles the walls of shame and fear, making it possible for people to access accurate information without guilt. This Christ-centered reframing shifts accessibility from a clinical concept to a redemptive action, encouraging faith communities to embrace open dialogue and ensure that life-giving information and services reach everyone, especially those most affected by harmful cultural silences.

Again, *Nyamreche* understanding of acceptability is deeply tied to her contextual theology and to Jesus' own approach to cultural sensitivity and relational engagement. From the above excerpt we can see the call for sensitivity. Moreover, another participant noted that:

> "In my work I have seen a lot of things that you cannot discriminate anyone. I have learnt this from Jesus. He goes to the homes of the rich and the poor, he interacts with

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

> everyone too. He interacts with women like the woman with the flow of blood, and others like Mary and Martha who had a dead brother. He heals the sick in rich homes like the Jairus and the centurion. Everybody meets his compassion and love. Jesus does not discriminate anyone. If we have to be the true light and salt of the earth, then we too must not discriminate. We must go to everyplace and every person. We must see them like Jesus would do. Jesus has broken all the walls that separate us and therefore we are able to interact with everyone" (Nyamrerwa, P06).

It seems that this *Nyamreche* understanding of acceptability is profoundly shaped by her contextual theology, emphasizing the need for relational engagement and cultural sensitivity modelled in Jesus' ministry. In her approach, acceptability is not confined to offering services that meet technical standards or cultural expectations but extends to ensuring that people feel genuinely respected, valued, and embraced within the care they receive. The participant's narrative vividly highlights this perspective. She reflects on how, in their work, they have learned (as inspired by Jesus) that discrimination has no place in true service. Jesus' ministry, as recounted in scripture, broke cultural, gender, and class barriers: He entered the homes of both the rich and the poor, engaged with the socially marginalized, such as the woman with a flow of blood, and extended healing and compassion without partiality.

This example reframes acceptability as a theological mandate to remove prejudice and cultivate inclusive, compassionate care. It calls for an ethic of radical hospitality and human dignity, where every person is approached without discrimination, mirroring Jesus' indiscriminate love and relational openness. Acceptability, in this sense, is not simply about conforming to cultural norms but about transforming them through non-judgmental engagement that reflects the heart of Christ. This *Nyamreche* testimony suggests that faith-based actors have a critical role in making SRHR services acceptable by embodying this relational, inclusive ethos of creating spaces where every person, regardless of social status, gender, or background, feels seen, valued, and treated with dignity.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Further, from this assertion, the *Nyamreche* Christ does not impose one-size-fits-all solutions; he listens, touches, heals, and responds to individual and communal contexts with compassion. In this spirit, the *Nyamreche* seems to be asserting that SRHR services must respect cultural identities, gender diversity, age-specific needs, and life-cycle requirements. Her Christology critiques both secular and religious institutions that fail to tailor services to marginalized groups, such as adolescents with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, and queer youth. Importantly, she echoes the ESCR Committee's warning that "acceptability" must not be used as a pretext to deny specific services to certain groups (ESCR Committee 2008). Instead, Christian theology must affirm a life-affirming ethic that welcomes difference and centers the dignity of every person seeking care.

Finally, quality in *Nyamreche* Christology is linked to the pursuit of justice, truth, and holistic healing. Jesus' healing acts were not superficial or symbolic; they restored individuals to full participation in their communities.

> "Jesus does not want people to die. He therefore does not want violence, or to see us die in diseases. Jesus does not want our girls to drop out of school. He wants them to be in class to be taught so that one day they can be of great help to the society. Let us not discriminate these girls, let us show them love like Jesus would do. When we say these girls are immoral, we are also saying that the whole community is immoral because it takes all of us to make one girl pregnant. There is something each of us is doing or not doing that enables these cases of pregnancy. Jesus will ask us to cast a stone on them and we will all walk away in shame. I do not want to walk away in shame. I want to be with these girls before they get pregnant. I want to teach them how to protect themselves. But if by accident one of them gets pregnant, I want to support them make good decisions"(Nyamrerwa, P03).

In this *Nyamreche* narrative, quality is inseparable from the pursuit of justice, truth, and holistic wellbeing, and as such, a standard that transcends mere technical adequacy to reflect the fullness of life that Jesus advocates. The participant's reflections emphasize that Jesus' healing was never superficial or symbolic; it restored dignity, social belonging, and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

community participation. Similarly, quality in SRHR must go beyond delivering basic services or information. It demands a commitment to interventions that genuinely empower individuals, address systemic injustices, and promote long-term wellbeing. The participant's desire to see girls remain in school, avoid preventable diseases, and be treated with love and dignity speaks to a vision of quality that centers on comprehensive care. This care considers not only physical health but also education, social acceptance, and future prospects.

Furthermore, the participant's challenge to societal hypocrisy by noting that blaming girls for pregnancy implicates the entire community underscores the need for truthful, community-wide engagement that refuses to scapegoat or shame. Quality, in this sense, involves honest reflection on communal responsibility, proactive education, and non-judgmental support. The participant's commitment to teaching girls about self-protection before harm occurs and supporting them compassionately if they face crisis situations aligns with a Christological model of care that is preventive, restorative, and rooted in unconditional love. By adopting this approach, this *Nyamrerwa* and her community workers embody a standard of quality that is ethical, relational, and transformative that echoes Jesus' own ministry of justice-driven, life-affirming engagement. Drawing on her Christology, she calls for prophetic engagement where the Church advocates not only for service provision but also for continuous improvement, innovation, and accountability in SRHR delivery. Her Christology thus provides a robust framework for integrating theological compassion, health rights, and justice in transforming how SRHR services are provided to youth.

In conclusion, *Nyamreche* Christology offers a profound and transformative theological lens for advancing the AAAQ framework in adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Rooted in the compassionate, boundary-breaking

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

ministry of Jesus, their Christology redefines how faith communities and health systems alike should engage with SRHR. Jesus' life and actions, as marked by radical inclusivity, healing, and justice, serve as a model for dismantling the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that often obstruct young people's access to critical health information and services. *Nyamreche* theology does not merely critique these barriers; it offers a constructive path forward, one that insists faith-based engagement must align with principles of dignity, inclusion, and holistic care. Their vision challenges both church and society to move beyond restrictive doctrines and stigmatizing narratives, recognizing that safeguarding the health and rights of adolescents and youth is not just a public health obligation but a sacred, moral duty consistent with the heart of the Christian gospel.

By anchoring their advocacy in the concept of everyday diakonia, a ministry of practical and relational service, *Nyamrerwa* reframes the AAAQ elements as not only technical benchmarks but theological imperatives. Availability means committing to ensuring SRHR information and services are present in the very communities where they are most needed, breaking the culture of silence and religious gatekeeping. Accessibility demands intentional action to eliminate social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers, ensuring that no young person is excluded because of stigma, discrimination, or societal neglect. Acceptability calls for culturally sensitive, relationally grounded interventions that honor the dignity of each person while challenging harmful norms with compassionate truth. Quality underscores a holistic approach that addresses physical, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being, reflecting Jesus' example of restorative care that brings healing in its fullest sense. *Nyamreche* Christological perspective ultimately invites a bold reimagining of both theology

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

and practice as one where faith-inspired advocacy actively contributes to a world where adolescents and youth thrive with dignity, agency, and hope.

5.5 *Nyamreche* intersectional Approach: faith, health, and rights based interventions

Having established the theological foundations of *Nyamreche* Christology and its integration with the AAAQ framework, this final section turns toward examining the lived expressions of these theological commitments, especially as they respond to the pressing realities posed by the Triple Threat of HIV, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence (GBV). These three interlinked challenges represent a significant public health and social crisis among adolescents and youth in many African contexts, including Kenya (Mugo, Owaka and Mutisya, 2025). They are not only health issues but deeply embedded socio-cultural and theological concerns that intersect with questions of morality, community belonging, and human dignity (Mombo and Adera, 2024). *Nyamreche* Christology, with its focus on everyday diakonia through the practice of compassionate, justice-oriented service becomes a critical lens through which faith communities can address these challenges not in isolation, but as part of a holistic, integrated response.

This section, therefore, pays particular attention to how *Nyamreche* theological vision is enacted through an intersectional approach that weaves together faith-based compassion, public health strategies, and human rights advocacy within concrete, community-based interventions. Rather than treating theology, health, and rights as separate or conflicting domains, *Nyamreche* praxis embodies a seamless integration in which each informs and strengthens the others. For instance, in addressing HIV, her Christological stance challenges stigma within faith communities, promoting a narrative of care, inclusion, and support for those affected. Simultaneously, by ensuring the availability of accurate health information and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

promoting accessibility to treatment and support networks, she bridges the gap between pastoral care and public health.

In tackling teenage pregnancy, her theology calls for proactive engagement, including comprehensive sexuality education and open conversations about reproductive health, thereby enhancing acceptability and empowering young people with knowledge and agency. Moreover, her commitment to quality means that these interventions are carried out with compassion, competence, and respect for the dignity of all involved. When it comes to gender-based violence, *Nyamreche* Christological approach insists on both prophetic witness and practical action. Drawing from Jesus' model of confronting injustice and standing with the marginalized, their work advocates for the dismantling of harmful cultural norms and the establishment of safe spaces for survivors of violence. This praxis-centered expression of her Christology models how faith can serve as a catalyst for holistic, sustainable responses to the intertwined challenges of HIV, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence by ensuring that theology, health, and human rights are not only compatible but mutually reinforcing in the work of community transformation. This approach provides a localized understanding of intersectionality.

In SRHR work, intersectionality means "understanding how various social identities like gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability intersect to shape a person's unique experiences and access to SRHR," (Kapilashrami, 2020:5). But intersectionality as a concept stems from Audre Lorde's (21012) assertion that "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives". Intersectionality as a method, therefore, explores how multiple identities interact to create unique patterns of oppression. It is based on

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

the idea that "all forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and must therefore be analysed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another," (The center for intersectional Justice, 2023). Therefore, intersectionality describes the ways in which "systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination "intersect to create unique dynamics and effects (The Center for Intersectional Justice,2023). The aim of intersectionality theory is to examine the interconnections and interdependencies of systems of inequalities, then untangling these lines that create such a complex web of inequalities (The Center for Intersectional Justice, 2023).

Nyamreche Christological response to the triple threat challenge reveals an everyday concept of intersectionality. In their Christologies, intersectionality is not merely a conceptual lens but a lived reality shaped by the daily entanglements of faith, gender, poverty, queerness, age, and cultural belonging. Just as Kapilashrami (2020) notes that intersectionality in SRHR work demands attention to how overlapping identities influence access and experience, *Nyamreche* recognizes that young people and adolescents navigate health systems and religious spaces that are often structured by multiple, reinforcing layers of exclusion. Their practice of everyday diakonia through mentoring teenage mothers, offering home-based care for persons living with HIV, mediating in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and advocating for inclusive, justice-oriented health systems is inherently intersectional because they attend to the complex and overlapping struggles faced by marginalized youth.

Further, by refusing to isolate health from theology, or faith from justice, *Nyamreche* embodies what the Center for Intersectional Justice (2023) calls a simultaneous analysis and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

response to interlocking systems of inequality. In doing so, they offer a decolonial and grassroots model of intersectionality that untangles webs of oppression not through abstract critique alone, but through embodied compassion and prophetic action in the context of lived African realities. Thus, *Nyamreche* intersectional approach to the triple threat challenge is faith-based, drawing from a Christology that sees Jesus not only as a spiritual redeemer but as a social liberator who stood in radical solidarity with those pushed to the margins. Further, theological framing of the Triple Threat is not limited to moral judgment or doctrinal policing but reimagines Christian discipleship as embodied care, justice, and advocacy. In this light, responding to HIV is not simply a medical issue but an act of mercy and solidarity. Also, supporting teenage mothers is not a charitable gesture but a divine calling rooted in Jesus' own practice of welcoming and restoring the dignity of the socially excluded. Further, their intersectional theology challenges patriarchal and purity-based teachings that often silence survivors of sexual violence, replacing them with a vision of sacred accompaniment that insists no one is invisible to God. This faith-based intersectionality transforms local congregations into healing spaces, not through abstract theology, but through active, inclusive love.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

At the same time, *Nyamreche* approach is health-based and rights-based, guided by the AAAQ framework (Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality) and grounded in the belief that SRHR is both a public health concern and a matter of justice. By recognizing how intersecting inequalities such as poverty, stigma, age, disability, and queerness shape health outcomes, *Nyamreche* promotes interventions that are locally grounded yet structurally aware. They train peer educators, support youth-friendly clinics, and advocate for comprehensive sexuality education that affirms rather than shames. Thus, in contexts where

cultural taboos, entrenched gender norms, and rigid religious doctrines often hinder effective delivery of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services, *Nyamreche* approach emerges as a bold and necessary corrective. The model insists that health interventions must not only meet medical and scientific standards but also resonate with the spiritual values and cultural contexts of the communities they serve.

This perspective challenges the false dichotomy that often separates faith from public health or human rights work. Instead, *Nyamreche'* praxis demonstrates that faith can be a powerful ally in advancing SRHR when grounded in a theology of compassion, justice, and inclusion. By rooting her interventions in a Christology that emphasizes care for the marginalized and restoration of human dignity, she ensures that SRHR services are not only medically sound but also spiritually affirming, culturally sensitive, and socially transformative. In this way, *Nyamreche* work bridges faith and science, human rights and pastoral care, offering a truly holistic and intersectional response to the Triple Threat of HIV, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence. Their model attends to the whole person (body, soul, and society), recognizing that effective interventions must address physical health, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, and the broader social systems that shape individual and community life. By refusing to compartmentalize faith, health, and rights, *Nyamreche* charts a path for integrated community-based interventions that are both theologically grounded and socially relevant. Her intersectional approach not only confronts the immediate challenges faced by adolescents and youth but also contributes to the long-term transformation of cultural attitudes, religious teachings, and health practices. In doing so, she offers a compelling vision of how faith-informed activism can contribute meaningfully to the creation of just, healthy, and inclusive societies.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

5.6 Conclusion: Reimagining Christology as a Tool for SRHR Justice

This chapter has sought to "think otherwise" about Christology, SRHR, and the lived realities of adolescents and youth in Kenya by foregrounding the theological imaginations and practical interventions embodied by *Nyamreche.* Anchored in Walter Mignolo's call for 'an-other logic,' *Nyamreche'* Christologies resist both dominant religious frameworks and conventional public health paradigms that often portray faith and SRHR as irreconcilable. Instead of adhering to narratives that cast religion as a barrier to health rights, *Nyamreche* constructs a deeply contextual and intersectional Christological praxis, one that draws life and inspiration from the ministry of Jesus while creatively responding to the structural injustices that fuel the Triple Threat of HIV, early and unintended pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence. This Christology moves beyond doctrinal orthodoxy to embrace a theology rooted in solidarity, care, and justice for those whose bodies and lives are often subjected to neglect, stigma, and violence. By placing their theological reflection at the service of community needs, *Nyamreche* model a faith that speaks directly to the complexities of lived experience in contemporary Kenyan society.

Nyamreche approach embodies decolonial theology that deliberately steps away from abstract dogmas and the institutional silences that have historically characterized church engagement with SRHR. Instead, their praxis aligns with what John Klaasen describes as "service, accompaniment, and radical solidarity" (Klaasen, 2020). Everyday diakonia, for *Nyamreche*, becomes the heart of a theology that centers the lives of the most vulnerable, including teenage mothers, HIV-positive youth, queer adolescents, and survivors of violence. Their work does not separate spiritual care from bodily justice but sees both as inseparably intertwined in Christ's mission of healing and liberation. Through mentoring, community

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

caregiving, mediation, and persistent advocacy, *Nyamreche* enacts a form of discipleship that confronts exclusionary theologies and reframes SRHR as a sacred commitment rather than a secular or Western imposition. By grounding their interventions in both local realities and the liberative ethos of the Gospel, they challenge dominant power structures while offering pastoral care that is both compassionate and justice-oriented.

Further, this chapter has argued that *Nyamreche* Christological response to the Triple Threat challenge is intersectional in both theory and practice. Their work demonstrates a sustained engagement at the nexus of faith-based compassion, public health expertise, and human rights advocacy; a confluence that many frameworks treat as mutually exclusive. By doing so, *Nyamreche* provides a transformative model of grassroots engagement, where faith communities become proactive agents of change rather than passive observers or, worse, sources of stigma and harm. Their insistence on applying the AAAQ framework, emphasizing availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality, reimagines these categories not as mere bureaucratic or policy-driven indicators but as deeply moral and theological imperatives. In *Nyamreche* hands, the AAAQ framework becomes a lens through which Jesus' liberating mission is lived out in the concrete realities of young people's lives. It turns policy language into a pastoral mandate and challenges both religious and secular actors to view SRHR not only through the lens of service delivery but through the transformative vision of justice and care rooted in the Gospel.

In sum, *Nyamreche* Christology invites us to reimagine the practice of theology, church ministry, and community health engagement through the intertwined lenses of radical love, human dignity, and structural justice. Their witness affirms that faith is not a hindrance to SRHR advocacy but a vital resource for its decolonization, contextualization, and effective

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

realization. By standing with the marginalized, confronting oppressive systems, and embodying a theology of healing and hope, *Nyamreche* offers a living testimony that the liberating power of the Gospel is not confined to spiritual abstraction but is deeply concerned with the health, rights, and well-being of all people. In the face of the persistent challenges of the Triple Threat, *Nyamreche* story teaches us that true discipleship is found in everyday acts of service. in the choice to stand with the vulnerable, speak truth to power, and heal the wounds of the world, one life, one story, one act of diakonia at a time.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER SIX:

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of findings and conclusions

This study has been shaped by the conviction expressed in Bediako's words that theology must not remain confined to the ivory towers of academia or restricted to the sacred spaces of the pulpit. Instead, theology must be forged and continually renewed in the crucible of lived experience. It must spring from the contexts in which faith is embodied, contested, and practiced amid the everyday struggles, hopes, and complexities of life. Guided by this perspective, the study set out to explore the Christologies that emerge among the *Nyamre*che, a distinctive group of Luo-speaking African women who stand at the intersection of faith leadership and community health activism in Kenya. These women are not merely theological thinkers (albeit with no formal theological training), nor are they confined to conventional church roles; rather, they are church ministers, community health workers, mothers, and grassroots advocates who articulate and live out a Christology that is as much about daily survival, justice, and compassion as it is about doctrinal orthodoxy.

Central to this study was the critical engagement with how these women's lived experiences shape their understanding of Jesus Christ, especially in relation to adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (AYSRHR). By positioning themselves within both the church and the community health sectors, the *Nyamreche* offer a powerful example of what Bediako describes as "the theology of the living church." Further, their Christologies are not speculative or removed from reality, but are deeply embedded in the pressing realities of their communities. These realities are marked by the challenges of the so-called "Triple Threat": HIV, early and unintended pregnancies, and gender-based violence. In these

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

contexts, the *Nyamreche* understanding of Jesus as healer, liberator, and companion-in-struggle becomes a critical theological response to the suffering, stigma, and systemic neglect faced by many adolescents and youth, especially girls and marginalized groups.

The findings of this study affirm that the *Nyamreche*' Christologies are intersectional and contextual. They do not see faith and public health as separate domains but integrate them in ways that challenge both religious conservatism and secular public health narratives. Their theology underscores that Christian faith, when faithfully lived out, demands engagement with the community's social, cultural, and health realities. Through their practice of everyday *diakonia* through acts of service, accompaniment, and advocacy, these women reflect a living theology of radical hospitality, justice, and inclusion. Their Christologies serve as a counter-narrative to exclusionary theologies that often alienate or stigmatize young people, especially in matters of sexual and reproductive health.

Therefore, this study demonstrates that theology, particularly Christology, gains its deepest relevance and transformative power when it emerges from the ground up, from within the lived experiences of communities grappling with real-life challenges. The *Nyamreche* embody a theology that is alive, contextual, and responsive; a theology that sees the living Lord as an active presence in the struggles for health, justice, and human dignity. Their witness invites both the church and the academy to reconsider the task of theology, reminding us that true theological reflection does not shy away from the messy realities of life but meets them head-on with compassion, courage, and prophetic hope.

The exploration was guided by four main objectives: to trace oral, embodied, and lived Christologies in Christian history; to delineate the oral, embodied, and lived Christologies of Luo-speaking women involved in church ministry and community health promotion referred

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

to as *Nyamreche* as a subset of African women; to evaluate the relationship between these Christologies and the everyday quests for life in abundance within the context of the triple threat challenges of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections; and to assess the practical and theological implications of these discourses in reimagining Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Africa. In pursuit of these objectives, the study addressed the following research questions: What are oral, embodied, and lived Christologies in Christian history? What are the oral, embodied, and lived Christologies of Luo-speaking women in church ministry and as community health workers *(Nyamrerwa)*? How do these Christologies relate to the daily struggles for life in fullness amid the triple threat of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV? And finally, what are the practical and theological implications of these insights for reimagining SRHR discourses and interventions in the African context?

Therefore, in line with the research objectives and research questions of the study, the key findings are:

1. *Existence of oral, embodied, and lived Christologies both in Christian History and modern-day formulations*: The study established that throughout Christian history, there have been diverse expressions of Christology beyond formal doctrinal formulations, and particularly oral, embodied, and lived Christologies that arise from the daily experiences and struggles of faith communities. Thus, Oral, lived, and embodied Christologies refer to expressions of faith in Jesus Christ that arise from people's concrete, everyday experiences of salvation, liberation, and divine presence, rather than from formal theological systems or creeds. Rooted in the understanding that theology is often enacted through what is most meaningful in people's daily lives,

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

these Christologies reflect a dynamic, personal, and communal engagement with Jesus, shaped by stories, symbols, practices, and speech rather than structured doctrine. In the early church, such Christologies were expressed through binitarian spirituality, where devotion to Jesus was seamlessly integrated into daily life and transmitted through oral traditions such as stories of healing, teachings, and parables. This tradition continues today, especially among marginalized or non-academic communities, where deep theological insights are voiced and embodied in the lived realities of individuals, such as elders or grandmothers, and in the faith practices of women navigating life-threatening challenges. These Christologies are fluid, diverse, and contextual, grounded in tangible encounters with Jesus and aimed at transforming life for the better.

2. *Nyamreche as producers and custodians of a non-systematized yet authentic, legitimate, and orthodox knowledge of the life and work of Jesus Christ:* The research found that Luo-speaking women in church ministry, who also serve as community health promoters, and who are known locally as *Nyamreche*, embody a unique and deeply contextual form of Christology. Their faith in Jesus is expressed not only through verbal testimony and prayer but also through their daily work addressing public health crises. Their Christologies are oral (rooted in storytelling and song), embodied (manifested in caregiving, advocacy, and resistance), and lived (integrated into everyday life and ministry). These Christologies further expand *Talitha cum* hermeneutics as a decolonial methodological resource that enabled researchers to pay critical attention to marginalized experiences, such as those of the *Nyamreche*. Talitha cum hermeneutics centers the lived realities, bodies, and voices of African women

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

who have historically been silenced or excluded in both African and global theological discourses. It affirms their capacity to theologize from their own contexts, directly confronting colonial and patriarchal structures and reclaiming theological agency.

3. *Christology as a source of Agency and Resistance in the Triple Threat Context*: *Nyamreche* Christologies are intimately linked to their quest for life in abundance in the face of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and HIV infections. Their everyday theological understanding of Jesus as actively ever present in all areas of life and with all people empowers them to respond to these intersecting crises not only as health workers but as faith leaders. Thus, *Nyamreche* embodies a unique and deeply contextual form of Christology that redefines faith as a call to public, transformative action, revealing theological meaning in the midst of everyday struggles for justice, healing, and dignity. This Christological grounding provides them with spiritual and moral agency to resist oppressive structures and advocate for justice and dignity in the context of the triple threat challenge
4. *Nyamreche's everyday diakonia Christologies have a Theological and Practical Implications for SRHR work: The study found* that the lived Christologies of *Nyamreche* offer vital theological resources for reimagining sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) advocacy in Africa. By framing SRHR work within a liberative theological lens, and rooted in Jesus' compassion and mission, their approach challenges the alienation of faith from public health and human rights. Further, their use of the AAAQ framework (Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality) is informed not just by policy but by a theological ethic of care, making it a powerful model for faith-based responses to the SRHR needs of adolescents and

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

youth. Through these theological (in this case Christology) constructions, the *Nyamreche* curate an intersectional and justice-oriented faith praxis that bridges the domains of health and theology, giving rise to a contextual Christian response to SRHR-related issues in ways that both empower individuals and transforms systems and structures

From these findings, the study concludes that:

1. *Nyamreche* constructs everyday diakonia Christologies where Jesus is viewed as actively ever present in all areas of life, and with all people in all situations in life. These Christologies are oral, embodied, and performed; they are based on a hermeneutic of life and flourishing and are undergirded in Jesus' diakonia. These Christologies bequeath the women with agency to curate and promote an everyday intersectional faith and health-based approach to the triple threat challenge. Such an approach provides a safe space for adolescents and youths to contest, to rise, to live, and to thrive against religio-cultural structures and narratives that (re) produce and perpetuate all forms of exclusion and dehumanization based on gender, sexuality, and health status.
2. Talitha cum hermeneutics as a decolonial methodology provides a framework of answering the Jesus question "who do you say I am?" in two interconnected levels: the macro-level of ideology and discourse concerning Jesus' identity and significance, and the micro-level of everyday lived experience involving health, wellness, gender, sexuality, and other such categories. Further, if grounded in Africa's triple religious heritage of orality, embodiment, and performativity, the framework unfolds through four key contours: a hermeneutic of hearing, which listens to grassroots experiences

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

as sources of authentic faith; a hermeneutic of speaking, which affirms oral and spontaneous theology arising from community life; a hermeneutic of participation, which encourages academic theology to engage with and learn from grassroots expressions without replacing them; and a hermeneutic of celebration, which honors oral and lived theologies as essential to the vitality of African Christian faith.

3. *Nyamreche's* everyday diakonia Christologies' response to the triple threat challenge is intersectional not only in theory but in practice. By locating their interventions at the intersections of faith-based compassion, public health expertise, and human rights advocacy, *Nyamreche's* everyday diakonia *Christologies* provide a transformative model for how grassroots faith communities can respond to adolescent and youth SRHR challenges in ways that affirm human dignity, protect health, and advance social justice. Further, it provides a localized emphasis on the AAAQ framework that recasts availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality not as bureaucratic metrics but as moral and theological imperatives grounded in Jesus' liberating mission.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

6.2 Recommendations and Directions for Future Inquiry

Building on the insights of this study, future research could further deepen Talitha cum hermeneutics as a decolonial methodological resource by applying it across other marginalized African communities beyond the Luo-speaking *Nyamreche*. There is a need to explore how other African women in diverse linguistic, ethnic, and socio-cultural contexts articulate oral, embodied, and lived Christologies in response to local struggles. This comparative approach could expand the framework's epistemological breadth and uncover

broader patterns of grassroots theology that are often excluded from mainstream theological discourse. Additionally, researchers can investigate how this methodology could interface with other liberative theological methods such as *mujerista* theology, queer African hermeneutics, and postcolonial feminist biblical criticism, among others, in enriching its interdisciplinary and intersectional potential.

A second line of inquiry could focus on the pedagogical and ecclesial implications of *Nyamreche* everyday diakonia Christologies, particularly in light of Chammah Kaunda's (2015) urgent call to decolonize theological education in Africa. Kaunda argues that if theological education is to foster "abundant life," it must confront and dismantle colonial epistemologies by centering indigenous, embodied, and spiritual ways of knowing (2015:75). This study affirms that the oral, lived, and embodied Christologies of the *Nyamreche* offer a compelling model for such a transformation. Future research should explore how these grassroots theological expressions can be formally integrated into theological curricula and seminary training not as case studies or footnotes, but as primary sources of theological knowledge. This decolonial turn would reimagine theological education as a critical interpretation of being African, rooted in a materio-spirituality that draws from indigenous worldviews and everyday experiences. It would also challenge institutional churches and theological institutions to embrace pedagogies that honor storytelling, caregiving, advocacy, and ritual as valid theological methods. In this way, the Christological practices of *Nyamreche* become not only a source of ecclesial renewal but also a transformative resource for liberating theological education from its colonial and patriarchal enclosures.

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Finally, future research should engage more rigorously with the intersection of theology and public health, specifically through a justice-oriented application of the AAAQ framework. This means mapping how oral and embodied Christologies operationalize availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality in concrete healthcare settings. Researchers could conduct action-oriented studies assessing the impact of such theological frameworks on SRHR outcomes among adolescents and youth in faith-influenced contexts. Theologically grounded metrics and evaluative tools could also be developed to measure how religiously motivated health interventions uphold human dignity and confront systemic barriers. Such research would not only deepen the theological significance of Nyamreche Nyamreche's work but also strengthen alliances among the theology, health, and human rights fields in Africa.

6.3 Conclusion

To sum it up, this study has illuminated the vital role that *Nyamreche* Luo-speaking women serving both as church ministers and community health promoters in Siaya County, Kenya, play as producers, interpreters, and custodians of Christological knowledge that is simultaneously authentic, legitimate, and orthodox, yet distinctly grounded in the lived realities of everyday life. These women operate at the intersection of faith, community engagement, and social justice, and their theological reflections emerge not from formal seminaries, doctrinal compendia, or academic treatises, but from the rhythms, challenges, and lived experiences of their communities.

Their Christologies, far from being abstract or purely theoretical, are embedded in the daily acts of caregiving, mentorship, advocacy, and resistance. They are enacted through

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

oral storytelling, ritual practices, and communal work, as well as through embodied performances of faith that respond to material and spiritual needs alike. In this sense, the *Nyamreche* theological labor is deeply praxis-oriented: it is simultaneously reflective and active, deeply rooted in context, and oriented toward transformation. By tracing how their lived Christologies intersect with critical health, rights, and social justice concerns, this study demonstrates how theological knowledge can emerge from the margins, from spaces historically excluded from formal theological discourse, and yet speak profoundly to universal questions about the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Central to this investigation has been the methodological framework of Talitha cum hermeneutics, which foregrounds the voices, experiences, and embodied practices of African women. This decolonial methodological approach allows us to recognize and validate theological knowledge that has traditionally been dismissed as informal, unsystematized, or peripheral. Through Talitha cum hermeneutics, the lives of the *Nyamreche* are not simply documented or studied as subjects; rather, their experiences constitute a form of epistemic authority. This approach challenges the long-standing hierarchies of knowledge that have privileged textual, clerical, and Eurocentric perspectives, instead positioning everyday lived experience as a legitimate site for theological insight and reflection. By centering women's voices, practices, and narratives, Talitha cum hermeneutics expands the epistemological imagination of theology, emphasizing that the divine is encountered not only in sermons, creeds, or ecclesiastical decrees but also in caregiving, advocacy, and the everyday negotiation of life's challenges.

ST PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

The *Nyamreche* Christologies, as illuminated by this study, reflect a form of theological agency that is both radical and deeply contextual. Their understanding of Jesus is intimately connected to the realities of marginalized communities, including young women and adolescents who face the intersecting challenges of poverty, gender inequities, sexual violence, and inadequate access to healthcare. The Christologies they articulate are not abstract doctrines removed from social realities; they are dynamic and responsive, shaped by the pressing needs of their communities and by the women's own embodied knowledge and spiritual insight. For example, in their roles as community health promoters, these women navigate the complex terrain of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, addressing issues such as teenage pregnancy, HIV infections, and gender-based violence—the so-called "Triple Threat" challenges that disproportionately affect young people in rural Kenya. In engaging with these challenges, the *Nyamreche* draw upon their theological reflections to guide action, embodying Jesus' model of diakonia through acts of care, advocacy, and communal accompaniment.

In doing so, the *Nyamreche* Christologies resonate with the earliest Christian communities, which first encountered the risen Christ not through abstract theological reflection but through communal storytelling, lived witness, and acts of service that were inseparable from the realities of daily life. Much like the apostles, martyrs, and early disciples whose witness shaped the church's formation, these women testify to a Jesus who is radically present in the struggles for justice, health, and human dignity. Over centuries, Christian theology became increasingly entangled with structures of empire, filtered through Greco-Roman philosophical frameworks, and later shaped by Eurocentric colonial ideologies that often marginalized local expressions of faith. In contrast, the *Nyamreche* Christologies resist

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this drift toward abstraction, returning theology to its incarnational center: a Christ who walks with the poor, heals the sick, empowers the marginalized, and calls all people to abundant life. By rooting Christological reflection in lived experience, these women reclaim theology as a praxis that transforms both the self and the surrounding community.

Importantly, the *Nyamreche* engagement with theology is inseparable from their advocacy for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Their Christologies provide the theological foundation for interventions that are faith-affirming, justice-centered, and responsive to local realities. Through this integration of theology, health, and rights, they demonstrate that addressing the triple threat is not merely a matter of policy or medical intervention but is also a theological imperative; a sacred duty to protect life, uphold dignity, and promote justice. Their faith-driven approach reframes SRHR as an integral component of discipleship, demonstrating that attending to the needs of the vulnerable is both an expression of Christ's love and an enactment of prophetic witness. In this way, the *Nyamreche* exemplify how theological reflection and social action can mutually inform one another, producing a holistic model of Christian praxis that is at once deeply contextual, relational, and transformative.

This study also highlights the epistemological significance of oral, embodied, and narrative knowledge in the construction of Christology. The *Nyamreche* transmit theological insight not through formalized texts or academic discourse but through lived stories, songs, prayers, and communal practices. These narratives capture the complexities of human life, the rhythms of daily labor, the realities of caregiving, and the negotiation of justice and healing in contexts often marked by scarcity and marginalization. By engaging with these narratives,

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theologians and scholars are invited to recognize that knowledge of Christ is not monopolized by clerical elites or confined to written texts. Instead, theological authority is present in the lived experiences of grassroots communities, particularly women who have historically been excluded from formal theological training and platforms. Talitha cum hermeneutics, in this regard, serves as both a method and an ethic, affirming the legitimacy of these forms of knowledge and their capacity to generate profound theological reflection.

The *Nyamreche* Christologies are also profoundly feminist in orientation, even if not explicitly framed in feminist language. By centering women's experiences, bodies, and labor as sources of theological insight, their Christologies challenge androcentric assumptions embedded in much of Christian theology. They highlight the ways in which gendered power dynamics have historically constrained access to theological knowledge and marginally positioned women's voices within ecclesial and academic discourse. In resisting these exclusions, the Nyamreche assert that Jesus' life and ministry are inherently aligned with the experiences and needs of women, particularly those on the margins of society. Their theological vision is therefore both liberative and political, revealing the intersections between faith, gender, and social justice. It asserts that theological reflection is not neutral but deeply implicated in the structures of power and authority, and that reclaiming theological agency is an act of empowerment and resistance.

Through ethnographic engagement, this study demonstrates that the *Nyamreche* co-construct their Christologies with the communities they serve. These theological reflections are not imposed from above or extracted for academic consumption; they are cultivated in dialogue with local knowledge, communal rituals, and everyday practices. This participatory

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approach emphasizes that theology is both relational and situated, emerging from lived experience rather than abstract speculation. It further underscores the ethical imperative of theological research: to listen attentively, engage respectfully, and walk alongside communities as they articulate their own understandings of Christ. By centering the voices of the Nyamreche, this study affirms the capacity of grassroots theological practice to reshape the broader discourse on Christology, ethics, and social justice.

Furthermore, the Christologies of the *Nyamreche* exemplify a holistic vision of salvation and discipleship. Salvation, in this context, is not abstract or narrowly spiritual; it encompasses healing from physical illness, liberation from systemic oppression, restoration of communal harmony, and empowerment for individual and collective agency. Jesus is experienced as present amid human suffering, actively participating in the struggles for justice and life-affirming transformation. Through this lens, their Christologies articulate a dynamic interplay between faith and action, highlighting that the love of Christ is realized not solely in contemplation but in concrete engagement with social, health, and justice issues.

The study further illustrates the transformative potential of everyday diakonia as a theological praxis. The *Nyamreche* demonstrate that acts of caregiving, advocacy, mediation, and mentorship are not merely functional or social duties; they are theological expressions that enact the compassion, justice, and solidarity of Christ in the world. Their practices challenge dominant Christian paradigms that separate the sacred from the secular, the doctrinal from the practical, or the spiritual from the social. In embodying Jesus' ministry in everyday life, these women reveal that Christology is not a distant abstraction but a living reality that animates action, nurtures hope and cultivates human flourishing.

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Finally, this study underscores the imperative to reorient theological inquiry. It calls for a shift from privileging formal, text-based, and Eurocentric approaches toward recognizing the epistemic power of marginalized communities, particularly African women engaged in everyday diakonia. The *Nyamreche* theological work exemplifies how grassroots Christologies can challenge dominant paradigms, offering an alternative model that is simultaneously local and universal, practical and profound. Their witness affirms that authentic theological knowledge is produced in contexts of struggle, service, and community engagement, and that these embodied reflections carry the weight and authority of divine insight. In reclaiming theology as a site of resistance, liberation, and communal flourishing, the *Nyamreche* provide the church, academy, and society at large with a transformative vision of Christology: one that is deeply faithful, radically inclusive, and intimately attuned to the lived realities of marginalized communities.

In conclusion, the *Nyamreche* Christologies exemplify a form of theological practice that bridges the gaps between faith, health, and human rights. They illuminate the potential for theology to serve as both a liberative and life-giving force, capable of responding to pressing social, spiritual, and health challenges in ways that are locally grounded and globally instructive. By centering everyday experiences, embodied practices, and oral traditions, these women demonstrate that Christ is present not only in doctrinal formulations but in the struggles, hopes, and everyday acts of ordinary people. Their work embodies a radical vision of discipleship, one that situates justice, compassion, and advocacy at the core of Christian faith, and invites the wider theological community to reimagine the contours of Christology in ways that honor the voices, agency, and resilience of African women. The *Nyamreche* remind us that theology is not merely a discipline to be studied but a living, breathing practice

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that emerges in the ordinary and the extraordinary, in the mundane and the sacred, always attuned to the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of human life.

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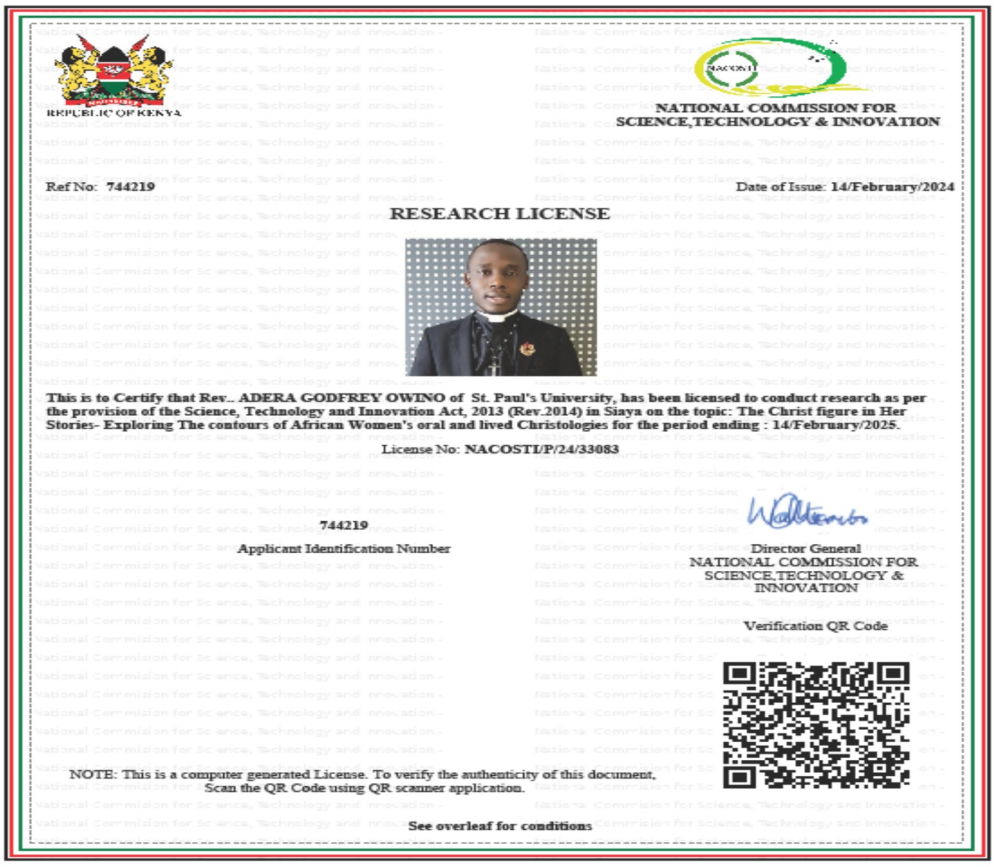
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APPENDICES

APPENDICE I: ETHICS CLEARANCE AND RESEARCH PERMISSIONS FROM NACOSTI



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: 744219

Date of Issue: 14/February/2024

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Rev.. ADERA GODFREY OWINO of St. Paul's University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Siaya on the topic: The Christ figure in Her Stories- Exploring The contours of African Women's oral and lived Christologies for the period ending : 14/February/2025.

License No: NACOSTI/P/24/33083

744219

Applicant Identification Number

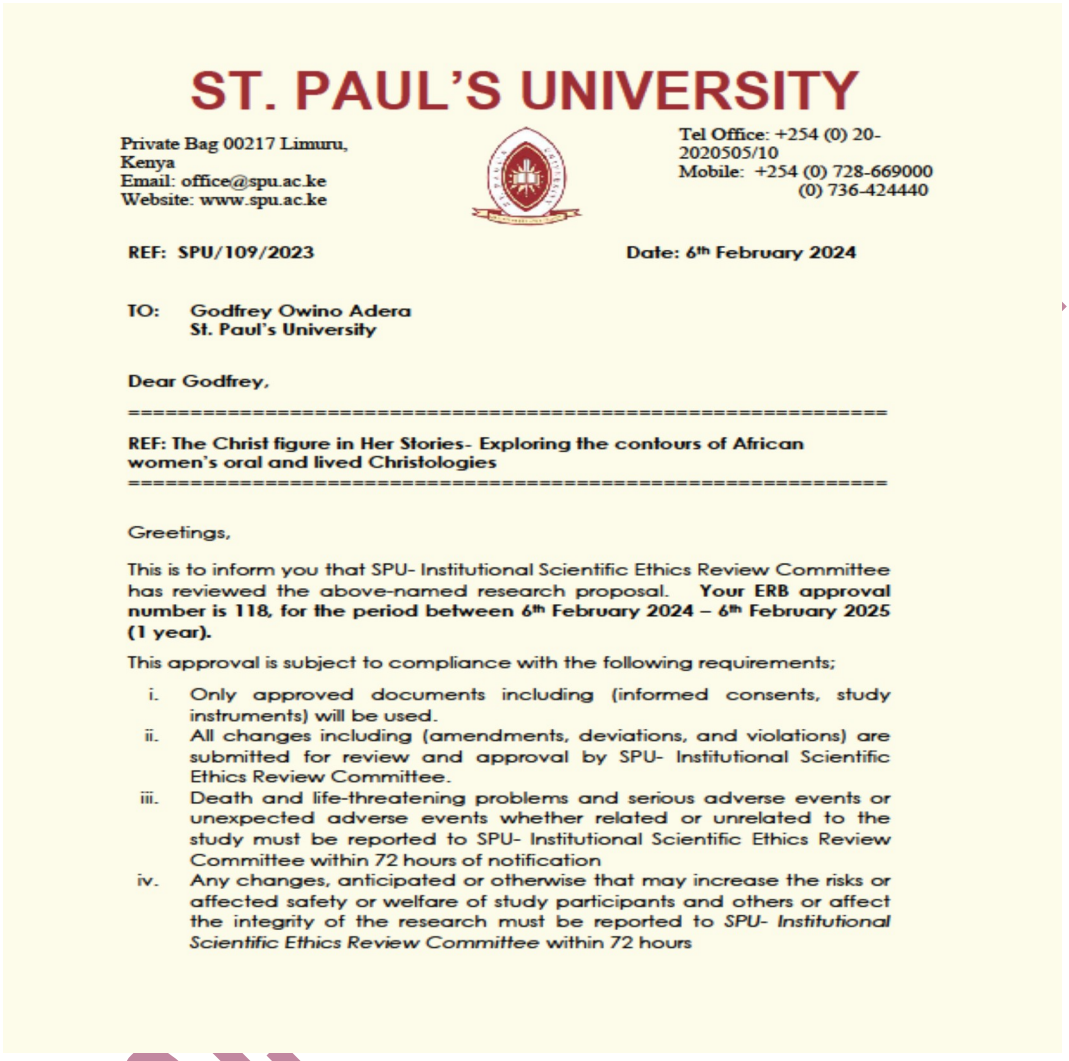
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APPENDICE 11: ETHICS CLEARANCE AND RESEARCH PERMISSIONS FROM ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY



ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

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Email: office@spu.ac.ke
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Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
Mobile: +254 (0) 728-669000
(0) 736-424440

REF: SPU/109/2023 **Date: 6th February 2024**

TO: Godfrey Owino Adera
St. Paul's University

Dear Godfrey,

==========

REF: The Christ figure in Her Stories- Exploring the contours of African women's oral and lived Christologies

==========

Greetings,

This is to inform you that SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal. **Your ERB approval number is 118, for the period between 6th February 2024 – 6th February 2025 (1 year).**

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments) will be used.
ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.
iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee within 72 hours of notification
iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to *SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours

APPENDICE III. CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Christ figure in Her Stories- Exploring A Tripartite Perspective of African women Christologies - Gender, Sexuality and Health.

Background: In this research, I pay attention to voices and agency of *Nyamrerwas* (community health volunteer/workers) as a subset of grassroots women curating diakonia Christologies in their everyday work in dealing with life threatening situations of diseases and violence commonly referred to as the triple threat- teenage pregnancy, sexual and gender based violence, and HIV infections. It specifically targets *Nyamrerwas* who are women and who area also involved in church life as lay or ordained ministers. The study seeks to explore how their faith as Christians and church workers impact their work in promoting flourishing of lives through access to sexual and reproductive health related services and information among girls and key populations.

I shall use narrative ethnography as a methodological approach in hearing and analyzing stories from these grassroots women. I use this methodology first to explore the ways in which Jesus is present with women who are in the frontlines of advocacy for sexual reproductive health and rights in their everyday life, what this presence mean, what this presence does, and how this presence is known and described. Secondly, to explore how such religious knowledge is important for them in dealing with the ways in which patriarchy and clericalism are utilized in the production of the anti-rights, anti-gender, and anti-equality rhetoric in access to sexual and reproductive health services and information among girls and key populations.

Participation: Your participation in this meeting is voluntary and you are free to end your participation at any time. While I will write a report that describes participants' perspectives on the topics discussed, In this study, I will identify all participant by name or provide any

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identifying information that could disclose their identity. Participants will receive funds to cover transportation costs to the meeting place and to honor and respect the value of participants' time and contribution to this project.

If you agree to participate in this study, kindly tick the boxes and sign below.

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read, understood and discussed the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during or after the research process without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential and Will only be used for the research purpose of PhD studies at St. Paul's University by Godfrey Owino Adera

4. I understand that my name will be linked with the research materials, and I will be identified or made identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research.

5. I agree to participate in an interview with Godfrey Owino Adera- a PhD Student at St.Pauls University-Kenya

6. I agree to participate in a follow-up interview with Godfrey Owino Adera

7. I agree that all interviews can be audio-recorded.

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

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APPENDICE IV: QUESTIONNAIRE

The Christ figure in Her Stories- Exploring A Tripartite Perspective of African women Christologies - Gender, Sexuality and Health.

Name of Researcher ----------

Name of Participant…….

Place/Location ----------

Date…….

Background: In this research, I pay attention to voices and agency of *Nyamrerwas* (community health volunteer/workers) as a subset of grassroots women curating diakonia Christologies in their everyday work in dealing with life threatening situations of diseases and violence commonly referred to as the triple threat- teenage pregnancy, sexual and gender based violence, and HIV infections. It specifically targets *Nyamrerwas* who are women and who area also involved in church life as lay or ordained ministers. The study seeks to explore how their faith as Christians and church workers impact their work in promoting flourishing of lives through access to sexual and reproductive health related services and information among girls and key populations.

I shall use narrative ethnography as a methodological approach in hearing and analyzing stories from these grassroots women. I use this methodology first to explore the ways in which Jesus is present with women who are in the frontlines of advocacy for sexual reproductive health and rights in their everyday life, what this presence mean, what this presence does, and how this presence is known and described. Secondly, to explore how such religious knowledge is important for them in dealing with the ways in which patriarchy and clericalism are utilized in the production of the anti-rights, anti-gender, and anti-equality rhetoric in access to sexual and reproductive health services and information among girls and key populations.

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Questions

1. Kindly introduce yourself (name, age, station of work, role in church)

2. Share with me your journey as a community health volunteer

3. Share with me your journey as a Christian leader/minister/volunteer in church

4. Share with me the kind of work that you do in the grass root as community health volunteer

5. Share with me your experience in dealing with cases such as teenage pregnancy, HIV infections, prevention, and treatment, gender-based violence and any other case related to health, gender and sexuality

6. Share with me the teaching of your church about teenage pregnancy, HIV infections/prevention/treatment, gender-based violence and any other case related to health, gender and sexuality

7. Does your work agree with the teachings of your church in supporting teenage mothers, HIV infections, prevention, and treatment, gender-based violence and any other case related to health, gender and sexuality?

8. How do you see Jesus present with you in your work as a community health volunteer? Use a name/image/story/an experience

9. Share with us how your knowledge and belief in Jesus Christ impacts your work as a community heath volunteer

10. Based on your experience as a Christian leader/community health volunteer, what advice would you give to the church and theological educators on how to teach about Jesus and his ministry in a context where their rampant cases of teenage pregnancy, Sexual and gender based violence, and high prevalence rate of HIV infection.

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Poem excerpt used to frame the interview sessions: 'I am not your Data'

This is a poem by Abhya Flavian Xaxa. An Adivasi Rights Activist and Sociologist by training. Abhay has worked with grassroots organizations, campaigns, NGO's, media, research institutions in different capacities on the issue of Adivasi land rights in central India. Adivasis is the collective name used for the many indigenous peoples of India who live as a minority group (See. Abhya, F.X. (2016) I am not your data, In *Adivasi Resurgence.* Available at https://adivasiresurgence.com/2016/01/13/i-am-not-your-data/ Accessed on 12th November 2023)

I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,

I am not your project or any exotic museum object,

I am not the soul waiting to be harvested,

Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested,

I am not your cannon fodder or the invisible worker,

or your entertainment at India Habitat Center,

I am not your field, your crowd, your history,

your help, your guilt, medallions of your victory,

I refuse, reject, and resist your labels,

your judgments, documents, definitions,

your models, leaders, and patrons,

because they deny me my existence, my vision, my space,

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your words, maps, figures, indicators,

they all create illusions and put you on a pedestal,

from where you look down upon me,

So I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar,

I make my own tools to fight my own battle,

For me, my people, my world, and my Adivasi self!

~Abhya Xaxa

Participant Profiles

1. Participant 01 (P01)

A 48-year-old female Community Health Promoter (CHP) serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She is a women's leader in a Roman Catholic Small Christian Community and has served as a community health volunteer since 2012. She was nominated by members of her village to undertake this role. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and church leader.

2. Participant 02 (P02)

A 60-year-old female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She is a church development leader in an African Independent Church. She began her service as a traditional birth attendant in 1992 and was later trained in community health and hygiene before becoming a community health volunteer in 2011. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and church leader.

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3. Participant 03 (P03)

A 53-year-old female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She serves as a mission secretary in an African Independent Church. After many years as a traditional birth attendant and receiving training in community health, nutrition, and hygiene, she was appointed as a community health volunteer. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and church leader.

4. Participant 04 (P04)

A 58-year-old female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She is a women's leader in a charismatic African Independent Church and has served as a community health volunteer since 2019. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and church leader.

5. Participant 05 (P05)

A 73-year-old female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She has held various leadership positions in the Anglican Church, including women's ministry and small Christian fellowship groups. She has served as a community health volunteer since 2010. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and church leader.

6. Participant 06 (P06)

A 28-year-old female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She is a youth leader in the Anglican Church and entered community health work through mentorship and apprenticeship under a family member who had extensive experience as a traditional health practitioner. Below is her Jesus story as a young community health volunteer and church youth leader.

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7. Participant 07 (P07)

A female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She is a lay minister in the Anglican Church and has served as a community health volunteer since 2018 following training in community health and sanitation. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and lay church minister.

8. Participant 08 (P08)

A female CHP serving in a rural Community Health Unit in Siaya County. She is a Sunday school teacher in a Christian denomination and has served as a community health volunteer since 2011. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and Sunday school teacher.

9. Participant 09 (P09)

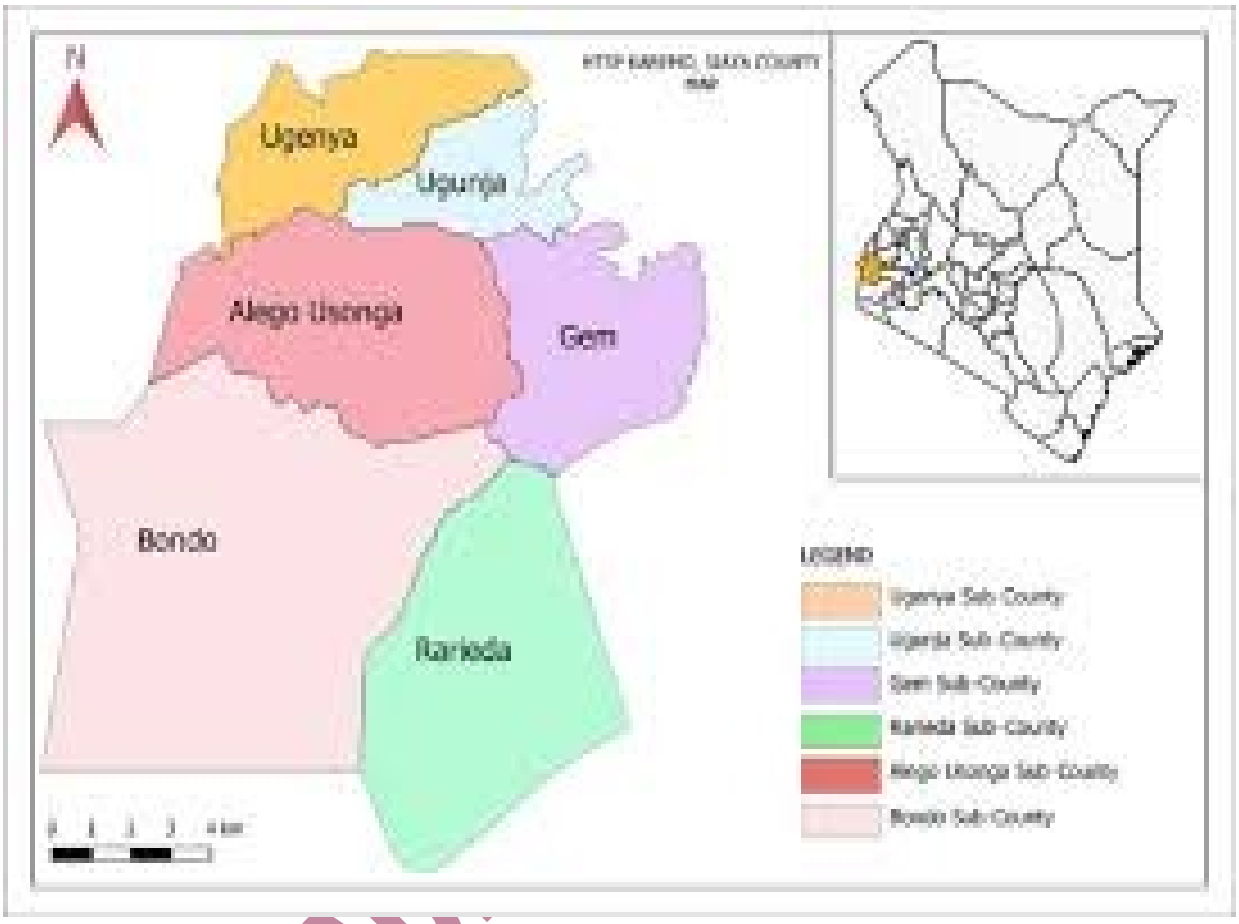
A female CHP serving in a Community Health Unit associated with a county referral hospital in Siaya County. She is a women's leader in a Pentecostal church and has served as a community health volunteer since 2010. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and church leader.

10. Participant 10 (P10)

A female CHP serving in a Community Health Unit associated with a county referral hospital in Siaya County. She is an ordained pastor in a Pentecostal church and has served as a community health volunteer since 2019. Below is her Jesus story as a community health volunteer and ordained minister.

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APPENDICE V. THE MAP AND LOCATION OF SIAYA COUNTY



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APPENDICE VI. MAP AND LOCATION OF SIAYA SUB COUNTY



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