

## Extending and Locating Jesus's Body: Toward a Christology of Radical Embodiment

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### Abstract

The African Jesus of Tinyiko Maluleke and the Christ of deep incarnation represent two radically different christological trajectories. While the deep incarnation theologians extend Jesus's body into social and cosmic bodies, Maluleke locates Jesus's body in the bodies of his fellow Africans. Each of these christological moves is interpreted as a manifestation, albeit in a different sense, of God's radical embodiment through Jesus in our world. African appropriations of Jesus stand out as a warning that even christologizing centered upon the category of "flesh" is at risk of remaining purely visionary unless it is done by and/or with those in whose own bodies Jesus is being crucified.

### Keywords

African Jesus, black theology, Christology, deep incarnation, deep resurrection, embodiment, Elizabeth Johnson, Niels Gregersen, Tinyiko Maluleke

### Introduction

"The incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and flesh," epitomized by what Christian theology called the "mystery of incarnation," remains the "principal anguish and source of all . . . joys and sorrows"<sup>1</sup> for those who recognize a deep-seated

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1. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, trans. P. A. Bien (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 1.

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connection, indeed, an affinity between the body of Jesus and their own bodies. If such an affinity is acknowledged, does it *extend* to all flesh or is it *located* in some bodies in a unique way?

This study seeks to interpret the Christ of deep incarnation and the African Jesus of Tinyiko Maluleke within their respective theological frameworks as well as in *mutual correlation*.<sup>2</sup>

The African Jesus of Maluleke, a black theologian from Tshwane, South Africa, and the Christ of deep incarnation, a theological proposal developed initially by Niels Gregersen from Copenhagen, Denmark, represent two radically different christological trajectories. What, if anything at all, has Tshwane to do with Copenhagen? In my study, I aim to demonstrate that what lies at the heart of both these theological perspectives is the *reality* of God's radical embodiment in the world we inhabit. Put crudely, while the deep incarnation theologians *extend* Jesus's body into social and cosmic bodies, Maluleke *locates* Jesus's body in the bodies of his fellow Africans. Each of these christological *moves*, I posit, is a manifestation, albeit in a different sense, of God's radical embodiment through Jesus in the world of creation and of African culture(s).

What underlies my intention to bring these two christological proposals into a conversation is my belief that the present-day South African debates on the decolonization of the mind and of social structures need to incorporate an environmental dimension to no less a degree than the global ecological movement is in need of grounding its agenda in the social contexts of exclusion, not least those of structural racism, sexism, and xenophobia—areas which South Africa still, sadly, champions. Regarding this *mutual correlation* between the global and the local, the universal and the particular, deep Christology and African Christologies alike have a significant contribution to make. And I firmly believe that they can bring more to the table if they listen to and learn from one another.

In the first part of the study, a dual hermeneutic key of *extending* and *locating* Jesus's body is employed in order to present deep incarnation and African Jesus of Maluleke as exemplary of two christological moves, each of which reveals different aspects of the divine embodiment. The second part puts forward a constructive proposal whereby the two christological trajectories are brought into a conversation. After mapping a number of liminal questions which emerge at the intersection of deep and African Christologies, I offer some more in-depth insights into the issue of the cross as a site of reconciliation and a site of resistance, once again seen from the dual perspective of *extending* (deep Christology) and *locating* (African Christology) Jesus's body.

As my central argument goes, it is among other reasons thanks to their stubborn grappling with the issues surrounding cross, reconciliation and resistance that African/black theologians like Maluleke are well positioned to critique the universalizing and

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2. Elsewhere I discuss the multiple and far-reaching theological implications of this conversation. See Jakub Urbaniak, "Between the Christ of Deep Incarnation and the African Jesus of Tinyiko Maluleke: An Improvised Dialogue," *Modern Theology* 34 (2018): 1–29, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/moth.12408/full>.

totalizing tendencies inherent in theological proposals like deep incarnation. Such a critique proves particularly relevant whenever the reality of God's radical embodiment in the world is being reduced to an anemic concept, with no relevance for the lived, embodied experience of *those who share in Jesus's flesh* (meaning, in essence, *all*). When limited to a *purely visionary* exercise, christological reflection seems to betray the very aspect of Jesus's identity that makes him *one of us* and *one with all*.

## The Deep Incarnation Theologians: All Flesh as Jesus's Extended Body

The father and the main protagonist of the christological proposal of "deep incarnation," Niels Gregersen, admits that he coined the term almost in passing, as part of a theological response to the problem of evolutionary suffering.<sup>3</sup> And yet looking through the 2015 publication edited by Gregersen and titled *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology*,<sup>4</sup> one immediately realizes that the present-day reflection centered on the notion of "deep incarnation" amounts to nothing less than a nuanced, original, cutting-edge, multi- and cross-disciplinary discourse carried out by leading theologians, philosophers, and scientists committed to rethinking Christology in a contemporary age. In this volume, authors like Jürgen Moltmann, Elizabeth Johnson, Gerald O'Collins, Celia Deane-Drummond, Richard Bauckham, and others, relate the concept of incarnation to the question of the wider nature of reality and, for the most part, address the particular proposal of deep incarnation from their specific disciplinary angles.<sup>5</sup> What they have in common is the conviction that God's incarnation in Jesus Christ extends into the whole fabric of physical and biological creation.<sup>6</sup> In the incarnation, Jesus's body becomes not only an "exemplar of humanity," but also an "instantiation of the 'frail flesh' of biological creatures . . . and the very basic physical stuff."<sup>7</sup>

3. Niels H. Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40 (2001): 192–207 at 193; Niels H. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: From Deep History to Post-axial Religion," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72 (2016): a3428, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3428>, 1–2.

4. *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology*, ed. Niels H. Gregersen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

5. As I refer in this study to the "deep incarnation theologians," it should be made clear that even those who directly contributed to the development and elaboration of this christological proposal are not united or organized into any formal school of thought. They come from various disciplinary and denominational backgrounds and differ significantly in their respective interpretations of incarnation.

6. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation," 2.

7. Niels H. Gregersen, "God, Matter, and Information: Towards a Stoicizing Logos Christology," in *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics*, ed. P. Davies and Niels H. Gregersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 319–48 at 344; see also Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus and the Cosmos: Soundings in Deep Christology," in Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation*, 133–56 at 138.

The proposal of deep incarnation stands as a noteworthy example of a multi- and cross-disciplinary novel development which comes at the “time of awesome discoveries about the universe” that paradoxically “occur in tandem with massive damage at human hands to Earth’s fabric of life.”<sup>8</sup>

In essence, “deep incarnation”<sup>9</sup> can be equated with the idea that the flesh assumed in Jesus “connects not only with all humanity, but also with all biological life, and the whole matrix of the material universe down to its very roots.”<sup>10</sup> John’s Prologue lies at the center of this christological proposal:

For the concept of deep incarnation it is important that the divine Logos became *sarx* (Jn 1:14): not just as a human being (*anthropos*) as opposed to other species, and not just as an individual man (*anēr*) as opposed to being a woman. It was *as* flesh that the divine Logos “lived” or “dwelled” among us (Jn 1:14). The flesh is not only the *principle of individualization* (as in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas) but also the *principle of sharing*, namely sharing a bodily existence, based on a common physical matrix and living under similar biological conditions.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, deep Christology sees incarnation as “a divine assumption of the full eco-space of the material world of creation.”<sup>12</sup> Johnson adapts a christological expression from Gregersen: “If this is God, then *thus* is God.” If Jesus is God-with-us, then his life, death, and life again “carry a precious disclosure about how incomprehensible holy Mystery, whom no one has seen or can see, relates to the world.”<sup>13</sup> As moment in the biological evolution of our planet, Jesus

was composed of star stuff and earth stuff; his life formed a genuine part of the historical and biological community of Earth; his body existed in a network of relationships drawing from and extending to the whole physical universe . . . The atoms comprising his body were once

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8. Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 133.
  9. Even though the term “deep incarnation” remains central for the (self-)identification of this fairly new christological trajectory, other terms have also been used by its proponents. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson introduced a broader notion of “deep Christology” (Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos”) which embraces both “deep incarnation” and “deep resurrection.” Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 207–10; Gregersen “Deep Incarnation,” 4. Sallie McFague sums it up in a pithy axiom: “Liberating, healing, and inclusive love is the meaning of it all.” Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 161. This is the core of what she labels the “christic paradigm” (162–78), another term that shows “family resemblances” with the proposal of deep incarnation. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 199–206.
  10. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 196.
  11. Niels H. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation and *Kenosis*: In, With, Under, and As: A Response to Ted Peters,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52 (2013): 251–62 at 260, emphasis original.
  12. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation,” 1.
  13. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 199.

part of other creatures. The genetic structures of the cells in his body were kin to the flowers, the fish, the whole community of life that descended from common ancestors in the ancient seas.<sup>14</sup>

This means, in essence, that God communicates God's own self to the world through the process of evolution, both cosmic and biological.

The insight which underlies the proposal of deep incarnation is by no means a new one. Already the Church Fathers had developed a profound cosmic Christology, whereby the divine *Logos* was seen as present in the world of creation before and after the advent of Christ—both as *logos asarkos*, a general presence of a nude deity in creation, and as *logos ensarkos*, the presence of Christ as the embodied *Logos* in the multifarious community of creation.<sup>15</sup> Also the intertwining of *Logos* Christology with the biblical figure of Wisdom—and, indeed, the identification of *Logos* and *Sophia*, for which there are persuasive scriptural grounds (Sir. 24:3–5)<sup>16</sup>—can be seen as preparing the foundation for the opening of the ontological doctrine of the *Logos* incarnate to ethical and personal orientations that form part of deep Christology.<sup>17</sup> In more recent times Bonhoeffer pointed out that the space-time continuum belongs not only to the humanity of Christ, but also to the very definition of his divinity,<sup>18</sup> thus articulating a central tenet of what is known today as “deep incarnation.”<sup>19</sup> In the same vein, von Balthasar spoke of “the Son’s existence [as] co-extensive with all creation” and interpreted the history of incarnation as a “self-exteriorization” of divine love.<sup>20</sup> Similar examples could be multiplied.

What is then truly novel about the proposal of “deep incarnation” is, in my view, its twofold grounding, in Christian tradition and in present-day science, and the radical way in which it articulates the ecological implications of the belief that Jesus “immersed himself into the grains of creation and into the biological conditions that humankind shares with other life-forms.”<sup>21</sup>

14. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 209; 196–97.

15. Niels H. Gregersen, “Introduction,” in Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation* 1–21 at 7. For instance, “in Athanasius, the Logos assumes not just an individual body but the material world *in extenso*, which already bears the marks of the presence of the divine Logos” (Niels H. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges,” in Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation*, 361–79 at 369; see also Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 17). Ambrose of Milan, in turn, boldly preached that “In Christ’s resurrection the earth itself arose” (*Patrologia Latina* 16:1354).

16. See also Gerald O’Collins, “Word, Spirit, and Wisdom in the Universe: A Biblical and Theological Reflection,” in Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation*, 59–78.

17. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges,” 362.

18. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Vol. 12: “Christology,” Berlin, 1932–1933, trans. and ed. L. L. Rasmussen and I. Best (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 45–46.

19. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges,” 364.

20. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 35; see also 29.

21. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation and *Kenosis*,” 253–54.

Regarding the twofold grounding, Gregersen asks, "What does the incarnation in Christ have to do with the world of star formations, animal suffering, and the restless productivity in nature, as we have come to know cosmic and biological evolution from the sciences?"<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Johnson's book *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, published in 2014, serves as a case in point. Needless to say, in the past science and theology have often been conflictual, or totally disparate (save in such mystics as Teilhard de Chardin), and theology has been mainly anthropocentric (even androcentric!).<sup>23</sup> Following John Haught, Johnson considers *On the Origin of Species* "Darwin's gift to theology,"<sup>24</sup> and she examines his work against the backdrop of Christian trinitarian faith. As a fruit of a genuine dialogue between Darwin's view of evolution<sup>25</sup> and Christian belief in the God of love, Johnson's book offers an unparalleled synthesis of scientific and theological ideas. These ideas converge on a number of essential points, notably the universal interconnectedness of all life and flesh: "We evolved relationally; we exist symbiotically; our existence depends on interaction with the rest of the natural world."<sup>26</sup> This is a "keystone of evolutionary theory"<sup>27</sup> as well as the fundamental truth about God's presence *in, with, and for* the entire community of creation. Today reaffirmed by science, it has been revealed theologically through the deep incarnation of *Logos/Sophia* who, as a human being, "conjoined the material conditions of all biological life forms (grasses and trees), and experienced the pain common to sensitive creatures (sparrows and seals)."<sup>28</sup>

Contemporary science tells us that evolution includes both lawlike regularities and randomness. If chance is indeed, as Peacocke suggests, a tool that allows matter to explore the full range of its possibilities,<sup>29</sup> if natural systems have indeed certain freedom to explore and discover themselves within a context of lawlike regularities, which is, as some scientists claim, "one of the natural conditions for the possibility of the emergence of free and conscious human beings as part of the evolving universe"<sup>30</sup>—if all that is true, this means, as Johnson asserts, that "God's act is not a discrete ingredient that can be isolated and identified as a finite constituent of the world."<sup>31</sup> Instead, the evolving universe operates without compulsion, according to its own dynamics,

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22. Gregersen, "Introduction," 3.

23. Judith Coyle, Review of *Ask the Beasts* by E. Johnson, *St Augustine Papers* 15 (2014): 75–79 at 75.

24. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 18; see also John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 45.

25. Johnson is careful to distinguish scientific views about the theory of descent with modification from the so-called "social Darwinism" (Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 102–5).

26. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 196.

27. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 121.

28. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 196.

29. Arthur R. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 117.

30. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 172.

31. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 164.

working freely, *in concursus* with the incomprehensible God who brings forth the fullness of the community of life.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to the far-reaching eco-theological implications of deep incarnation, suffice it to say that if Jesus as God's *Logos/Sophia* is indeed "part of the vast body of the cosmos,"<sup>33</sup> then it is *Jesus's extended body*, his social and cosmic body, that humans violate as they abuse their natural environment and exploit the poor of the earth. In Johnson's felicitous phrase, "How tragic [it] is when human action shatters and destroys the flesh that the Word became!"<sup>34</sup> From a theological perspective, it is hard to imagine a more radical ground for an "ecological conversion," with the concrete ethical and spiritual implications.<sup>35</sup>

While scientific and ecological insights remain crucial for understanding the proposal of deep incarnation, both in terms of its origins and its far-reaching practical implications, it is at its christological core that extending Jesus's body into social and cosmic bodies can be interpreted as God's radical embodiment in the world of creation.

Theologically speaking, whatever happens in the universe is always accompanied by "a divine mind and wisdom that works for more comprehensive goals."<sup>36</sup> This can be best explained as "the concomitant presence of the divine Logos and Spirit, who 'understand' cosmic and biologically [*sic*] processes *from within* and who are capable of pursuing goals over time, even leading to goals transcending time and space."<sup>37</sup> I highlighted "from within," for this is where we are reminded that the proposal of deep incarnation concerns, on a most basic level, God "*going into flesh*,"<sup>38</sup> indeed God's radical embodiment. If the *Logos* can be interpreted as the "informational matrix for the concrete forms that have emerged and will emerge in the world of creation,"<sup>39</sup> then what can be said about the *sarx* that the divine *Logos* became? In other words, if *Logos* became *sarx*, in what is God *really* incarnate, here and now?

Jesus's own body can be seen as distinct yet not separate from his risen body<sup>40</sup> and, *mutatis mutandis*, from his extended body, both social and cosmic. Gregersen suggests that Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus as the *accommodating body*:

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32. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 160, 164; see also Jakub Urbaniak, "Holiness without the HOLY ONE(s): Towards an 'Evental' Account of Holiness," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72(4) (2016): a3485, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3485>, 1–10 at 5.
  33. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 196.
  34. Johnson, "Jesus and the Cosmos," 140.
  35. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), 216–21, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).
  36. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges," 376.
  37. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges," 376; italics mine.
  38. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation," 3.
  39. Gregersen, "God, Matter, and Information," 342.
  40. The entire paragraph is based on Jakub Urbaniak and Elijah Otu, "How to Expect God's Reign to Come: From Jesus' through the Ecclesial to the Cosmic Body," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72 (2016): a3380, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3380>, 1–11 at 8.

In all four Gospels Jesus is not understood as a person in the modern sense, that is, as a psychological individual. An *in-dividuum* (in Greek, *a-tomos*) means something indivisible, whereas Jesus becomes precisely what he is in the exchanges with others than himself. The landscapes he crosses, the people he meets, the religious culture he both embraces and oversteps belong to Jesus' body, just as his body cannot be understood without either God's Spirit animating him or without his relationship to his heavenly Father, whom he addresses in prayer and whose will he seeks to understand.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, by looking at Jesus's body against the backdrop of his life and ministry, Gregersen points out that it "not only moves in time and space but is moved and transformed by whom and what Jesus meets and is met by."<sup>42</sup>

However, the mystery of Jesus's extended body can be fully grasped only through the double lens of the incarnation and the resurrection. In the Christ-event—from cave to cross and resurrection—God has entered "into the sphere of the materially vulnerable and mortal to shed light on all from within."<sup>43</sup> Rahner famously noted that "the statement of God's *Incarnation*—of his becoming *material*—is the most basic statement of Christology."<sup>44</sup> But it is only in his resurrection that "Jesus' body has become accessible *worldwide*."<sup>45</sup> This is the ultimate implication of what Johnson labelled "deep resurrection." In her own words,

If in death this "piece of this world, real to the core," as Rahner phrases it, surrendered his life in love and is now forever with God in glory, then this signals embryonically the final beginning of redemptive glorification not just for other human beings but for all flesh, all material beings, every creature that passes through death. The evolving world of life, all of matter in its endless permutations, will not be left behind but will likewise be transfigured by the resurrecting action of the Creator Spirit.<sup>46</sup>

This has formidable ramifications not only for the creation, but also for God's own self (which is never really only God's own). If in the Incarnation, the entire matrix of materiality has been assumed in Jesus's body and blood, then through his resurrection this matrix of materiality has been assumed into God's own life.<sup>47</sup> Gregersen goes as far as to admit that "there can be no deep incarnation . . . without a deep resurrection."<sup>48</sup> With the proposal of deep resurrection, personal and even historical eschatologies are being pushed beyond their human scope "to include a blessed future for the whole natural world."<sup>49</sup> Deep incarnation is thus continued in the deep

41. Niels H. Gregersen, "The Extended Body: The Social Body of Jesus according to Luke," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51(3) (2012): 234–44 at 234–35.

42. Gregersen, "The Extended Body," 235.

43. Johnson, "Jesus and the Cosmos," 134.

44. Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, trans. K.-H. Kruger (New York: Seabury), 157–92 at 176–177, emphasis original.

45. Gregersen, "The Extended Body," 242. See also Urbaniak and Otu, "How to Expect," 3.

46. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 209.

47. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation and Kenosis," 252.

48. Gregersen, "Deep incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges," 371.

49. Johnson, "Jesus and the Cosmos," 148; see also Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 208–13; Jürgen Moltmann, "Is God Incarnate in All that is?," in Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation*, 119–31 at 123.



resurrection of the social and cosmic body into God's trinitarian life.<sup>50</sup> In this context, Welker's "spiritual body" (Pauline *soma* in contrast to *sarx*) expresses both continuity and discontinuity between the mortal flesh dominated by non-divine powers, and the immortal flesh mysteriously transformed by divine grace in the resurrection.<sup>51</sup>

Mary Douglas argues that the biological and the social body belong together as a microcosm and a macrocosm.<sup>52</sup> Her anthropological insight may be adapted theologically: in Jesus's own body (which is never really only his own), *Logos* incarnate establishes, through the Spirit, a living connection between God and *all* flesh.<sup>53</sup> In support of such an interpretation, Moltmann suggests that the Hebrew term *basar*—especially in the phrase *kol basar* (lit. "all flesh")—can best be translated as "life."<sup>54</sup> Johnson goes even a step further when she claims that "in a deeply real sense, the meaning of flesh/*sarx* encompasses all matter."<sup>55</sup>

Thus Jesus's body appears as extraordinarily open in relation not only to God and Jesus's fellow humans, but also to sensitive creatures ("sparrows" and "foxes"), whose pains he himself has experienced, to all biological life-forms ("grass" and "lilies"), whose fate he himself has shared and ennobled, and ultimately to matter as such ("all flesh"), whose material conditions of creaturely existence he himself has conjoined.<sup>56</sup> "Transformed from a biological, cultural body into an extended body—a kind of body-fellowship,"<sup>57</sup> Jesus's body can be now seen not only as a hermeneutic key to the interconnectedness and interdependence of social bodies and cosmic matter, but indeed as the most elementary "eschatological material" of all flesh.<sup>58</sup>

## Tinyiko Maluleke:

### Jesus's Body Located in Broken African Bodies

Among theological approaches developed in democratic South Africa, few could claim to reflect the *kairotic* commitment to the context and the critical-subversive edge inherent in the prophetic tradition of the black theology of liberation to the extent found in the work of Tinyiko Maluleke, one of the most prolific black theologians in present-day South Africa. Currently Maluleke is based at the University of Pretoria, City of Tshwane, which he joined in 2014. Maluleke is also an influential academic

50. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation and Kenosis," 260.

51. Michael Welker, "What is the 'Spiritual Body'?", in Davies and Gregersen, eds., *Information and the Nature of Reality*, 349–64 at 359–60.

52. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 69–87.

53. Gregersen, "The Extended Body," 244.

54. Moltmann, "Is God Incarnate in All that is?," 127.

55. Johnson, "Jesus and the Cosmos," 138.

56. Niels H. Gregersen, "The Extended Body of Christ: Three Dimensions of Deep Incarnation," in Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation*, 225–51 at 225–26; see also Gregersen, "The Extended Body," [2012] 239.

57. Gregersen, "The Extended Body," 243.

58. Urbaniak and Otu, "How to Expect," 3.

and political commentator, often challenging those in power and greatly contributing to setting parameters for social transition in the country. He has published numerous opinion pieces on various educational, social, political, and particularly racial issues affecting South African society. Glimpses of his theological thinking can be found also in those popular articles. Personally, I like to think of them as a form of ordinary theology, accessible to all. In his christologizing, Maluleke insists over and over again that Africa, its culture, its (pre-colonial) past and present as well as all its peoples, must be taken seriously as a *valid* and *creative* “host” and “container” of Christ.<sup>59</sup> This emphasis, I believe, inscribes itself perfectly into the prevalent social and cultural sensibilities fueled by the “decolonization discourse” which is carried out, for better or worse, on so many levels of public life in present-day South Africa.

What drives Maluleke's fragmentary and often informal christological reflection is, ultimately, his desire to *bring Jesus home*, to enable his fellow Africans to see Jesus as near and accessible, and at the same time to make Jesus feel at home among Africans. By doing so he does not fight against the natural religious and theological instincts of African people. On the contrary, he recognizes affinity between Jesus and ordinary Africans as something constitutive of both their religious experience and theological appropriations of Jesus, and he builds upon it or, better, gives it a more mature christological expression.

Maluleke is unapologetic about the methodological rigor that black theology should aspire to, as he posits that becoming “more academic and intellectual” in nature does not necessarily imply that today's black theology is by definition anti-grassroots.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, being “methodologically restless and theoretically ill at ease—deliberately so”<sup>61</sup> belongs, in his view, to the very essence of South African black theology. Maluleke interprets this “methodological restlessness,” that is, an ongoing concern with issues of method, theory, and ideology, not as “a sign of elitism and distance from ordinary people,”<sup>62</sup> but rather as something positive, namely a sign of keeping vigilant theoretical focus in the face of the complex challenges faced by black theology, whose project is “comprehensive liberation” in the South African context.<sup>63</sup> Based on a methodological “oil check,”<sup>64</sup> Maluleke himself prompts black theology to move beyond the contextualization paradigm which will allow it to recognize that African Christianity

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59. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Christ in Africa: The Influence of Multi-Culturality on the Experience of Christ,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 8 (1994): 49–64 at 62.

60. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Black Theology Lives! On a Permanent Crisis,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 9 (1995): 1–30 at 22–23.

61. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “African Christianity as African Religion: Beyond the Contextualization Paradigm,” in *The Quest for Liberation and Reconciliation: Essays in Honor of J. Deotis Roberts*, ed. Michael Battle (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 116–26 at 117.

62. Maluleke, “African Christianity,” 117.

63. Maluleke, “African Christianity,” 117.

64. Maluleke, “African Christianity,” 118–19.

is “not merely a battleground for Africanity and Christianity,”<sup>65</sup> but a new coherent *African religion*.

In some of Maluleke’s writings, arguments are framed explicitly within the (de)colonial discourse,<sup>66</sup> whereas in others he speaks rather about “Africanization,” “liberation,” “rediscovering the agency of Africans,” and so on.<sup>67</sup> These are organically connected in his reflection with the issues of inculturation, contextualization, and not least incarnation.<sup>68</sup> One would expect nothing less from a theologian and a scholar of religion. After all, while “decolonialism” has become a fad in the context of fallism, African authors, and theologians among them, have had a myriad of ways to refer to the same phenomenon long before the South African students took their cause to the streets in 2015.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, Maluleke is aware that many, globally and locally alike, still fail or are reluctant to acknowledge Africa and *Africanness* as a legitimate “host” for Christ. This may be particularly (and ironically) true of some white South Africans, be it those still suffering from the “Dutch Reformed Church schizophrenia”<sup>70</sup> or those from the English-speaking churches, with their

65. Maluleke, “African Christianity,” 123.

66. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “A Historical Quest for a Black Presence that ‘Walks’,” in *Orality, Memory, and the Past: Listening to the Voices of Black Clergy under Colonialism and Apartheid*, ed. Philippe Denis (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000), 229–50; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “The Valdezia Mission Station, Then and Now: A Missiological Appraisal,” *Missionalia* 31(1) (2003): 156–76; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Postcolonial Mission: Oxymoron or New Paradigm?,” *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95 (2007): 503–27.

67. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans: An Emerging Paradigm of Post-Cold War and Post-Apartheid Black and African Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108 (2000): 19–37; Maluleke, “African Christianity”; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Of Africanised Bees and Africanised Churches: Ten Theses on African Christianity,” *Missionalia* 38 (2010): 369–79.

68. Maluleke, “Christ in Africa”; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “Will Jesus Ever be the Same Again? What are the Africans Doing to Him?,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 11(1) (1997): 13–30; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, “The Crucified Reflected in Africa’s Cross-Bearers,” *Mission Studies* 17 (1/2) (2000): 82–96.

69. The most original decolonial thinkers and works to which Maluleke himself not seldom refers in his texts and public talks include Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1973); Franz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1977); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986); Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*; Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (1975); Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993); and the novels of Ayi Kwei Arma.

70. Jaap Durand, “Afrikaner Piety and Dissent,” in *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. de Gruchy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 39–51 at 49. Durant alludes here to the DRC’s “concern for the social and political welfare of the Afrikaner people, on the one hand, and its apparent lack of concern for the same problems amongst blacks” (*ibid.*, 45; see also Maluleke, “Christ in Africa,” 57–58).

“tradition of protest without resistance,”<sup>71</sup> none of whom are capable of prophetic solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized of our society.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, Maluleke’s multifaceted reflection on African appropriations of Jesus demonstrates that African Christianity has already become an African religion in its own right.<sup>73</sup> Africans have not waited for official permission from their white masters, whether in their churches or in the public square, “to try to speak and confess Jesus Christ” and to “celebrate salvation in Jesus” in a way that represents them and in a way in which they perceive it.<sup>74</sup> Thus African people have been embodying faith in Jesus “brought by the missionaries” in their own cultures long before the mainstream churches started talking about inculturation; and Africans continue to do so spontaneously, organically, and by means of their own creativity.

In his quest for this embodied Christology, Maluleke’s first stance is, therefore, to acknowledge that it is already there: in the liturgies of African indigenous churches where Christ truly becomes and is worshipped as the healer, liberator, ancestor, mediator, elder brother, the crucified one, head and master of initiation, and the Black Messiah;<sup>75</sup> in the pre-funeral-day night vigils, the foot stamping, the ceremonies of “taking off the black mourning clothes,” the peculiarly African preaching style, the Manyano and the Amadodana traditions, the funeral “celebrations,” and so on.<sup>76</sup> African appropriations of Jesus like these can often be accessed only through what Maluleke calls, after Scott, the “hidden transcripts,”<sup>77</sup> and, as such, their language needs to be decoded.<sup>78</sup>

African lay-preaching, testimony-giving, singing, and spontaneous liturgies are good illustrations of such a grassroots christologizing. Far from a cerebral exercise, these are indeed all about an embodied experience. For instance, in the common practice of “shared-preaching” not only ministers’ but also congregants’ bodies are “overtaken” by Jesus’s Spirit and “even the quietest, most illiterate people, suddenly have the courage and the wisdom to speak and speak sense . . . In them you see Jesus in

71. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 93ff.

72. See Jakub Urbaniak, “Faith of an Angry People: Mapping a Renewed Prophetic Theology in South Africa,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 157 (2017): 7–43 at 34–35.

73. Maluleke, “African Christianity,” 123.

74. François K. Lumbala, *Celebrating Jesus Christ in Africa: Liturgy and Inculturation* (New York: Orbis, 1998); quoted in Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 83.

75. Maluleke, “Christ in Africa,” 57.

76. Maluleke, “Christ in Africa,” 54.

77. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4–5.

78. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 83. These rich Christologies, people’s Christologies, constitute a form of “incipient theologies,” to use Cochrane’s phrase. See James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 154.

earnest, speaking out forcefully, gesturing, crying, jumping up and down and sometimes even fainting in the process.”<sup>79</sup>

Through such “christologizing” African Christians express their self-identification with Jesus and paradoxically, at the same time, their belief in the integral otherness of Jesus.<sup>80</sup> Maluleke traces both trajectories in the hidden transcripts of African Christianity, notably in the popular choruses sung in many local churches. “Grass-root African Christianity,” he comments, “harbors a dialectic of identification and non-identification with the suffering . . . Christ.”<sup>81</sup> This tension is manifested in the two particular choruses juxtaposed by Maluleke:

*Waze wa bonakala* (“when/ as he appears”). *Thina s’o fana naye* (“we will be like him”).  
*Thina s’o fana naye, thina s’o fana naye.*<sup>82</sup>

*Ka nyaka-nyaka hohle hohle* (“I have searched everywhere”) *Ka mufumana Jesu waka*  
(“[until] I found my Jesus”). *Ga gona ya tshwanang na ye* (“There is no one like him”).<sup>83</sup>

Thus the emphasis on affinity between Jesus and ordinary Africans, as real and deeply rooted in people’s religiosity as it is, is only one side of the story. “On the one hand [Jesus] is recognizable to Africans in his suffering and yet on the other hand it is recognized that he is like no one.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, there is always a sense of ambiguity as the identification with Jesus is never total. His integral otherness is kept, as is a clear distinction between him and us,

so that *his* identity is never collapsed into *our* identity . . . Hence, the cautious futuristic suggestion that “when he appears, we will be like him” as if to say we are not, at the moment, like him. In a sense therefore our ability to be like him depends on him—i.e., on his [future] appearance . . . not on us.<sup>85</sup>

While this dialectic of identification and non-identification should be kept in mind, it does not diminish the fundamental feature of African Christology, which is lived by millions of Africans in their daily experience, namely the awareness that their own bodies embody Jesus’s body. Bishop Tutu expressed this truth in the traditional language of *imago Dei* when he insisted “before the oppressors and oppressed alike that God’s image was reflected in all human beings.”<sup>86</sup> He did not shy away from confronting young and angry black activists who burned the “informers”—those who cooperated with apartheid’s police and who, in their mind, deserved to die. Instead Tutu

79. Maluleke, “Will Jesus Ever be the Same?,” 25.

80. Maluleke, “Will Jesus Ever be the Same?,” 20–24; Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 83–93.

81. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 93.

82. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 82.

83. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 85.

84. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 93.

85. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 85, emphasis original.

86. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 87.

reiterated the same simple truth, namely that all, even the “sell-outs” and “traitors,” bore the mark of Christ and thereby their life was sacred.<sup>87</sup> “Human beings are alike in being less than Jesus,” Maluleke concludes, “but equally all are alike bearers of the image of God.”<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, what allows Africans to experience Jesus as someone tangible and approachable, from whom power can be derived and requested,<sup>89</sup> someone who is keen to enter their world, with all its joys and unsolved problems, is his own brokenness. This is what they truly have in common. It is Jesus's brokenness that makes him most intimately close and familiar to African people.<sup>90</sup>

The hard life led by the majority of people in Africa also makes it difficult to celebrate salvation in Jesus. In a continent ravaged first by the slave trade then by colonialism, then by neo-colonialism, then by internecine wars, dictatorships and hunger; it is remarkable that African Christians persist in affirming the presence and the resurrection of Christ. How astounding it is this bold, ironic and stupefying claim that Christ . . . is being crucified in the emaciated and flea-ridden bodies of Africa's starving, dying children; this stubborn insistence that God's image resides in *this* Africa . . . this is truly astounding.<sup>91</sup>

A couple of years after the publication of the *Kairos Document* (1985), Albert Nolan, one of its main protagonists, pointedly stated that “God is being crucified in South Africa today . . . the crucifixion of God in Jesus Christ is for us the crucifixion of the oppressed people.”<sup>92</sup> A few years earlier Takatso Mofokeng elaborated on the same theological insight in his doctoral dissertation titled “The Crucified among the Crossbearers.”<sup>93</sup> Maluleke refers specifically to Mofokeng's account of the revival night vigils on Good Friday in South African black churches, whereby the lure of Christ's passion among black believers is linked to (and explained by) the *pathos* of their own lives.<sup>94</sup>

Jesus is being tortured, abused and humiliated in their presence and in their time. In fact it is their own painful life story that they are reliving and narrating. Jesus of Nazareth is tortured, abused and humiliated in them. They are hanging on the cross as innocent victims of white evil forces. Jesus' cry of abandonment is their own daily cry.<sup>95</sup>

87. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 87; see also Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 11; 34ff.

88. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 87.

89. Maluleke, “Will Jesus Ever be the Same?,” 22.

90. Maluleke, “Will Jesus Ever be the Same?,” 20–24; Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 83–93.

91. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 83–84, emphasis original.

92. Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1988), 67.

93. Takatso A. Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology* (Kampen: Kok, 1983).

94. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 84.

95. Mofokeng, *The Crucified*, 27–28.

This account illustrates accurately, I believe, my point about locating Jesus's body, particularly Jesus's broken body, in the bodies of his African followers. What has to be underlined once again is that before such a move occurs christologically, as it does in the theological reflection of Maluleke, it first happens on the experiential (spiritual) level—in the lived faith of the millions of “African cross-bearers.” The deciphering of the hidden transcripts of African Christians reveals that a great number of African women, the poor, black, destitute, marginalized, discriminated, LGBTI people, today also the refugees unwelcome in South Africa and subject to various forms of xenophobia—in brief, those on the underside of history see in Jesus's abused body reflections of their own wounds and they trust that this Jesus too, in all his brokenness, is reflected in them. It is this affinity between their daily experience and that of Jesus's cross that draws them to him.<sup>96</sup>

Setiloane famously described this tormented Jesus who is recognizable by Africans and *irresistible* to them:

And yet for us it is when he is on the cross,  
 This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands  
 and open side, like a beast of sacrifice:  
 when he is stripped, naked like us,  
 Brownd and sweating water and blood  
 in the heat of the sun,  
 Yet silent,  
 That we cannot resist him.<sup>97</sup>

An African Jesus is certainly not “a removed King who sits on the clouds,” nor is he just

a happy-clappy Jesus. He is a screaming Jesus—screaming on the cross and screaming in Africa: on the pulpits, in the streets and in the squatter camps. The African Christ who smiles on the cross is a paradox inviting reflection. This is a defiant smile.<sup>98</sup>

96. Maluleke, “The Crucified,” 85.

97. Gabriel Molehe Setiloane, “I Am an African,” in *Mission Trends No 3*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 128–31, quoted in Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 196.

98. Maluleke, “Will Jesus Ever be the Same?,” 27. See also Jakub Urbaniak, “What Makes Christology in a Post-Apartheid South Africa Engaged and Prophetic? Comparative Study of Koopman and Maluleke,” in *Theological Disciplines and the (Post-)Apartheid Condition: Genealogies and Future Directions*, Theological Explorations, 1, ed. Rian Venter (Bloemfontein: University of the Free State, 2016), 125–55 at 134.

Even though Jesus is the healer par excellence, his African followers are aware that he has no easy answers to offer, no immediate solutions to their predicament.<sup>99</sup> He enters their broken world—indeed, the presence of his Spirit saturates their broken bodies—and they welcome him as their Lord and Savior. But paradoxically, they seem to understand that he comes not to transform their messy reality—at least not immediately, not miraculously, but simply to share their fate.<sup>100</sup> Situating the scandal of the cross in a specifically African framework, Maluleke warns against a religious triumphalism:

African Christianity is a broken Christianity. It could not be otherwise in a broken and crucified continent; a broken and crucified world. Therefore, the enthusiasm of those voices who call for triumphant African Christianity to take its rightful place in the Christian world must be met with some caution. The brokenness of the (African) world must be related to the brokenness of Jesus Christ. In Africa, the scandal of the cross must be confronted headway.<sup>101</sup>

The experience of almost four hundred years of suffering and dehumanization—from the slave trade through colonialism and the statutory apartheid to the present-day economic apartheid, persisting structural racism, corrupt, incompetent government, and so on—taught black South Africans a lesson. This cross-generational experience of pain is like a poison that circulates in their cultural and religious blood systems and makes them, for the most part, disillusioned—even about God's intervention. Hopelessness is, in Maluleke's view, "one of the greatest indicators of Africa's brokenness."<sup>102</sup> In this context, the best Christianity has to offer to Africans is Jesus's solidarity, his embodied presence in the midst of their shared brokenness.

This overview aptly illustrates that Maluleke's work consists in more than merely identifying people's appropriations of Jesus as African Christologies in their own right—in which task his famous proficiency in most of the official South African languages and a background in missiology certainly come in handy. It also goes beyond underlining their significance for understanding African Christianity which—when simply studied, without suspicion, condescension, or attempted control—may provide us with "valuable insights into the shape and form of religion and religiosity in the world today."<sup>103</sup> Based on his reading of the signs of the times (sought notably among the black, poor, and marginalized Christians), Maluleke does what the Kairos Theologians did in the mid-1980s and what every liberation theology worth its name does: he creatively articulates people's Christologies *as* prophetic Christology, and he does so—in my view—without betraying their original spirit, without sanitizing and

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99. The same could not be said about the believers from some new Afro-Pentecostal churches preaching the "health and wealth" (prosperity) gospel. Indeed, it seems that in their case the brokenness of Jesus, so central for African Christianity at large, is being shunned for the sake of unsophisticated pneumatology, whereby the Spirit is reduced to a mere Power.

100. Urbaniak, "What Makes Christology?," 134.

101. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 91.

102. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 93.

103. Maluleke, "Of Africanised Bees," 379.



domesticating them, which means also without taming the woundedness and anger so often inherent in them.<sup>104</sup>

### Between All and Ours: Mapping Liminal Questions

The hermeneutical study sought to interpret the Christ of deep incarnation and the African Jesus of Maluleke against the backdrop of a shared christological category, namely that of God's *radical embodiment* through Jesus in the world we inhabit. Based on this exercise, the most evident tensions between the two proposals could be captured in the form of the following juxtapositions:

- (a) Recognizing Jesus, and his specific call, in the *Kairos* ("the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action")<sup>105</sup> versus recognizing Jesus in the whole fabric of physical and biological creation (eco-space);
- (b) Underlining the need for the appropriation of Jesus in cultural terms, with its ethical implications, especially with regard to transforming the unjust social structures versus emphasizing the eco-ethical dimension of incarnation with its practical implications for the natural environment;
- (c) Focusing on the affinity between the crucified Jesus with the African cross-bearers (victims of moral evil) versus focusing on the pre-moral principle that explains the hardship of evolutionary processes (animal pain and human suffering as part of the natural order).

All these essentially reflect the fundamental dialectic between the universal and the particular, which is constitutive of Christian faith as such. Gregersen articulates it fittingly when he points out that "the proposal of deep incarnation is . . . both 'high' in Christology and 'low' in materiality."<sup>106</sup> In contrast to deep Christology which emphasizes the balance between the universal and the particular, African appropriations of Jesus underscore the tension between the global and the local, especially with regard to power relations. Even if he does not deny the universal dimension of some theological truths,<sup>107</sup> Maluleke's focus is on keeping in check all the modes of theological discourse that have the propensity for universalizing and totalizing the particular (and especially the African) expressions of Christian faith.<sup>108</sup>

104. Urbaniak, "Faith of an Angry People," 31.

105. This is how the *kairos* is understood in the *Kairos Document* (see *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* [Braamfontein, Johannesburg: Kairos Theologians], ch. 1, <http://bit.ly/kairos1985>).

106. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation," 2.

107. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 84–86.

108. For concrete examples of Maluleke's critique of Christian meta-narratives which reduce *Africanness* to a form of exotica and of equating "Africanization" with the lowering of allegedly *universal Christian standards*, see Maluleke, "Christ in Africa," 62; Maluleke, "Of Africanised Bees," 370; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "The Elusive Public of Public Theology: A Response to William Storrar," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 79–89 at 84.

Here I only signal two possible ways in which the reflection of the deep incarnation theologians may present African/black (as well as other liberation) theologians with liminal questions, and thereby, potentially, broaden their christological horizons.

The most significant liminal question that deep Christology may bring to the table is, in my view, the one regarding bridging the gap between the universal (here the *environmental*) and the particular (here the *social*). Perhaps no one has done more in this regard than eco-feminist theologians, and in particular Elizabeth Johnson who persistently stresses in her writings “the deep-seated connection of ecological devastation and social injustice,” the fact that “ravaging of people and ravaging of the land go hand in hand.”<sup>109</sup>

Economic poverty coincides with ecological poverty, for the poor suffer disproportionately from environmental destruction . . . If nature is the new poor, then our passion to establish justice for the poor and oppressed now must extend to include suffering human beings AND life systems and other species under threat . . . The only adequate ethical vision is one of comprehensive justice for all.<sup>110</sup>

Thus Johnson reminds us that the theological idea of deep incarnation is valuable not just for its intellectual explanatory power but also for the strong practical (eco-ethical) dimension it entails.<sup>111</sup> In this context she asks whether liberationist Christologies, like African/black Christologies, “can encompass ecological concerns without losing passion for those who are suffering want.”<sup>112</sup> In answering this question, she points to the “deep ministry” of Jesus as a possible clue that may help present-day Christologies “hold both insights in the same line of vision.”<sup>113</sup> A longer passage will be worth quoting at this point:

Deep incarnation as enacted in Jesus’ ministry underscores the dignity of all that is physical, for bodies matter to God: all bodies, not only those that are beautiful and full of life but also those damaged, violated, starving, dying, bodies of humankind and otherkind alike. Jesus’ ministry grounds compassion for all the bodies in creation . . . With this conviction, disciples can risk the struggle for life in a world where death due to entrenched poverty, violent injustice, and ecological devastation is a daily possibility for millions. In doing so, they are working in history to en flesh the coming reign of God, thereby moving creation in the direction compassionately willed by God. Along this line of thinking, the implications of the christic paradigm [Sallie McFague] bring social justice and the meaning of the natural, evolving world into a tight embrace.<sup>114</sup>

109. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 6.

110. Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 154.

111. Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 153.

112. Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 142–43.

113. Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 143.

114. Johnson, “Jesus and the Cosmos,” 145.

Furthermore, the deep incarnation theologians seem to share the view that “there can be no deep incarnation . . . without a deep resurrection.”<sup>115</sup> If African/black Christologies are to embrace the biocentric and cosmocentric dimensions in the spirit of hope, it may be significant for them to address another liminal question, namely, how to extend their prophetic reflection on the cross and brokenness into an equally prophetic theology of resurrection. Vuyani Vellem’s subversive insights on resurrection as “food for insurrection,” grounded in his theological appropriation of the notion of *iziko* (“the fireplace”), offer a promising line of thought.<sup>116</sup>

### Jesus’s Cross: A Site of Reconciliation, a Site of Resistance

To close the loop, I am going to focus on a few liminal questions about Jesus’s cross—a christological locus that plays a central role in most African appropriations of Jesus. More specifically, I seek to probe the tension between cross seen as a site of *universal* reconciliation (deep Christology) and cross seen as a site of resistance against a *particular* form of injustice (Maluleke and most African approaches to Jesus).

At the outset, let me put forward a tentative proposal aimed at reconciling the two theological emphases, namely, the universal (global) of deep Christology and the particular (local) of African Christologies:

*If through incarnation in Jesus God reveals Godself as enfleshed, universally, in all bodies, through Jesus’s cross God reveals Godself as enfleshed, particularly, in broken bodies.*

Can a theological formula like this one hold the tension between the particular and the universal dimensions of God’s embodiment in our world without turning into “theological word games”?

If testing the parameters for the critical engagements between deep and African Christologies may be of any help in answering this question, one has to look at the ways in which each of the two trajectories problematizes and elaborates on the meaning of Jesus’s cross in relation to the other christological approach. Here I seek to articulate especially some of the ways in which African Christologies grapple with the issues surrounding cross, reconciliation, and resistance. I believe that the insights of African/black theologians like Maluleke should evoke a deep sense of caution vis-à-vis any cheap or anemic notion of reconciliation stemming from a disembodied faith often expressed by a theology disconnected from the anger and woundedness which mark the experience of those on the underside of history, like most South African people today. Such a notion of reconciliation is void of resistance against injustice, not least in the form of a demand for restitution. More fundamentally, disembodied as it is, it remains,

115. Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges,” 371; see also Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 207–10.

116. Vuyani S. Vellem, “*Iziko*: Insurrection and Resurrection,” in *Bible and Theology from the Underside of Empire*, ed. Vuyani S. Vellem, Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, and Philip Vinod Peacock (Stellensbosch: Sun, 2016), 153–62 at 162.

in my view, at odds with the very aspect of Jesus's identity that makes him one of us and one with all.

### *No Reconciliation without a Resistance*

From a specifically christological perspective what stands out as Maluleke's way of "keeping the universal in check" is his reflection on Jesus's cross as a (not unproblematic) site of reconciliation. There are a number of critical questions that black theology has to offer with regard to this topic. First, Maluleke ponders the question whether forgiveness is a human or a divine business in light of Derrida's view of the representative nature of human reconciliation:

Jesus himself did not pronounce forgiveness on his killers, he asked God to forgive them . . . Jacques Derrida reminded us that "strictly speaking forgiveness is humanly impossible." Often the people who legitimately need to do the forgiving are killed before they have a chance to consider forgiveness. . . . [F]orgiveness died in the Nazi concentration camp as millions of Jews died . . . In this way human forgiveness and human reconciliation, where it really matters and where it is really necessary, can only be done symbolically, representatively and therefore tentatively.<sup>117</sup>

Further, Maluleke explores the intricate relationship between truth, knowledge, and power in the context of gender, racial, ethnic, and economic reconciliation in Africa, in particular as illustrated by the tension between amnesty and justice inherent in the South African reconciliation process and by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's own "hegemony of truth."<sup>118</sup> Here he refers to the Foucauldian notion of the "hegemonies of truths," whereby truth is something *manufactured* in the interest of the power-holders. The telling "silence and absence of blacks and women in the South African reconciliation discourse"<sup>119</sup> is just one of many cases in point.

Through the TRC process truth has also been proved to be a "thing of this world"—there are so many competing versions of truth. This recalls Pilate's disdainful question to Jesus: "What is Truth?" . . . How much does it cost? What color is truth? What gender is it? Whose truth is it? . . . In our modern world, can those with knowledge and power speak anything but the truth? Which is prior—the truth of power (such as Pilate had) or the power of the truth (such as Jesus was)? In South Africa can truth be anything but the truth of power—male and white power?<sup>120</sup>

Perhaps it is precisely with regard to the issue of power relations and cultural difference that African Christologies may pose the most significant challenge to the deep

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117. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 88.

118. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 88.

119. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 88–89.

120. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 88.

Christology approach and any other theological approaches with universalizing inclinations.

The deep incarnation theologians have a tendency to reduce Jesus's cross to the *site* of the creation-incarnation tandem, whereby the two are considered as "expressions of the selfsame divine love"<sup>121</sup> and "the universal significance of the cross of Christ"<sup>122</sup> is understood in terms of that selfsame divine love, here embodied in the crucified Jesus, that reconciles the entire "cosmos . . . to God in the *shalom* of reconciliation."<sup>123</sup> Thus, as with other aspects of christological reflection, so in this case the deep incarnation theologians are interested in extending—that is, demonstrating the universality of—Jesus's embodiment and its soteriological implications. The advantage of such a reading of Jesus's cross is twofold. First, it is eco-inclusive since the "deep theology of the cross" includes evolutionary pain, not only human suffering due to sin. Second, it offers the integral view of the Christic mystery of incarnation and Passover rooted in "a Trinitarian understanding of God who exists eternally in a *perichoresis* of mutual relations,"<sup>124</sup> rather than interpreting preexistence, incarnation, and exaltation of the Word in terms of temporal sequences, "as . . . three separate stages in the 'nature' of Jesus Christ."<sup>125</sup> With regard to the salvific meaning of the cross, this is ultimately equivalent to theologically arguing that "Christ die[d] not only for sinners, but also for the victims of natural selection and of social depreciation."<sup>126</sup>

In this sense, the christological proposal of deep incarnation hardly leaves space for locating—that is, demonstrating the relevance of—Jesus's embodiment and its ethical-social implications in a particular cultural and historical context. That through Jesus's cross everything, without any differentiation, has been universally reconciled with God is not sufficient ground for building a sustainable culture of reconciliation in a continent where economic racism persists, ensuring that the "white minority remains the richest and most powerful group, [where] the ethnocentricity (together with all its antecedents) has led to the many internecine wars and genocide," and so on.<sup>127</sup> In Africa, where "for centuries both African religion and African culture have been weapons of resistance as well as arenas of the battle for the soul of Africa(ns) in the military, spiritual and cultural assault on *Africanness*,"<sup>128</sup> such a cheap notion of reconciliation will simply not do. To use a somewhat crude analogy, the universal claim that "All lives matter" (as opposed to "Black lives matter"), as true as it may be, does

121. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation and Kenosis," 258–59.

122. Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ," 193.

123. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation and Kenosis," 260. See also Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ," 196; Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 225.

124. Johnson, "Jesus and the Cosmos," 133–34.

125. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation and Kenosis," 256.

126. Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ," 197.

127. Maluleke, "The Crucified," 92.

128. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "The Good Life and Social Justice in Africa," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (San Antonio, Texas, November 21, 2016 [unpublished]); emphasis original.

not prove helpful in the context where it is black lives, above others, that are being treated like a commodity.

When the African/black Christology of liberation, like the one found in Maluleke, locates Jesus's cross in the midst of African cross-bearers, part of its "hermeneutic responsibility" is to articulate the tension between the need for justice for the victims of oppression and the need for forgiveness for the oppressors, neither of which can be achieved without acknowledging and challenging the imperial structures of oppression that still persist in a given sociopolitical context.

Thus from the perspective of African Christologies, Jesus's cross appears at once as a site of (not unproblematic) reconciliation and a site of resistance. Indeed, one could say, it may serve as a site of universal reconciliation only insofar as it is acknowledged and experienced as a site of resistance in the particular contexts of injustice—acknowledged and experienced, needless to say, by the oppressed and the oppressors alike.

### *Cross as a Source of Both Prophetic Challenge and Mystical Awareness*

And yet if this African *theologia crucis* is not to remain purely anthropocentric, some notion of the mystical, alongside the prophetic, has to be embraced. Here perhaps we touch upon one of the less obvious intersections between deep and African Christologies which carries within itself a possibility of the particular (resistance) and the universal (reconciliation) dimensions of Jesus's cross shedding a new light on one another. In brief, I suggest to begin with the notion of resistance, rather than that of reconciliation (that is, *from below* rather than *from above*), but this time reconsidered from an eco-christological perspective.

It is commonly known today that complex "processes of evolving nature that beget and sustain life,"<sup>129</sup> allow natural environment to regenerate itself over and over again in the face of (and in spite of) systemic degradation to which it is exposed due to one species' continuous attempt to consolidate all forms of power.<sup>130</sup> Thinking of Jesus's crucified and risen body along the lines of the deep incarnation and deep resurrection may prompt us to consider this tremendous capacity of the natural world and the multiple ways in which different planetary-scale systems act upon it (some of which today's science renders intelligible to us) as a primal form of that "creative resistance" to which the whole of Creation is called vis-à-vis the imperial forces of destruction. Thus our faith that the "piece of this world, real to the core"<sup>131</sup> signals embryonically, through his cross and resurrection, the promise of the fullness of life to all flesh,<sup>132</sup> may lead us to seeing ourselves as being urged to join the broader community of life

129. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 199.

130. The ultimate limits of this regenerative potential of our ecosystem seem to be one of the most controversial issues in the present-day ecological debates. See Jonathan Foley, "Living by the Lessons of the Planet," *Science* 356(6335) (2017): 251–52.

131. Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Questions on Easter," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4 (New York: Seabury, 1974), 129.

132. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 209.

in the universal act of resistance against all the persisting forces that hinder life in its fullness.

Here the dichotomy of the particular and the universal breaks down. Our personal as well as ecclesial stance vis-à-vis any form of oppression and discrimination is meaningful only insofar as it is embodied and expressed through prophetically challenging the imperial mechanisms and structures of injustice in a particular context which is ours. At the same time, it is only a mystical awareness of all being one flesh, and all somehow sharing in the brokenness of this flesh, that may enable us to join the “universal struggle” without becoming what we fight against, that is, without turning into the agents of the same empire, just under new auspices.

Jesus’s cross proves then to be a versatile hermeneutic category which provides rich theological resources for thinking about both the particular and the universal dimensions of reconciliation, and—even more importantly—not one without the other. It is God’s radical enfleshment in the crucified and risen body of Jesus that allows Christian faith to preserve the tension between the prophetic challenge vis-à-vis the particular forms of injustice on the one hand and the mystical awareness of the ultimate unity of all flesh on the other.

### Visions and Bodies: Musings on Theological Accountability

Perhaps the last liminal question that should be briefly posed at this point is the one concerning theological accountability. For the most part, theologians who stand behind the African appropriations of Jesus choose to be accountable to their fellow African people, rather than to the international theological/academic community or to the “repository of the ‘necessary truths,’”<sup>133</sup> or to some allegedly universal Christian standards.<sup>134</sup> This may well be seen as a false dilemma if one’s theological reflection remains purely speculative.<sup>135</sup> But as we have seen, African/black christologizing, by its nature, aims at praxis.<sup>136</sup>

To use a somewhat simplistic illustration, if a South African theologian today sought to stress the relevance of place and eco-space in their christological reflection, as Gregersen does,<sup>137</sup> they would have to decide whether to address the contentious issue of the alienation of black Africans from their land, or whether to discuss the subject in a way that does not touch upon any such contextual matters. From the perspective of

133. Gregersen, “Introduction,” 4.

134. Maluleke, “Of Africanised Bees,” 372. This should not be confused with a lack of methodological rigor (see Maluleke, “Black Theology Lives!,” 22–23; Maluleke, “African Christianity,” 117).

135. Jakub Urbaniak, “Theologians and Anger in the Age of Fallism: Towards a Revolution of African Love,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 15 (2) (2017): 1–25 at 13, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14769948.2017.1313643>.

136. Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), xvii.


137. See Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation,” 3.

global christological debates, the question of land redistribution in South Africa may appear as marginal, if not irrelevant. African/black Christologies, on the other hand, locate Jesus in the bodies of his fellow Africans, and thereby their questions come from a people's *belly*, which is often a place of brokenness and anger. From that perspective the land issue matters. And if it matters to Africans, it matters to their Jesus as well.

How then should we think of "theological accountability" in the context of christological proposals such as deep incarnation—proposals which are reflected on by the global academic community and whose theological aspirations are universalistic through and through?<sup>138</sup> One of the most unsettling questions that we may have to ask ourselves as we ponder the reality of God's radical embodiment in the world we inhabit is whether our primary theological focus should be set on the vision (such as "comprehensive justice for all" or "a planetary ethics") or on the bodies—above all broken, dispossessed bodies that enflesh the body of the one whom we call our Savior.

No doubt bodies need vision and visions need embodiment. In Gregersen's words, "In Jesus Christ, the particular and the universal are consistently intertwined, so that we have constant movements between the two poles of the encompassing reality of Jesus Christ: the divine Logos and the world of flesh."<sup>139</sup> But, as I sought to demonstrate in this article, African appropriations of Jesus stand out as a blunt reminder and warning that even christologizing centered upon categories such as "flesh," "materiality," "eco-space," "embodiment," and "deep incarnation," is at risk of remaining purely visionary unless it is done *by* and/or *with* those in whose own bodies "Jesus is being tortured, abused and humiliated."<sup>140</sup>

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138. It may be worth noting that many South African theologians in our day seem to be driven in their intellectual quest by the global ideal of "planetary ethics," which they share with other "public theologians" around the world and which is probably not too distant from what deep Christology implies in terms of its ethical ramifications. I have in mind mainly white Reformed Afrikaans theologians, many of whom identify themselves with the global network of "public theology." See Jakub Urbaniak, "Elitist, Populist or Prophetic? A Critique of Public Theologizing in Democratic South Africa," *The International Journal of Public Theology* 12 (3–4) (2018): 332–52 <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-12341546>.

139. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation," 2, 5.

140. Mofokeng, *The Crucified*, 27.