

**THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTUS VICTOR THEORY AMONG THE ACHOLI
ANGLICAN CHRISTIANS BY**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I **ALLAN OTIM OCHAKA**, hereby declare that this **Research Dissertation** is my own original research work and has never been submitted to any educational institution of higher learning for any award.



Signed

Date: 31/03/2025

APPROVAL

This **Research Dissertation** under the topic: **“The Concept of Christus Victor Theory among the Acholi Anglican Christians”** has been submitted for examination with my approval as a University Supervisor.

Signed: Date: 31/03/2025

Professor Christopher Byaruhanga (Rev. Dr.)

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this continuing work to my dear Wife, Mrs. Proscovia Otim, dedicated and virtuous as ever, the rock of our family.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

BTSDT	:	Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology
CMS	:	Church Missionary Society
DNU	:	Diocese of Northern Uganda
DOK	:	Diocese of Kitgum
ESV	:	English Standard Version Bible
NKJV	:	New King James Version Bible
NIV	:	New International Version Bible
UBOS	:	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UCU	:	Uganda Christian University

ABSTRACT

The Christus Victor theory has played a significant role in shaping the spirituality, faith and Judeo-Christian practices of the Acholi Anglican Christians in Northern Uganda, significantly explaining and providing a framework for their deliverance, salvation and redemption from their evil pre-Christian suffering and pain.

This research investigated the significance of the Christus Victor theory detailing its resonance with key cultural and spiritual practices of the Acholi people which predated but ultimately reinforced the adoption and spread of the principles of the Judeo Christian faith as expounded by the Church Missionary Society in the 20th century AD; focusing on the doctrines of the victorious atonement and reconciliation, fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the ultimate solution for the Acholi suffering and pain. From the evaluation of the theologies of the Acholi pre-Christian spirituality as signified in *Joggi* (gods and deities), *Ajwaggi* (Spiritual mediums), *Abila* (Clan and ancestral deities) and *Cen* (malevolent spirits) and the related rituals of *Matu Oput* (reconciliation) and *Tumu Kir* (atonement, appeasement and redemption); the Acholi blood rituals and religious ceremonies ineffectually conveyed reconciliation, appeasement, atonement and redemption of the people from their suffering and pain.

This investigative study focusing on four key objectives of literary scrutiny sufficiently demonstrates the significance of the victorious Christ as espoused in the Christus Victor theory in the salvation and redemption of the Acholi from their pain and suffering thus providing a significant foundation of their current practice of faith.

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1 CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Concept of the Study

From the inception of creation, the world of Adam and Eve was a perfect creation, living in complete harmony and communion with God. Nonetheless this perfection was later adulterated by sin as signified in Genesis 3 and from then on, God through his unsearchable and incomprehensible love set out to restore this divine - human fellowship and balance with Himself.

This divine balance was only eventually restored through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, so that whosoever believed in his life, death and resurrection was saved (John 3:16). The Christus Victor theory, a prominent Christian soteriological and atonement concept, depicts the death of Christ and his resurrection as a victory over Satan and his evil cosmologies. This theory demonstrates that the incarnate and victorious Christ, Son of God, procured a decisive victory over Satan and his cosmologies of evil, sin, and death, thereby permanently freeing humanity (Mayer 2020, 295).

Propagated by Aulén Gustaf (1879-1977) in 1931 in his book *Christus Victor* (Aulén 1931), Aulén demonstrated that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, he destroyed not only sin and death but their ultimate cause, Satan (Gerald 2014, 439-440). Worth noting is that Jesus Christ, entered the World under the conditions of sin and death, and defeated Satan in a decisive victory - restoring the perfect communion between God and Man by atoning for the sin of humanity (Mayer 2020, 296).

This is the crux of the faith that the Acholi and the Anglicans in general profess and their confidence is signified in the declarations Jesus made in Revelation 1:18, supported by Colossians 2:13-15, denoting; “...I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (ESV); affirmed in Colossians 2:13-15, with apostle Paul saying; “...and you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (ESV)

Within the above biblical testimony lies the demonstration that the church’s nature of salvation centers on the belief that God in Christ carried out a triumphal battle against all cosmological forces of the devil that were opposed to both His reign and his people’s wellbeing thereby bringing to pass God’s plan of restorative reconciliation between Him and the World (Byaruhanga 2005, 80).

This is the deepest purpose of Christ’s mission and Ministry and it was in that context that His victory over sin and death is understood (Gerald 2014, 440). This is the concept of the faith of the Acholi Christians, whose hope is premised on the affirmatory profession and confidence in the victorious and triumphal Christ in his defeat of death, sin and evil.

1.2 Background

The Acholi are part of the Nilotic greater ethnic grouping originally from Southern Sudan and now covering a greater part of Northern Uganda. Kevin Ward writes that Christianity first came to the Acholi or Northern Uganda in 1903, through the invitation of the local Payira tribal clan Chief, Rwot (Chief) Awic (Ward, 1991). Although in later years Christianity became a significant force in the region, Ward argues that there was originally a lukewarm reception of the faith in Acholi considering that the rest of Uganda received Christianity with such passionate enthusiasm.

The above notwithstanding, the Acholi Christian today is part of the contemporary modern Church in Uganda, professing majorly the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Faiths as the most dominant denominations, with a sizable though largely splintered presence of independent Pentecostal churches.

Explanations given for the initially indifferent reception of the Christian faith was the equivalent Acholi name of God that was used by the Missionaries (Ward, 1991). In his explanation, Ward asserts that the disastrous choice of the local dialectal equivalent of the name of God signified as *Lubanga* for the Anglicans or *Rubanga* for the Roman Catholics; an importation from Bunyoro's *Ruhanga* (God); partly explains the lukewarm reception of Christianity in Acholi.

In supportively analyzing this failure, the Verona Father, J.P. Crazzolaro regretted the use of this *alien* name and asserted that the Lwo name *Jok* would have been a better option, capable of carrying the Christian concept of God. Nonetheless, Ward contends that both the Church Missionary Society (Anglicans) and the Verona Fathers (Roman Catholics) had come to the conclusion that *Jok* had too many ambiguous and positively evil associations to be used. However what these missionaries also failed to realize at the time was that the word *Lubanga* also had a sinister indigenous meaning, *Jok Lubanga*, referring to the unambiguously evil spirit believed to have been responsible for the spread of tuberculosis of the spine (Ward, 1991).

In discussing the spiritual awakening of the African people, Mbiti contends that Africans are notoriously religious with each group of African people having their own religious system and sets of beliefs and practices that permeates all the compartment of life so comprehensively that it becomes impossible to extricate it from other aspects of life (Mbiti, 2002, p. 1). Moreover Mbiti further asserts that the African people do not know how to exist without a religion.

Mbiti adds that while traditionally the pre-Christian African did not have written sets of dogmas or doctrines, African people simply learnt, adapted to and passed on to the next generation; these beliefs, customs and traditions as had been propagated by the community (Mbiti, 2002, p. 3). To him, it is these inclinations that demonstrate the innate religiosity of the African people (Mbiti, 2002, p. 3)

In understanding the concept of Christus Victor from the Acholi Christian perspective, one must appreciate that the pre-Christian Acholi had three groups of spirits, the first being the Clan spirits believed to have been owned by the Clan heads, signified by shrines on hills and rivers. The second category of spirits were the spirits of the living dead, originating from a specific lineage and clan groupings, with most classified as friendly or protective or benevolent while a few others classified as vengeful or malevolent; specifically of relatives believed to have died harboring anger and negative emotions - these were generally feared as dreadful spirits. While the third category of spirits were believed to have been spirits of unknown persons or dangerous beasts- and were considered hostile, dangerous and calamitous, full of misfortunes and responsible for the suffering of men (Mbiti, 2002, p. 85).

This view of a multiplicity of spirits with one dominant spirit is closely supported by JP Ocitti who asserts that the Acholi Christians contextualizes the Christus Victor theory within their cosmological framework, which includes a pantheon of spirits (Ocitti, 1973, pp. 145, 146).

The spiritual experiences and maturity of the Acholi people as seen from the plethora of gods or deities (*Jok*) made it easy for the people to easily comprehend the concept of a Monotheistic, Superintending, Creational and All-powerful God from a Judeo-Christian perspective once introduced in 1903 with the attendant triune doctrinal concept of an all victorious and conquering Christ. Within the Christian Acholi now lies the emphasis of faith in Christ as the powerful liberator who saves and restores,

mediates and reconciles to the Father, protects and heals; experiences gleaned from their pre-Christian expectations of paradise from a supreme God (Aker, 1974).

Nonetheless, while it is imaginable that the Acholi embraced this all - powerful conquering Christ, it is logical to assert that the Acholi Christian like many other Christians sought for the opportunity to regain their perceived pre - Christian folklore lives that was supposed to have been reinforced by happiness, childlike ignorance, immortality and resurrection. Specifically for the Acholi, they were looking for a divine all conquering spiritual force that could liberate them from pain and suffering.

Additionally, they were also perceived to have dreamt of, in their pre -Christian life, a life where God would supply all their livelihoods without toils and struggles, a life almost equivalent to the biblical idea of paradise (Mbiti, 2002, p. 95). This is reminiscent of the life that the apostle John talks about in the book of Revelation 21:3b & 4; which states that:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (ESV)

However it is a life the pre-Christian and sinful Africans and Acholi people never achieved, remaining a far distant dream, but upon Christianization, they were again offered this same hope. Mbiti writes of the several myths and stories of how pre-Christian Africans perceive themselves to have lost this glorious life expectation and earthly paradise and in turn failed to attain the higher gifts of immortality and resurrection (Mbiti, 2002, p. 96).

Interestingly, upon Christianization, the Acholi Christians were miraculously, but this time without any effort of their own except in humble acceptance, offered the same life as they had dreamt of in their folklore tales, with the victorious Christ giving the Acholi Christian, the free gifts of salvation, and victories over the crippling malevolent spirits of the devil; and were reconciled back to the Father.

This is indeed what the Christus Victor concept signifies to the Acholi believer; victories over death, sin and the devil accomplished by Christ. This was the same unwritten, yet to be attained life that the folklore stories of pre-Christian Africans, including the Acholi foreshadowed (Mbiti, 2002, p. 96-97).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Within the biblical affirmations in Revelations 1:18, Colossians 2:13-15 and Hebrews 2:14-15 lies the demonstration that the church's salvation belief is centered on the hope that God in Christ carried out a victorious conflict against the powers of evil which were hostile to His will and thereby bringing to pass God's plan of restorative reconciliation between Him and the World (Byaruhanga 2005, 80). This is the deepest purpose of Christ's mission and Ministry and it was in this context that His victory over sin and death is understood by believing Christians (Gerald 2014, 440).

This study investigated the victorious power of Christ as espoused by the Missionaries saving the Acholi from the fear of the devil and the belief in its domineering power and presence which had bedeviled them with torturous consequences manifested in

pain, suffering and death. This investigative research examined the above conundrum in the Acholi practice of faith, worship and believe in the Victorious Christ.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of the Christus Victor theory in explaining the Acholi pre-Christian spiritual predicaments and providing a pathway in Christ for the Acholi deliverance, redemption and salvation. The examination indeed revealed that the Christus Victor theory, superintended by Jesus Christ, signified relief, deliverance and redemption for the Acholi from their torturous pre-Christian cosmologies and spiritual maladies, with the Acholi believer finding spiritual rest in the Victorious Christ.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1.5.1 General Research Objective

This study systematically examined the theological understanding and implications of the Christus Victor theory within the belief systems of the Acholi Anglican Christians.

1.1.4 Specific Research Objectives

This study undertook a detailed review of the following specific objectives:

- I. Evaluation of the sufficiency of a select set of soteriological theories of atonement in addressing Acholi pre-Christian spiritual challenges,
- II. Examination of the sufficiency of the Christus Victory theory in addressing the Acholi Pre-Christian Cosmological challenges,
- III. Examination of the Christus Victor theory in relation to the Acholi belief systems.
- IV. Evaluation of the teachings of the Missionaries in relationship to the Christus Victor theory

1.6 Scope of the Study

The research evaluated the details of the different theories of atonement within the fields of soteriology, with special examination and analysis of the Christus Victor Theory of atonement and its corresponding direct and implied significance to the Acholi Anglicans and its impacts on their understanding of sin, death and the devil. This has been addressed through devotion of specific chapters to specific objectives.

1.7 Justification of the Study

The Christus Victor theory, with its emphasis on Jesus Christ's victory over the powers of evil, sin, and death, carries various connotations when examined through the mirrors of the different cultural lenses. By examining the key concepts within Christus Victor theory from the context of both pre and post Christian Acholi, the study was able to appreciate the extent to which the Acholi African cultures have both influenced and been influenced by the concept of Christus Victor as a doctrinal principle of atonement from a Judeo-Christian perspective; specifically in regards to their pre-Christian suffering and pain occasioned by their evil spiritual cosmologies.

This study has enabled a better appreciation of the relevance of culture and the respective spiritual cosmologies in the faith of a people who were so ingrained within their unwritten and undocumented worship practices and religious rites and rituals at the point of their conversion (Bevan, 2018, p. 62). This is supported by (Dirk, 2019) who contends that the ancient believers and the early church experienced the whole Christ, the divine and human Christ.

It was the desire of the study to evaluate sets of available principles and theories of atonement from a local Acholi tribal and Christian perspective in order to enrich the local body of knowledge in as far as the understanding and appreciation of the Acholi cosmologies are concerned. This is because while much has been written on the Christus Victor theory from a western Church and greater African theological context, there remained a relative greyness of academic endeavor focusing on its interpretation and application within the Anglican Church in Acholi.

By exploring this topic among the Acholi Anglicans, this scholarship hopes that it has contributed to the broader academic discourse on atonement and salvation with specific respect to the Christus Victor theory from the Acholi Anglican perspective.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The Christus Victor theory, its resonance and general understanding is deeply entrenched within the Acholi Anglican systems of faith and worship and did not require systematic and direct embedment and systematization, because faith in the supreme deity is part of the lived experiences of both the Acholi And the African believers. To the Africans in general and Acholi in particular, this is “contextual theology” (Stinton, 2004, p. 16). Walls quoting Kwame Bediako assert that the African Pre-Christian past is synonymous with their Christian Present (Walls, 2002, p. 120). Additionally, the African person is so religious that religion permeates through their entire cosmology (Mbiti, 2002, p. 1). And while there were no written dogmas and

doctrines regarding the African believe system, this was never a deterrent for the African faith to be carried for centuries of generations (Mbiti, 2002, pp. 1, 4).

It is the hope of this study that it can add to the prevailing body of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the concept of Christus Victor in regards to faith, belief and practice of the Acholi Anglican Christian Community.

1.9 Literature Review

This study evaluated the key soteriological principles of atonements as argued and advanced by the various theologians in the different age of Christianity while analyzing the key concepts within the Christus Victor theory with a detailed evaluation of both pre-Christian and post-Christian Acholi appreciation and understanding of the various soteriological concepts of atonement. Underpinning this study has been the significant and fairly modern seminal work of systematic theologian Gustaf Aulén, whose epic work, *Christus Victor*; offers an historical critique of the three main theories of atonement.

Gustaf Aulén traces the Christus Victor theory to the writings of the early Church Fathers, particularly the writings of Irenaeus, who emphasized Christ's divine and human incarnation and victory over Satan as central to salvation (Gustaf, 2008, p. 4). Aulén expands this idea, framing Christus Victor as a narrative of divine kenosis (self-emptying) and cosmic restoration, unifying the spiritual and social dimensions of salvation (Gorman, 2009, p. 23).

Aulén's integrative approach is especially significant in Acholi Anglicans' spiritual and social contexts where systemic evil and spiritual warfare are tangible realities of faith. In contrasting the Christus Victor theory with the legalistic and moralistic perspectives of atonement, while emphasizing its narrative of liberation from evil; Aulén authoritatively states that, "the central theme of the Christus Victor model is the triumphant liberation of humanity from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil, accomplished through Christ's victory" (Gustaf, 2008, p. 5).

The Christus Victor theory therefore offers a relevant framework for understanding salvation as liberation not only from personal sin but also from social and spiritual oppressions; aspects that are in consonant with the Acholi Anglican Christians.

To this end, a detailed literary examination of the soteriological atonement theory of Christus Victor and its relationship to the unique religious dynamic and practices of the Acholi Anglican Christians undertaken through a thorough evaluative analysis and examination of previous literatures in corresponding chapters aligned to the objectives as specified hereunder enables an understanding and appreciation of the subject theory, Christus Victor, in respect to the Acholi Anglican Christians.

1.9.1 Specific area of review, extensive study and research

- a) Evaluation of the sufficiency of a select set of soteriological theories of atonement in addressing Acholi pre-Christian spiritual challenges,
- b) Examination of the sufficiency of the Christus Victory theory in addressing the Acholi Pre-Christian Cosmological challenges,
- c) Examination of the Christus Victor theory in relation to the Acholi belief systems.
- d) Evaluation of the teachings of the Missionaries in relationship to the Christus Victor theory

1.10 Research Design and Methodology

1.10.1 Research Design

The Christus Victor, one of the theories of atonement, views Christ's death and resurrection as the decisive victory over sin, death, and the devil. This research explored how this theological concept has been understood, interpreted, and applied within the Acholi Anglican community. The study primarily focused on the Christus Victor theory's intersection with pre and posts Acholi Christian belief system and the contemporary context of faith of the Anglican Christian Acholi believer.

This library based theological research, examined scholarly works on the soteriological theories of atonement and the key concepts and principles within the Christus Victor theory of atonement. The same approach was undertaken in the investigative study and examination of related literatures that touches on the pre and

post Christian Acholi and the people's appreciation of faith and the celebration and belief in the victorious Jesus Christ.

Primary, Secondary and tertiary corroborating data were used in this study. The data was drawn from both the Analog (physical library) and E-book sources, Journals, articles, publications, internet materials and other online resources. The library theological data was obtained deliberately and purposely through a targeted search based on the research objectives with the specific subject matter on the atonement theories in general and the Christus Victor theory in particular.

1.10.2 Area of Study

The Acholi Christians are part of the modern Church in Uganda, professing majorly the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Faiths; in the Dioceses of Northern Uganda and Kitgum for the Anglicans and Gulu Archdiocese for the Roman Catholic Church. These are the most dominant denominations, with a sizable though largely splintered presence of independent Pentecostal churches. However, this study was specifically tailored to the Acholi Anglicans within the Anglican Dioceses in Acholi in Uganda.

The Acholi are part of the Nilotic ethnic grouping originally from Southern Sudan but now covers the greater part of the greater Northern Uganda, in the districts of Gulu City, Gulu, Nwoya, Amuru, Omoro, Kitgum, Lamwo, Pader and Agago Districts. In his testimonial, Kevin Ward writes that Christianity first came to the Acholi in Northern Uganda in 1903, through the invitation of the local Payira tribal clan Chief, Rwot

(Chief) (Ward, 1991). It is prudent to note that this faith has for the last 120 years been passionately expressed in this part of the Anglican Communion with over six hundred thousand Anglican worshipers.

1.10.3 Sources of Information

This study deliberately and purposely employed a combination of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary corroborating data. The data was drawn from both the Analog (physical library) and E-book sources, Journals, articles, publications, internet materials and other online resources, thus adequately fulfilling the purpose of the study as set out in the research objectives.

1.10.4 Data Collection

The study data was gathered through a purpose driven library and online study and compiled, analyzed, interpreted and thematically presented. The data was gathered from the University Library, online data stores, book stores and online documentations; comprising of Primary, secondary and tertiary data.

1.10.5 Methodology of Data Search

The study employed purposeful data gathering technique which depended on the relevancy of data given the underlying study dictates of a theological literary qualitative library based study. Patton opines that purposeful data gathering (Sampling) is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002).

1.10.6 Primary Data

While the Bible remained the primary source of theological and doctrinal information as the foundation of faith and the word of God, this study also examined detailed theological data on atonement in general and the Christus Victor in particular as the primary area of study. Corroborating studies of other atonement theories and other important literatures about the culture, faith and practice in Acholi as supporting and corroborating literature were also appropriately used. Works and literatures of the early Church fathers, ecumenical councils and reformation theologians who provided foundation doctrinal breakthroughs in expounding and explaining these soteriological atonement theories and concepts were also used as supportive primary data sources.

1.10.7 Secondary and Tertiary Data

To understand and appreciate the theological and doctrinal foundations of this study, secondary and tertiary information were used. The study used both secondary and tertiary data, from biblical commentaries, Journals, Articles, Text books, internet documents, internet materials (online resources), Magazines, bulletins, newspaper articles and editorials, prayer and liturgical books and opinions.

1.10.8 Data Analysis

An Integrated analytical and contextual combination of literal and historical analysis, thematic analysis, comparative analysis, contextual analysis and exegetical analysis and study approaches and tools were used to examine key doctrinal and biblical information thus enabling a comprehensive theological research on the Acholi practice or faith and worship. These approaches are explained further herein:

Within the context of this study, the literary and historical analysis used involved close reading and examination of the relevant supportive biblical texts in order to interpret their meaning and significance as legibly as possible. Relevant biblical texts that properly explain the basis of atonement and the complete work of Christ have been carefully referenced and explained, with theological inferences provided to enable a detailed understanding.

Additionally, in handling doctrinal information, the study used historical analytical approaches to contextualize these theological texts within their historical settings. These were specifically used in the detailed examination of the theories of atonement in general but specifically in the thorough examination of the Christus Victor theory and the pre and post-Christian Acholi spiritual cosmologies.

The other analytical method used in this study is the thematic analysis, which involved the coding of key theological and doctrinal texts to identify recurrent themes. This was used to uncover themes related to victory over evil, sin and death as reflected within the Acholi beliefs and as signified in the Christus Victor theory of atonement. Additionally, Comparative Analysis was used in the comparative study of the concept of Christus Victor as understood by Acholi believers. This highlighted the unique aspects of Acholi believe systems and resonance with Christus Victor theory.

The study also deployed contextual analytical approach, using specific aspects of cultural contextualization in understanding the Acholi Culture. This method examined how the Acholi culture and history have shaped their understanding of the victorious Christ and the idea of salvation as espoused by the CMS in the early 20th Century.

Because of the biblical underpinning of the study in regards to appreciation of the biblical resonance with key study assumptions, an abridged exegetical analysis was used, though on a very limited and for cross referencing and inferential basis only.

1.11 Presentation of the Final Report

The final report has been presented in a dissertation format. This is a “Six Chapter study” presented concurrently with a “General Introductory” section. The second to the fifth chapters forms the backbone of the research, interlaid with comprehensive data analysis of the study findings. The study objectives are the backbone of the study, as comprehensively investigated and addressed in the report. The report uses APA intext citation system and a referenced materials bibliography of all studied and quoted materials provided at the end of the combined report dissertation.

2 CHAPTER TWO: THEORIES OF ATONEMENT

This chapter explores the relevance of some specific theories of atonement in addressing the Acholi pre-Christian cosmological predicaments. It is worth noting that from an African perspective there was no absence of faith in a supreme being who was responsible for the Acholi spirituality before the coming of Christianity. According to Mbiti African people believed in God, even though, they took this belief for granted (Mbiti, 1991, p. 45). This view is supported by Bolaji who asserts that many African languages accommodated the idea of a supreme God ranked above other gods (Bolaji, 1973, pp. 137 - 139).

To the Acholi, it is the missionaries in their preaching who introduced the various theories of salvation. Some of these theories are the christus victor theory, satisfaction theory, penal substitution theory, moral influence theory and the spiritual and political liberation theory. These theories mentioned are collectively known as the soteriological theories of atonement.

Soteriological theories of atonement are theological frameworks that attempt to explain how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ accomplished salvation for humanity. These theories address questions about the purpose, mechanism, and implications of Christ's atoning work; articulating the means by which Christ reconciled humanity to God. Some scholars argue that although the New Testament asserts that salvation was achieved through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the book does not say how (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 79).

Since the New Testament does not say how salvation was achieved, scholars have come up with these theories of atonement for purposes of providing the much needed logical explanations. In the subsequent paragraphs I will briefly discuss some of these theories of atonement; focusing on the satisfaction theory, penal substitution theory, moral influence theory and the spiritual and political liberation theory; pointing out their strengths and weaknesses in as far as the Acholi dilemma is concerned.

2.1 Satisfaction Theory

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Archbishop from 1093 to 1109, in his detailed treatise titled, *Cur Deus Homo* or *Why God Became Man*, gave an elaborate explanation on atonement and why it had to be Jesus Christ (Gerald, 2014, pp. 443-452). Gerald explains according to Anselm that, humanity because of sin was destined to eternal damnation. Save for the propitiatory intervention of Jesus Christ, who was both finite and infinite, to atone for the sin of humanity, reconciled man to the God; through his expiatory sacrifice (Gerald, 2014, pp. 443-452).

The concepts of propitiation and expiation are significant in atonement theories as they explain how Christ delivered humanity from condemnation. According to scholars expiation takes away guilt, through the removal and cleansing of sin thus erasing sin and guilt from the sinner while propitiation appeases God's wrath provoked by sin, hence satisfying God's wrath. These views are central in (Horton, 2012, pp. 204, 205) and (Gerald, 2014, p. 438, 439)'s explanation of the concepts of atonement. According to Horton, propitiation refers to "the necessity for the satisfaction of God's

justice. This is because God is holy and righteous and therefore He cannot overlook transgression (Horton, 2012, p. 205).

The idea of expiatory satisfaction had been a popular theology during the early church, with authorities such as Tertullian and Augustine, giving it the foundational basis at the time (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 81). However it was Anselm who popularized this concept, through his treatment of sin as “failure to give God what is due to Him”. He observes that “in the process, the sinner offends God’s honor by not rendering perfect obedience to Him” (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 81).

The transgression and disobedience of humanity against God meant that He could not simply overlook sin, “which had robbed Him of His honor”. In His divine but loving response, God must either punish human sin or His divine honor must be satisfied; but in the case of the latter only a God-man could satisfy God’s honor (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 81). Bray asserts that the Father allowed the Son to die because the restoration of humanity could only be brought about by the death of a God - Man who was capable of achieving that (Gerald, 2014, p. 446).

By satisfying the price that humanity must pay the Father for their atonement, Christ turned away the wrath of God from humanity and satisfied God’s honor and thus Christ propitiated the Father fully for all past, present and future sins of humanity. Some scholars have asserted that Christ willingly rendered perfect obedience to God on the Cross on behalf of humanity (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 81). While Anselm explains

that only God could make the satisfaction required for the sins of humanity, yet only humanity owed the debt and this necessitated the God-Man, Jesus Christ to fulfill the purpose of His incarnation (Anselm of Canterbury, 2000, pp. 89, 92). Corroboratively, Byaruhanga asserts that “the death of the innocent Christ on the cross on behalf of humanity is of such immensity that it satisfies the honor of God for all the sins of the whole world, with the benefit of Christ’s satisfactory death offered to all people and accepted by God as due satisfaction for all sinners” (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 81).

However, while this all-encompassing satisfactory concept of atonement covers the whole believing human world for eternity; the devil, a fallen angel, is excluded from Christ’s commonwealth of salvation. Anselm argues that the devil cannot be saved because that requires the death of a God-angel instead of a God-man and yet angels, in the form they are created in, cannot die (Gerald, 2014, p. 451).

The above line of thought points to the creation of man, where humanity originates from one created man, Adam, and can only be saved by a perfect God-Man, Jesus Christ. Anselm contends that angels are not descended from the same ancestry with humanity, so that the God-Man Christ is incapable of saving the devil and his demons. The devil cannot therefore be saved (Gerald, 2014, p. 451).

Noteworthy however is that, while this theory positions the salvation of humanity as a complete and final act of Christ, fulfilled in His death and resurrection, the theory

does not offer tangible explanations on the torturous impacts of death and the devil, maladies that the pre Christian Acholi believer was looking for salvation from.

The theory focuses on two key concepts of expiation and propitiation, discussing the cancellation of sin and guilt conscience from humanity and therefore appeasing the Father and removing His wrath that humanity should have borne. The Acholi however suffered both metaphysical and physical bondage and maladies believed to have been caused by the devil and his marauding agents of demons, which this theory does not address. To the Acholi people, the complete triumphal package that tackled death, sin and the devil was the ultimate solution that would speak to their predicament given the bedeviling torture of some of their pre-Christian spiritual cosmologies.

2.2 Penal Substitution Theory

In the satisfactory theory, Anselm asserted that Christ fulfilled both the propitiatory and expiatory roles and demand hence restoring God's honor with sin punished on the cross by the suffering and death of Christ; offering complete and final atonement on behalf of humanity thereby averting God's wrath (Horton, 2012, p. 202, 203).

The Apostle Paul asserted that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and as (Gerald, 2014) puts it, since sin was the principle point of departure between God and humanity; death had to be the principle point of reconciliation, in other words, someone had to die to reconcile man with God (Gerald, 2014, p. 434). And in both of

these theories, the death of Christ is central with the only difference being the semantics used to explain its significance.

It is in this principle of death, that the penal substitution theory also finds a resting place or rather a starting point. Grudem articulates that Christ's death was termed a *penal* because Christ bore a penalty when he died and hastens that it was termed a *substitution* because in death, Christ became the substitute for the fallen and sinful man (Grudem, 1994, P. 579). Horton asserts that the concept of *penal substitution* gets its root word, *penalty*, from the Latin word *poena*, reflecting the Church's proper recognition that Christ's sacrifice was the payment of a debt to divine justice in the place of humanity (Horton, 2012, P. 201).

Within the biblical testamental period settings and as Horton asserts, "It is poignantly and elaborately clear that within Israel's sacrificial system of guilt offerings under the Mosaic laws and system; the prophetic anticipation of the Suffering Servant and the main narrative and doctrinal themes of the New Testament converged in the concept of penal substitution (Horton, 2012, P. 201). This is scripturally significant, because within the New Testament are Greek concepts of *anti* (In place of, instead of) and *hyper* (For the sake of); as seen in Mathew 2:22, 20:28, John 10:11, 15:13, Romans 5:8 and Ephesians 3:20 respectively; all demonstrating the scriptural backing of this theological position (Horton, 2012, P. 201).

Horton additionally avers that these scriptural references, demonstrates, anything other than the principle of substitution, submitting that, indeed, Christ took the place of sinners, using the analogy of the “guiltless for the guilty” and the “righteous for the unrighteous” (Horton, 2012, P. 201). Stott concluded in like manner, asserting that, “the essence of atonement is substitution; the Son of God takes the place of sinners” (Stott, 2006, p. 95).

In lending further credence to the scriptural significance on penal substitution, the Apostle Paul asserts, “For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Exegetically, Horton uses this assertion of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians to reinforce the arguments within the penal substitution theory, noting that the penal aspect is evident in the phrase “made sin” and the substitutionary aspect in the phrase “for us” (Horton, 2012, p. 201). In Jesus Christ substituting the sinner, he took the place of humanity on the cross as a substitute, because as (Gerald, 2014) inquired rhetorically; “of what use would it have been for a sinner to have died paying the price for their sins and in the process miss reconciliation with God”? (Gerald, 2014, p. 435)

It should also be borne in mind that within the Abrahamic dialogue with God, God substituted Isaac with a ram that He provided, so that the ram was sacrificed in the place of Isaac (Genesis 22:13, 14) - and this according to (Gerald, 2014) enshrined the principle of death by proxy within the Judeo-Christian theology, a principle that reinforces the penal substitution theory (Gerald, 2014, p. 435).

In closing this discourse, it is worth noting that “the objective of substitution is that in Christ, humanity might become His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21) and be reconciled fully to God (1 Peter 3:18). It is also plausible that the penal substitution theory emphasized the legal and forensic aspects of salvation, portraying Christ as the final and only sacrifice that fulfilled God’s divine justice (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 3:25)

From these discussions, it is clear that the cross and the death of Christ on it are central to redemption, restoration and reconciliation of humanity to God as expressed in these theories. Additionally, it has evidently been corroborated through scripture that Christ’s Priestly work on the cross was more than a vicarious sacrifice for sinners.

On the basis of these submissions and as asserted by some theologians, there is evidently more meaning to Christ’s death than penal substitution; nonetheless, penal substitution lies at the epicenter of Christ’s death. The denial of penal substitution theory leaves believers with the subjective theories that reduces Christ’s work to its effects on humanity; a subjective view in relation to the repentance of believers; rather than for humanity; in relation to God’s justice (Horton, 2012, p. 206, 207).

Nonetheless, to the local Acholi Anglican believer, the technicalities of the theological interpretation of the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ may not mean much, except for the fact that their faith as confessed and professed in Christ is resolutely final and to them it is all that matters. However, like in the satisfaction theory, the Acholi while pleased to have been liberated from the design

of eternal spiritual death for their sins, so that in Christ, they have a worthy substitute; their satisfying explanation is one that authoritatively spells out that the spiritual vices of evil and the devil have been defeated once and for all.

The Acholi desired a logical and final defeat of the bedeviling forces of evil so that their faith in the work of Christ is one that offers both salvation from sin and redemption from the crippling forces of darkness manifested in suffering and death.

2.3 Moral Influence Theory

While Augustine of Hippo did not have any direct interaction with the later theological concept termed *the moral influence theory*, his early works, though not explicitly, contains elements that interact with this concept. He acknowledged in *the Confessions* and other writings the transformative power of the love of God as signified in Christ, revealed in His humility, obedience and sacrifice as a model for believers to emulate; a moralistic reciprocal performance based view of atonement.

Augustine positioned Christ as a magnificent reflection of God's love, drawing believers to the Father. He observed that the aim of Christ's death on the cross was to demonstrate the love of God towards sinners with the intention of evoking a reciprocal response of love from the sinner to the Father on the basis of Christ (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 82).

First advocated by Peter Abelard (1079 - 1142), Grudem submits that, “the moral influence theory of atonement holds that God did not require the payment of a penalty for sin, but that Christ’s death was simply a way in which God showed how much He loved human beings by identifying with their sufferings, even to the point of death” (Grudem, 1994, p. 581).

In essence, this theory demonstrate Christ’s love for humanity manifested through his sacrificial death, with this love becoming a great teaching example for humanity, enlisting a magnetic response to God in love and in so doing, humanity is forgiven(Grudem, 1994, p. 581). And according to Byaruhanga, Abelard’s theory advocates that sin is not an objective barrier between human beings and God but a subjective state of mind which can be overcome by the death of Christ, adding that the theory postulates that Christ’s death invokes a response of love in the sinner’s heart (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 83).

Like Anselm, Abelard rejected the idea that the death of Christ was a ransom paid to the devil for the sin of humanity. However, Abelard also rejected Anselm’s theology that “God’s honor must be satisfied before the divine mercy becomes effective” (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 83). In rejecting Anselm’s theology, Abelard declared: “How cruel and unjust it appears that anyone should demand the blood of the innocent as any kind of ransom, or be in any way delighted with the death of the innocent, let alone that God would find the death of His Son so acceptable, that through it, He should be reconciled to the world” (Robert, 1962, p. 145).

It is the wisdom of Abelard that God who is love should have any need for the sacrifice of His Son as the price for the atonement for humanity or as a ransom. Instead he asserts that the life and death of Jesus Christ are a demonstration of God's love so powerful that it invokes a responsive love in the sinner and coupled with the corresponding teachings and examples of the life of Christ are effective in motivating the sinner to embrace change. According to Abelard, it is on the basis of this rediscovered love for God by man, inspired by the examples of Christ, that God forgives the sin of humanity and not on the basis of the sacrificial and accepted atonement of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

This theory further posits that "Christ's death incites humanity to virtue, converts man through the demonstration of God's love, warns man about how seriously God takes sin, and encourages humanity to join God in his work of bringing peace and reconciliation to the world" (Horton, 2012, p. 207). In using the Gospels (Luke 7:47) where Jesus pronounces forgiveness for sins because the sinner had loved much and vice versa, Abelard, reduced the whole process of salvation to one principle; that is "God's love in Christ brings about a reciprocal responsive love, from the sinner" (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 83).

While Abelard's theory of atonement reminds humanity of the importance of gratitude to God as a response to the atoning work of Christ, Grudem asserts that the theory is contrary to so many aspects of scripture, specifically on scriptural testimonies indicating that Christ died for the sins of man, bore the sins of man, died

as a propitiation and died as a ransom. He further contends that this theory robs the atonement of its objective character, because it holds that the atonement had no direct effect on God (Grudem, 1994, p. 581). He further submits that this theory has absolutely no way of dealing with the guilt of humanity, because if Christ did not die to pay and atone for the sins of humanity, then who did and how? And if Christ did not atone for the sins of humanity, “then creation has no right to trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins” (Grudem, 1994, p. 581).

Additionally, Abelard’s view leaves out a critical part of biblical expectation, that is, the reconciliation of the fallen humanity back to God; on what basis then is man reconciled back to God and why did God, in the demonstration of His love to sinners, choose to use the death of His Son, Jesus Christ? Finally, if Christ’s death is of no consequence in the salvation of humanity, with the Acholi believer, enlightened as Abelard claims; can the Acholi now, within this theory claim personal credit from their own efforts for their own salvation, doesn’t this make them co - equal with the creator? But most importantly, how can the Acholi believer infer victories over the bedeviling cosmological forces of evil, because they certainly cannot save themselves.

In looking for salvation from their crippling metaphysical world, the Acholi people undertook several spiritual veneration and worship of their pre-Christian deities, performed appeasement and atonement rituals and conducted spiritual reconciliation ceremonies to appease the gods, but all these did not make them morally upright and neither where they moved to emulate any “spiritually perfect gods and deities”

because there was none. Their laborious exercises were rituals done almost in futility as the fear of evil and the marauding damages of the devil according to them continued. This explains the inadequacy of this theory in addressing the Acholi cosmological desire. To use the Anglican phrase, “*Lex Credendi, lex orandi*” is what the Acholi were looking for in their pre and post Christian state.

2.4 The Spiritual and Political Liberation Theory

According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ “disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15). This passage illustrates how spiritual liberation dismantles the spiritual, political and evil powers that alienate humanity from God and each other.

To the *third world theologians*, salvation is understood principally as liberation from all kinds of oppressive and evil forces in the world, which are signified as being spiritual, political, economic and social in nature. This kind of view has influenced the understanding and interpretation of the concept of atonement and its contribution to the doctrine of salvation from a human liberation perspective.

The liberationist theologians view salvation as political and spiritual liberation, interpreting the ministry of Jesus Christ from the point of view of “the poor, the oppressed and the outcasts”; the original recipients of the Lord’s gospel (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 84). In explaining the spiritual aspect of this theory, Gutiérrez asserts that sin is not merely the fall of humanity from God’s presence but also a societal

structural reality that propagates injustice and oppression. He observes that, “Sin signifies the negation of love for one’s neighbor and therefore negating communion with God” (Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 102). To these theologians, spiritual liberation embodies reconciliation with God through Christ and the transformation of human hearts to embody love, justice, and solidarity as argued by Paul (2 Cor.5:18-19).

The proponents of human liberation theories contend that this concept involves internal transformation. The other proponent like Sobrino asserts that salvation begins with the recognition of God’s grace as the foundation for human liberation. He asserts that “grace restores the broken relationship between humans and God, thus empowering people to live as agents of liberation” (Sobrino, 2015, p. 219).

On the other hand, Gutiérrez argues that there is a direct interrelationship between human liberation and the salvific work of Christ, juxtaposing that salvation is “inseparable from the liberation of the oppressed and the transformation of unjust societal social structures” (Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 86). This theory provides that the cross is the ultimate act of solidarity with the oppressed, where Jesus Christ identifies with the suffering of humanity and offers hope for their justice, freedom and prosperity.

While Cone asserts that fellowship with God is the beginning and end of human liberation; a vertical dimension of faith which is an essential response to the gospel and is thus the heart of liberation’s meaning from the human side. He further asserts that this vertical sense of personal relationship with God, the Father of Jesus Christ is

logically prior to the other components of human liberation, adding that it is from the knowledge of this vertical divine - human relationship that the struggles of liberation in history are based” (Cone, 1975, pp. 141-144) as cited in (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 85).

Biblically, the proponents of spiritual and political liberation theory uses scripture in a way that makes their philosophy convincing and in way that further their conviction. For example in the gospel of Luke, Christ declared in the prelude to the “good news” prologue that, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61:1-2, ESV). To the human liberation theorists, this proclamation has both spiritual and socio-political implications. While the Cross is significantly pivotal, resurrection equally has an indelible impact on this theory, symbolizing the defeat of oppressive forces and the promise of a new creation and a society with freedoms.

Moltmann writes, “The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of God’s new world, in which the oppressed find liberation and the structures of injustice are overturned”. To him, this eschatological hope fuels activism and resistance against injustice in the present age (Moltmann, 2015, p. 256). While Boff emphasizes the role of the faith as practiced, with the aim of ushering political liberation; asserting thus, “Theology must be lived out through actions that challenge injustice and promote human flourishing” (Boff, 2011, p. 115).

These proponents of the spiritual and political liberation theory selectively use such scriptures that denote a deadness of faith if not accompanied by real actions (James 2:17), to demonstrate the relevance of their theological view. To this end, the proponents of this theory call for a praxis of faith that embodies the redemptive and liberating work of Christ, not just spiritually, but in concrete and practical ways.

The spiritual and political aspects of the theory demonstrate the significance of economic and political situations within given societies. They warn the Church, that these circumstances, determines the way people hear and respond to the gospel. Additionally, they seek to remind the church that God has a particular concern for the less fortunate challenging the Church to take on extra responsibilities and a duty of care in regard to the plight of the oppressed in the society (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 85).

However like the subjective view, the human liberation view too demonstrates significant flaw in their assumptions and theological explanations; leaving out and misrepresenting key biblical texts, only selectively applying these texts, and in most cases in a literal sense. For instance, the proponents of these theory interprets salvation primarily from the socio - political - economic scenarios, choosing to emphasize related secular oppressions, without a determination of how God is to achieve it. (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 85).

Secondly, the theory ignores biblical timing and futuristic settings, denoting fulfillment of certain biblical events to a later time, such as the full restoration of

God's dwelling and His perfect world as indicated in the following select scriptures; Romans 8:19-21, Acts 3:21, Revelations 21:4, 1 Corinthians 15:26 and 15:27, and many other apocalyptic texts. Additionally, the theory negates the fact that salvation as it is today has come in partial and fragmental fulfillment and is yet to be fully grasped with final fulfillment preserved for the end time in the completed reign of God, sometime in the future.

While the theory has extensively demonstrated liberation as both political and spiritual signified in political, economic and social liberation; most of the assertions are presuppositions that do not definitively demonstrate how these ambitions can be achieved in the real life of the Acholi, who seeks the practical benefits of faith, such as salvation from the maladies of the evil as signified evil, death and suffering.

In conclusive analysis of all these theories, it is worth noting that while these theories laboriously explain the aspect of salvation that is futuristic and eternal, consequential aspects of sin, they fail to capture the immediate, physical and metaphysical need and longing of the Acholi believer and that is a conclusive battle and assurance that the devil and the evil that it causes manifested in suffering, pain and death have been defeated; this was their desire.

For example, the satisfactory theory emphasizes the appeasement of God's wrath and cleansing of sin, but positions nothing on the devil and his legions of demons. The theory does not offer tangible explanations on the torturous impacts of death and the

devil, maladies that the pre and post Christian Acholi believer was looking for in salvation. The Acholi had suffered both metaphysical and actual physical bondage and maladies believed to have been caused by the devil and his marauding agents of demons, which this theory does not address. To the Acholi people, the complete triumphal package that tackled death, sin and the devil was the ultimate solution that would speak to their predicament given the bedeviling torture of some of their pre-Christian spiritual cosmologies.

In like manner, the penal substitution theory offers related lines of thought, asserting that Christ, a substitutionary sacrificial offering, took the place of humanity and paid the penalty that they should have paid. While this individualistic soteriological concept validates the idea of salvation, so that in it humanity receives what would have been individually impossible, it fails to address the idea of communal spiritual and physical suffering that the Acholi underwent within their pre and post-Christian spiritual cosmologies signified by death and suffering, superintended by the devil and his related evil and demonic cosmologies.

If the discussed clusters of objective theories have been inadequate in providing definitive explanations for the cosmological predicament of the Acholi people, the subjective theories have been much worse. This is because not only do they dismally explain and account for the concept of atonement, they are catastrophic when used in explaining the Acholi predicaments of death and eternal suffering as a result of the bedeviling hands of Satan. The Subjective theories are moralistic, legalistic and

performance based; negating the fact that the defeat of the evil torturous cosmologies that the Acholi suffered needed a divine superior intervening hand, over and beyond the superficial atonement and appeasement offerings and sacrifices that they had offered and performed for generations but whose results were continued death and suffering.

It is on this basis that a more viable, definitive and conclusive explanation and theory is used to explore the predicament of the Acholi people in terms of the negative and marauding impacts and fear of evil and the devil both as spiritual cosmologies and practical realities of life in order to address the maladies of the devil, sin and death.

The next chapter uses the concept of Christus Victor theory in addressing these bedeviling vices, as rooted in Jesus Christ and His victorious battle over sin, death and the devil, achieved through his suffering and death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.

3 CHAPTER THREE: THE CHRISTUS VICTOR THEORY

This chapter examines the meaning and significance of the concept of Christus Victor, a key modernist soteriological theory of atonement, in relation the torturous challenges that the Acholi people experienced in their pre- Christian spirituality. The theory offers reasonable explanations that address the challenges of the pre-Christian Acholi while offering definitive answers and hope to the believing Acholi Anglicans.

Worth noting is that Christianity without victory over the trials and tribulation that humanity faces would be a powerless vacuum worship akin to idolatry as denoted severally in the Testaments. The Acholi sought for an assurance that the battles against the forces of darkness manifested as evil but superintended by Satan was one that had had a logical end. This is the dilemma that the Christus Victor theory sought to change and that Gustaf Aulén had exhaustively addressed in his theory in 1931.

Within the Christus Victor theory is embedded the earnest expectation of the Acholi people that God, through His Son Jesus Christ, had provided a definitive path out of the bedeviling cosmological forces of evil they had faced, but which answers had not been adequately offered in the foregone theories of atonement. The Missionaries however eventually offered this answer through the concept of Christus victor.

In this regard, Gerald Bray argues that when in 1931, Aulén Gustaf (1879 - 1977), with great surprise, rejuvenated the aspect of Christ's sacrificial victory, overlooked at the time, Aulén postulated in his concept to the extent that Jesus Christ came down from

heaven in order to destroy sin, overcome death and give life to man” (Gerald, 2014, p. 439). The Acholi traditional understanding of victory, with one’s adversary completely defeated and vanquished resonates with Christ’s total victory over sin, the devil and death as reflected in Christ’s declaration in Mathew 28:18.

Aulén Gustaf traces the concept of Christus Victor to the writings of the early Church Fathers, particularly the writings of Irenaeus, who emphasized Christ’s divine and human incarnation and victory over Satan as central to salvation (Gustaf, 2008, p. 4) He expands this idea, framing Christus Victor as a narrative of divine kenosis (self-emptying) and cosmic restoration, unifying the spiritual and social dimensions of salvation (Gorman, 2009, p. 23).

It is in the concept of Christus Victor, that the Christian believer in general and the Acholi people in particular find what to hold on to for their faith, and that is, a rooted conviction in the victorious Christ, with critical triumphant battles over sin, death and the devil. This demonstrates the ultimate freedom from the cosmic shackles of the ruler of this world, Satan. While the gospel accounts of the crucifixion say almost nothing about Satan, Aulén’s theory of Christus Victor posits that defeating the devil and all his demons was one of Christ’s most important priorities (Gerald, 2014, p. 439)

Gustaf Aulén combines aspects of the metaphysical significance of Christ’s atoning work to its physical significance, developing a theory that rightly positions Christ’s work as a triple victory, over sin, death and the devil. In fact scripture demonstrates

that Christ's victorious atoning work on the cross was a combination of sacrificial, judicial, economic and militaristic conquests (Horton, 2012, p. 206). It positions Christ as King not only in His resurrection and ascension, but on the cross - "precisely where Satan and his principalities and powers thought that they had triumphed". This is the essence of the Christus Victor theory (Horton, 2012, p. 206).

The Christus Victor theory has three main underpinning concepts that will support this discussion embedded in Christ's victories over the cosmological enemies signified in Sin, Death and the Devil. These are discussed as follows:

3.1 Christus Victor and Sin

Sin in the Acholi in the cultural context is understood as a relational and communal breach, often tied to the disruption of harmony between individuals, the community, the environment, and spiritual forces. It often involves offenses against both human and divine entities, including but not limited to ancestors, spirits, and the community. Sin is seen as a breach of the collective good and moral order. It is spiritual, relational, and social.

According to Gerald Bray, sin was not inherent in God's created order but was the result of rebellion, championed by the devil and his agents (rebellious angels) against God made possible by His loving nature, lavish gifts of latitude and choice to man (Gerald, 2014, p. 84). Sin is generational, owing to its origin in Adam, at the onset of creation as signified in Genesis three. It was only through God's love signified in the

Son, Jesus Christ that through His victorious death as christened in the Christus Victor Theory - was sin, dealt a final blow on the cross of Christ at Calvary.

In the philosophical theology of Gustaf Aulén, sin is an enemy of God. This is because there can only be a victorious spiritual and divine battle against an irreconcilable opposition, that is existential in threat and inherent and generational in character. Throughout the redemptive plot of salvation in Genesis 3, the plot is a warlike maneuver between Satan with his fallen human followers and God with His obedient covenant people - with all attempts made by the devil because of sin to extinguish the salvific messianic line (Horton, 2012, p. 206) - the mastermind of humanity's redemption from sin.

In this regard, the concept of Christus Victor provides the relevant framework for the understanding of salvation as liberation not only from personal sin but also from social and spiritual oppressions; aspects that are in consonant with the Acholi Anglican Christians. Worth noting is that, Christ's victory restored not only individual salvation but also the societal communal and cosmic balance disrupted by sin within the Acholi fabric of faith and praxis. Aulén postulated in his concept to the extent that Jesus Christ came down from heaven in order to destroy sin, overcome death and give life to man" (Gerald, 2014, p. 439). Christ's victory over sin as expounded by Gustaf Aulén ensures salvation for the Acholi believer. In fact, Aulén looks at the victory over Satan, the instigator of sin as central to salvation (Gustaf, 2008, p. 4)

In aligning the Acholi world view of sin with the Christus Victor concept, it is worth noting that sin was viewed in the Acholi perspective not just as a moral failure but also as a cosmic and spiritual disruption, malady and adulteration of the life God had intended for them. But in salvation and redemption from sin and death, the Acholi believer now finds comfort in the Apostle Paul's Colossian biblical testament, who asserts that Christ has defeated the spiritual forces, powers and principalities of wickedness, freeing humanity from the bondage and the slavery of sin and evil (Colossians 2:15).

The Christus Victor theory's treatment of sin captures the immediate, physical and metaphysical need and longing of the Acholi believer and that is a conclusive battle and assurance that the devil and the evil it causes manifested in suffering, pain and death have been defeated. Sin was that gateway and eternal enemy that had compromised the Acholi and their wellbeing. In the victorious atoning and propitiatory responsibility of Christ, the Acholi have been reconciled to God the Father.

Of extreme significance is that Christ as the last Adam and true Israel, has accomplished in His victorious battles, once and for all time, to crush the serpent's head and disarm him of the power of evil and sin (Romans 16:20; Colossians 2:14-15). And therefore in repentance the Acholi can receive spiritual sanctification through God's forgiveness embedded in Christ and live victoriously free from the bedeviling urges of sin and its condemning consequences as Paul signifies in Romans 8:1 - saying "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (ESV).

The other important aspect of Christ's victory over sin is that the Acholi upon acceptance of the free gifts of God does not have to revert back to the tiring and ineffective bouquets of atonement, appeasement and sacrificial rituals to the indeterminate deities, spirits, mediums and gods. Christ's victorious sacrifice and defeat of the cause of sin, which is the devil, provided an eternal solution against these maladies that had torturously caged the Acholi because of sin and self-condemnation. The deliverance from sin, an enemy of God and his creation signifies deliverance from evil, because no legal justifiable warrants remained to spiritually suffocate the Acholi believer.

3.2 Christus Victor and Death

The biggest form of human suffering is death, felt either directly or indirectly by those left to shoulder the burden of loss of the departed. Within Acholi traditions and cultures, inexplicable, tragic and sudden deaths are the most painful. It is also common place for the Acholi to attribute deaths to the unchallengeable forces of evil, coming as a result of some vengeful spirits (*Cen*) or unsatisfied mediums (*Ajwaggi*) or unfilled clan and ancestral deities and mediums (*Abila*). Death signifies a final irreparable and irreversible form of defeat, an enemy of humanity and his creator, the Almighty God (1 Corinthians 15:26, Revelations 1:18, 20:14)

In theological equivalence, throughout the history of Christianity in general and the Anglican Acholi in particular, the faith that the believers in Christ had professed, from the onset, looks one riddled with defeat and sufferings and not victory, because even

Christ warned, unless his disciples were willing to carry their cross, they could not follow him (Mathew 16:24). In another instance Christ prepares his disciple for the coming persecution after his death and resurrection (John 15:20). While Paul avers in Philippians that believers too must suffer for Christ (Philippians 1:29). However Horton contends that these events “that appear in the eyes of the world to display “God’s weakness and a failure of Jesus Christ” to establish his kingdom is actually God’s mightiest deed in history” (Horton, 2012, p. 207). It is a demonstration of the victorious Christ, termed Christus Victor, to say the least. The heavens consider this suffering as superficial and temporal, with complete and final victory within the grasp of the believer by faith in Christ.

To the Acholi Anglican believer, the victorious Christ cannot fail, but the frailties of humanity manifested through sin and the devil which is but a temporary injunction, makes man seem to live a defeatist life punctuated with suffering and death. Nonetheless, the Acholi Anglican believes that their present suffering is a foretaste of the end time glory to come as signified in Revelation 21:3b & 4; which denotes that:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (ESV Bible, 2012)

It is for the reasons signified above, that Gustaf Aulén identifies death as a central force defeated through Christ's atonement. He argues that death, along with sin and the devil are a collection of evil principalities and powers that holds man in bondage.

He postulates that within the concept of the Christus Victor, Christ's work must be primarily understood as a victorious divine battle over "pervasive and oppressive enemies" to human existence, that death is a part of (Gustaf Aulén, 2003, p. 55).

Specifically, Aulén asserts regarding death that; "The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil. In this divine drama, death is not merely a biological end but a spiritual power opposed to God's life-giving purposes". (Gustaf Aulén, 2003, p. 55).

The Christus Victor theory places significant emphasis on Christ's victory over death as part of His triumphant victories over the cosmic powers of darkness. By His life, suffering, death and resurrection, Christ "destroyed the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). This victory ensures eternal life for the Acholi, addressing not only the fear and power of death but also offering assurance to the Acholi believer, that the superintendent of death that is Satan has been defeated.

It is for this reason, that Gustaf Aulén identifies death as a central force defeated through Christ's atonement. He argues that death, along with sin and the devil are a collection of evil principalities and powers that holds man in bondage. He postulates that within the concept of the Christus Victor, Christ's work must be primarily understood as a victorious divine battle over "pervasive and oppressive enemies" to human existence, that death is a part of (Gustaf Aulén, 2003).

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It is in this concept of Christus Victor that a definitive hope and victory for the Acholi believer over the gloom and torturous effect of death is found. Gustaf Aulén's emphasis that Christ's victorious resurrection was the ultimate conclusive defeat of the evils of death has significant resonance with the Acholi Anglican believe system.

In fact according to Horton, in Jesus Christ's victorious battles against the devil, the proponent of death embedded in sin; death and hell were demobilized from having the last word in regards to humanity. He adds that “spiritual oppressors and those who perpetuate violence, injustice and suffering throughout the earth have been delivered their own death warrant” (Horton, 2012, p. 206).

The significance of the concept is not just a future hope but a present victory that has freed the Acholi believers from the fear and finality of death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). By conquering death, Christ restored humanity to life in communion with God, affirming that death no longer had dominion over those who are in Christ. This concept further resonates deeply with the Acholi understanding of death as a spiritual reality. It portrays Christ as the conqueror of death, liberating humanity from its fear and bondage (1 Corinthians 15:26). This relegates death from being a weapon of punishment and suffering for the Acholi to an instrument of translation and transition

to the nether world of eternity for those who believe and have confessed the victorious Christ (Ephesians 2:1, Psalms 2:12).

3.3 Christus Victor and the Devil

The pre-Christian Acholi spiritual cosmologies viewed entities such as *Cen* (malevolent spirits), *Joggi* (gods and deities), *Abila* (ancestral and clan deities) and *Ajwaggi* (spirits mediums) as part of a moral order that can be negotiated with through appeasement and atonement rituals. Unfortunately, these evil spirits and deities were by their very nature unpredictable and indeterminate; with calamitous endings for the Acholi and their sacrificial rituals. This is because of the evil nature of these spiritual cosmologies.

The integrative approach within Christus Victor is significant in Acholi Anglicans' spiritual and social contexts, where systemic evil and spiritual warfare are tangible realities of faith. Aulén contrasts the Christus Victor concept with the legalistic and moralistic perspectives of atonement, emphasizing its narrative of liberation from evil. He authoritatively states that, "the central theme of the Christus Victor model is the triumphant liberation of humanity from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil, accomplished through Christ's victory" (Gustaf, 2008, p. 5).

In postulating this, Aulén agreed with the early Church fathers' theology that sin, death and the devil are essentially the same things and he likewise believed that when Jesus Christ died on the Cross, he was destroying not only sin and death, but

their ultimate cause, the devil. Like Aulén, the early church rightly believed that it was “this cosmic battle against satanic influences that was the deepest purpose of Christ’s mission and ministry and it is therefore in this context that Christ’s victory over sin and death had to be understood” (Gerald, 2014, p. 440).

Byaruhanga contends that through his life, suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ won the victory over Satan, setting humanity free to live in harmony with God. To this extent, Christ is seen in the New Testament as the victor over Satan, having delivered humanity from the devil’s bondage (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 79). In fact the apostle Paul asserts that Christ made a public spectacle of the devil, triumphing over them openly (Colossians 2:15). This is the assurance of faith that the Acholi believer was looking forward to, that the devil and all his enslaving demonic forces had been neutralized in Christ’s cosmic battles.

In reviving the concept of Christus Victor, Aulén Gustaf added credibility to the belief that the devil had indeed held humanity in captivity and there had indeed been the need for a savior (Gerald, 2014, p. 439). The argument that the church’s nature of salvation centered on a victorious God, who through Christ, waged a victorious battle is indeed a valid argument to the Acholi Anglican believers, whose hope in faith centers on the all victorious Christ, a total point of departure from the Acholi atheist, animist and traditionalist practices. In this concept, the Acholi finally found a doctrine that supersedes the torturous spiritual cosmologies and evil that had enslaved them.

Regarding this torturous evil cosmologies, Aulén asserts that: “God in Christ carried out a victorious conflict against the powers of evil which are hostile to His will. This constitutes Atonement, because the drama is a cosmic drama, and the victory over the hostile powers brings to pass a new relation, a relation of reconciliation, between God and the world” (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 80).

The centrality of evil and the devil within the concept of *Christus Victor* gains additional significance when seen from the perspective of the African religious cosmological systems in general with a myriad of spiritual forces; both benevolent and malevolent, perceived to impact humanity significantly (Mbiti J, 2015, pp. 203 - 205). These forces include ancestors, spirits, and deities, seen as integral to maintaining or disrupting societal harmony, with sin and evil, deemed not only as moral issues but also spiritual disruptions caused by malevolent forces (Mbiti J, 2015, pp. 203 - 205).

According to Benno, “a cursory reading of post-colonial, sub-Saharan African theology from a variety of traditions displays the pervasiveness of the concept of the *Christus Victor* theory in a wide range of African Christian movements and theologies” (Benno, 2017, p. 2). For example, Mbiti asserts that in African spirituality, “Jesus is seen as the *Christus Victor* above all other things (Mbiti John, 1972).” And to a great extent, (Benno, 2017) citing (Mbiti, 2002) contends that the African belief systems puts significant aspects of its faith and practices on the Creator and the Father of the Victorious Jesus Christ. (Benno, 2017, p. 2)

The Christus Victor theory finds further resonance within these African cosmologies; especially with its emphasis on the all-conquering Christ, with victories over these cosmic evil powers. Moreover, the Christus Victor theory aligns with the African cultural perspective as it portrays Christ's atonement as a victory over the finite cosmic evil powers so prevalent within these African cultural setting.

With specific emphasis to the Acholi cosmologies and their spirituality both from a pre-Christian and post Christian perspective, It should be borne in mind that the Acholi spirituality and faith centered on various spiritual entities, such as "*Jok*" (gods, deities and spirits), "*Cen*" (vengeful spirits), "*Tibo*" (spirits of the living dead) "*Abila*" (Ancestral and Clan deities) and "*Ajwaggi*" (Spirit Mediums). These Acholi cosmologies were a combination of both benevolent and malevolent forces, which interacted with both the physical and metaphysical world of the Acholi People. However, the malevolent forces caused so much suffering to the people, and it is here that the Christus Victor theory is embraced and celebrated as liberating and critical in espousing Christ's triumphal victory over the devil.

The Acholi experiences and suffering from evil is relatable to the Apostle Paul's assertion. It is therefore comforting from the perspective of the Christus Victor theory that Christ is the ultimate eternal hope of the Acholi people. The Apostle Paul affirms in Colossians asserting that, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Colossians 2:15, ESV).

It is distinctively clear that in Aulén espousing and emphasizing Christ's triumphal victories over sin, death and the devil, the primed spiritual rulers and powers of darkness, with equivalence in the Acholi's *Cen* (malevolent gods, spirits and deities); the Acholi believer automatically found deep resonance in the understanding of these pervasive and evil spiritualities as defeated by Christ (Katongole, 2011, p. 72).

In the defeat of the vices of *Cen* (malevolent gods, spirits and deities); *Ajwaggi* (Spirit mediums), *Abila* (Clan and ancestral deities) and others; Christus Victor affirmed to both the Acholi believer and non-believer, that their suffering and fear of the bedeviling evil cosmologies in their spirituality had been dealt with by the Christ.

In reinforcing Christus Victor's explanation of the defeat of Satan and his evil cosmologies, Horton asserts that the victorious Christ has abrogated the powers of Satan and cast him out and in the process Christ has healed the sick, reconciled the outcasts of sin to the Father and heralded the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Horton, 2012, p. 206). Of inferred significance and importance to the Acholi is that the victorious Christ has driven the devil from God's holy garden, restored God's reign on earth (in Acholi), crushed the head of the serpent, and disarmed the devil of his bedeviling and torturous cosmologies (Horton, 2012, p. 206). Therefore the suffering of the Acholi believers is in their past and not in their present state of salvation.

The other significant aspect of the Christus Victor theory to the Acholi believer is that in Christ's triumphal defeat of the oppressive and evil rulers of the darkness of this

world; Christ earned the place of the one and only divine mediator before God for the Acholi Christians, because His atoning sacrifice was accepted as sufficient by God. The salvation of the Acholi means that they have replaced as their mediator, the unpredictable mediatory spiritual entities.

This mediatory substitution signifies freedom for the Acholi people from the oppressive forces that had bedeviled them with Christ as their supreme Mediator. Scripturally, the apostle Paul lends credence to this notion, writing in Timothy that; “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). With the reorientation of mediatory allegiance of the Acholi believers, their confessions, prayer, veneration and worship are now offered in the name of the victorious Jesus Christ (Mathew 28:18) or the Trinity, in the name of God: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

It is on this basis that we can conclude that in Christus Victor, a definitive and conclusive theory able not only to explain the past predicament of the Acholi believer, but also to demonstrate that in the Victorious Christ, the challenges of the bedeviling cosmologies of the Acholi spirituality signified in sin, death and the enslaving works of Satan have been dealt with. This is total deliverance for the Acholi, a signification that the evil enslaving cosmologies are now in their pre-Christian past.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: CHRISTUS VICTOR WITHIN THE ACHOLI BELIEF SYSTEMS

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the embedded nature of the concept of Christus Victor in the pre and post-Christian Acholi belief systems and evaluates the Acholi attempts of self-atonement and redemption in their pre-Christian life and the resultant impacts of the concepts of Christus Victor as expounded by the Missionaries.

In the Acholi pre and post-Christian cosmologies are embedded the spiritual and cultural practices of appeasement and atonement, restitution and reconciliation, cleansing, renewal and the need for redemption from the malevolent spiritual entities which at times presented themselves as benevolent spirits. These were signified as *Joggi* (gods, deities and spirits), *Cen* (vengeful spirits), *Tibo* (spirits of the living dead) *Abila* (Ancestral and Clan deities) and *Ajwaggi* (Spirit Mediums).

Within these Acholi constellations of spiritual entities, are systematic resonance in principle and treatment with Gustaf Aulén's concept of Christus Victor, particularly in their understanding of cosmic battles, spiritual oppression, and the quest for communal harmony. These parallels provided an enriched framework for understanding the integration of the gospel into the Acholi concepts of reconciliation, restitution, and redemption through sacrificial atonement and appeasement as means of spiritual liberation from evil.

These are presented in detail within the Acholi spiritualities as follows:

4.1 Pre Christian Acholi Spirituality

The pre-Christian Acholi developed complex religious and cosmological worldviews that emphasized the interplay between spiritual forces and harmony within the community through processes of active and ongoing reconciliation, restitution, cleansing, renewal and redemption embedded in their sacrificial appeasements and atonement rituals aimed at the achievement of spiritual and cosmological balance and freedom from evil.

In order to achieve these spiritual and cosmological balance and redemption from evil; they held a worldview centered on spiritual interconnectivity with faith in a believe systems that recognizes various spiritual entities. The cosmological entities included the following objects of worship and veneration; *Joggi* (gods, deities and spirits), *Cen* (vengeful spirits), *Tibo* (spirits of the living dead) *Abila* (Ancestral and Clan deities) and *Ajwaggi* (Spirit Mediums). These were and still are a combination of benevolent and malevolent forces, which interacted both with the physical and metaphysical world of the Acholi People and were believed to directly influence the daily lives of individuals and communities (Mbiti JS, 2015, pp. 45-47).

These Acholi spiritual entities were perceived as agents that could bring blessings or curses depending on how they were appeased or offended. For instance, *Cen* (vengeful spirits) or *Ajwaggi* (spirit mediums) and *Abila* (Clan deities) were thought to cause illness or misfortune as forms of punishment for moral or social infractions or sin (Oruka, 2017, pp. 102-104). Generally, the Acholi considerations around *Joggi*

(gods), *Cen* (evil or vengeful spirits); *Tibo* (spirits of the living dead or departed relatives), *Ajwaggi* (spirit mediums) and *Abila* (Ancestral and Clan spiritual cosmologies) tended to have similar treatments across families, cultures, clans, communities and tribes.

In this pre-Christian Acholi spirituality, moral and social harmony and traditional reconciliation (*Mato Oput*) was essential for maintaining the balance between the spiritual and physical realms. However rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies (*Tumu Kir*) were central to addressing disruptions caused by sin or spiritual affliction or the acts of profanities against traditional norms and customs (*Timo Kir*) or in the events of causing accidental deaths (*Nek Alany*) with appeasements accompanied by compensatory justice or restitution (*Culo Kwo*) or appeasement, atonement or redemption (*Tumu Kir*) (Tiéno, 2010, pp. 134-136). These rituals often involved community participation and were aimed at reconciling offenders with the spiritual world, the community, and the long gone ancestral spirits - the living dead.

Additionally, the Acholi performed ritual sacrifices to appease ancestral spirits, gods, spirits of deities and other spiritual forces that were believed to aid the people in order to heal and cleanse the community of unruly evil spirits, commonly termed or known as *Cen* (evil and malevolent spirits). For example, the ritual *Tumu Kir* (ritual appeasement sacrificial cleansing and atonement) involved the slaughter of animals without defects or imperfections, such as goats and sheep, in order to restore spiritual balance after offenses have been committed or affronts against spiritual

deities have occurred and was therefore done as a means towards compensatory justice, reconciliation, atonement and appeasement. These sacrificial practices emphasized the need for tangible spiritual actions and rituals in order to address spiritual disruptions and maintain harmony and spiritual balance with nature.

These rituals which often involved community participation were aimed at reconciling offenders with the spiritual world, the community, and world of the living dead. It should be noted that both scripturally and within the concept of Christus Victor theory, the principle of restoration of cosmic harmony between humanity and God is emphasized. These concepts of Acholi atonement, reconciliation, appeasements and eventual spiritual deliverance, redemption and salvation are explained hereunder.

4.1.1 Matu Oput as a means of Spiritual & Human Reconciliation

In the context of the Acholi spiritual cosmologies and culture, *Matu Oput* (traditional reconciliation) and *Tumu Kir* (appeasement, redemption and atonement) were significant in restoring harmony and spiritual balance as the respective deities and spirits were presumed appeased and if there were sins involved, then the rituals and sacrifices were presumed sufficient for that particular atonement and appeasement.

Within the Acholi spiritualities, *Matu Oput* is an ongoing cultural ritual that predates Christianity and has lived on within the Christian practice of the Acholi Anglicans, although it is considered fetish by a number of believers. This is because the practical process of *Matu Oput* involves the exchange of traditional medicine gourds and

calabashes filled with liquefied bitter herbs (*Oput*) that the aggrieved and the accused parties share as signs of remission and forgiveness of sins and wrongs, normalization of relationships, and an end to wars and hostilities.

One of the spiritual significance and connotations of *Matu Oput* is its outcome of reconciliation of the parties with the spiritual superintending deities of the respective clans and families so that misfortunes and omens were avoided. The spiritual world of the Acholi were believed to appropriate evil and punishments to parties that went about causing problems and misfortunes against others without atoning for those wrongs. The wrongs and enmities ranged from individuals, families, communities, clans and tribes, involving multiple deities (*Joggi*) and Ancestral shrines (*Abila*).

The *Matu Oput* ritual was therefore a sign of closure to these individual or community or clan or even tribal infractions and wrongs and a public declaration that there were no more problems and that the offenders were “remorseful”. The whole society or community were witnesses and once the final blessings had been administered using hyssop leaves (*Goyo Ayo*), this matter was considered closed and the spirits appeased and one who relapsed in this wrong would now be rightly punished by the gods and deities. Thereafter, the whole community of people and the world of the spirits shared in the celebration of the new found peace with sacrificial animals, mostly perfect goats, bulls and sheep offered, signifying an end to wars and hostilities.

4.1.2 Tumu Kir as a means of Cleansing, Appeasement and Atonement

Relatedly, *Tumu Kir* (ritual cleansing, sacrificial atonement and appeasement) which signified a deeper spiritual process with significant cosmological meaning than *Matu Oput* was the other Acholi spiritual remedy in the event of abominable acts or infractions either against man or gods or spirits or ancestors. While both have the effect of reconciliation and atonement, *Tumu Kir* adds the aspect of appeasement of the spiritual world, so that if this is not performed, the Acholi, believed strongly that a person or a family that have committed an infraction against another or against the deities or the gods, faces imminent calamity, suffering, severe illness or even death. This arose from an offense or an infraction termed *Timo Kir* (abominable and sacrilegious action or infraction or desolation). *Kir* (abomination) in this case refers to a grievous and serious abomination of severe or desolate magnitude.

Just like *Matu Oput*, *Tumu Kir* equally predates Christianity, but has blended with Christians in their post conversion walk and while also considered “fetish” and “evil” and a disallowable action, bundled up in the constellation of “evil and heathen” actions, its place in non-christened communities remains profound because of its supposed significance in atoning for and redeeming the Acoli from abominations and sacrileges. It is believed that once the rituals of *Tumu Kir* have been rightly performed, with proper sacrifices of animals, specifically perfect sheep, although in some instances blameless goats and cows can also be offered, then an abomination is fully atoned for and the spirits and deities appeased.

In the sacrificial atonement, the blood of the “blameless and innocent” animal is sprinkled on the individual or families with the leader of the ritual uttering specific words of enchantment and deliverance followed by a reciprocal declaration of remorse and repentance by the guilty party or parties. It is then believed that on the account of the blood of “the innocent and blameless dying animal”; death, calamity, bad omen, curses and even suffering have been averted and the sinner or wrong doer is redeemed. The animal dies on behalf of the offender and takes the sins, wrong doing and the impacts of the sin away from the individual, family and the community at large. A celebration in appreciation of the gods and deities follows, with belief that they too are communing with the village or the family or the individual in this celebration. Therefore *Tumu Kir* was believed to correct all the wrongs in *Kir* and restored spiritual balance and cosmological peace in the community, marking an end of that sin or infraction or Abomination.

However, just like it is the case with *Matu Oput*, a repeat of *Kir* or infractions or abominations are normally believed to be catastrophic and the bedeviling impacts of suffering, misfortunes and death are the end results of the offender. Secondly, while Christianity has fully taken hold of the Acholi believer so that the victorious Christ has replaced the routine sacrificial animals, the “physical and practical sense” of these rituals means that Christian will always fall back to them as supposedly “faster and more reliable” solution. This is a “blended” form of cultured Christianity, where the worship of the one true God is complemented with the practice of African religion.

While several other spiritual rituals were and are still practiced by the Acholi community today, these are the most significant ones with direct bearings on the Christus Victor theory as far as the Acholi practice of faith and worship is concerned.

It is therefore worth noting that in the pre-Christian Acholi spiritual cosmologies, moral and social harmony, traditional reconciliation (*Mato Oput*) and self-animist atonement or appeasement or cleansing (*Tumu Kir*) were essential for maintaining the balance between the spiritual and physical realms. This was achieved through ritual sacrifices and ceremonies and were central in addressing disruptions caused by sin or spiritual affliction or the acts of profanities, abominations or aberrations against traditional norms and customs, gods or deities or in the events of causing accidental deaths (*Nek Alany*) with appeasements accompanied by compensatory justice (*Culo Kwo*) (Tiéno, 2010, pp. 134-136). On the whole, the Acholi religious constellations and spiritual belief systems provided a fertile ground for the later adoption and application of the much more comprehensive and complete atonement, the Christus Victor theory of atonement.

However caution must be observed when evaluating the relevance of these rituals in the lives of the Acholi from a spiritual and physical sustainability and effectiveness point of view. While these rituals might have worked as a matter of faith in their local spiritual cosmologies, especially before the knowledge of the Victorious Christ, they were certainly not sustainable because the Acholi remained subject to suffering, calamities and death. The results of the sacrificial appeasements and atonement were

superfluous; the envisaged reconciliation with both worlds - of the living and the dead were defective to say the least, because suffering, pain and death freely followed.

The torturous hand of the devil was heavily against the Acholi because the negotiated solutions as provided for within the rituals of *Tumu Kir and Matu Oput* could not and did not in themselves provide a final and conclusive solution and victory against sin, evil and death. More needed to be done to enable the people to gain permanent freedom and salvation from the bedeviling hands of darkness. Moreover, some of the mediums of atonement and appeasements were man made. In fact the ancestral or clan shrines (*Abila*) that were normally used as a point of contact with the world of the spirits and the deities had always been dedicated to specific spirits of the living dead or at times the ancestral spirits, who were supposed to guarantee the effectiveness of these rituals. The challenge came when the *Abila spirits* “revolted” against the people, ushering in severe upheavals and long periods of sufferings.

These Acholi cosmologies did not therefore provide the salvation and deliverance that the Acholi were looking for in their gods and deities. Moreover the processes were laborious, repetitive and expensive with a myriad of deities, gods and mediums. The Acholi could not for certain obtain a vicarious atonement and appeasement and therefore continued to look forward to the future for a solution that could one day deliver them from the stranglehold of evil, manifested in their suffering, pain, sicknesses and death.

On the whole, the pre-Christian Acholi religious constellations and spiritual belief systems provided a fertile ground for the later adoption and application of the much more comprehensive and complete atonement, the Christus Victor concept of atonement, with systematic resonances in principle and meanings such as emphasis on atonement, redemption, spiritual triumph, communal harmony, and reconciliation.

4.1.3 The Acholi deliverance in the Christus Victor theory

The concept of Christus Victor, introduced through the works of the Missionaries, provided both a metaphysical and physical way out for the Acholi in their deliverance from evil cosmologies. Gustaf Aulén's concept of Christus Victor offered the Acholi a transformative understanding of spiritual liberation, shifting their focus from appeasement to victory, and from temporary rituals to eternal redemption in Christ.

The integrative approach within Christus Victor is significant in Acholi Anglicans' spiritual and social contexts, where systemic evil and spiritual warfare are tangible realities of faith. Aulén contrasts the Christus Victor concept with the legalistic and moralistic perspectives of atonement, emphasizing its narrative of liberation from evil. He authoritatively states that, "the central theme of the Christus Victor model is the triumphant liberation of humanity from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil, accomplished through Christ's victory" (Gustaf, 2008, p. 5).

In postulating this, Aulén agreed with the early Church fathers' theology that sin, death and the devil are essentially the same things and he likewise believed that

when Jesus Christ died on the Cross, he was destroying not only sin and death, but their ultimate cause, the devil. Like Aulén, the early church rightly believed that it was “this cosmic battle against satanic influences that was the deepest purpose of Christ’s mission and ministry and it is therefore in this context that Christ’s victory over sin and death had to be understood” (Gerald, 2014, p. 440).

The theory posits through the His life, suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ won the victory over Satan, setting humanity free to live in harmony with God. To this extent, Christ is seen in the New Testament as the victor over Satan, having delivered humanity from the devil’s bondage (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 79). In fact the apostle Paul asserts that Christ made a public spectacle of the devil, triumphing over them openly (Colossians 2:15). This is the assurance of faith that the Acholi believer was looking forward to, that the devil and all his enslaving demonic forces had been neutralized in Christ’s cosmic battles.

Regarding the torturous evil cosmologies, whose key principal the devil, Jesus Christ defeated, Aulén asserts that: “God in Christ carried out a victorious conflict against the powers of evil which are hostile to His will. This constitutes Atonement, because the drama is a cosmic drama, and the victory over the hostile powers brings to pass a new relation, a relation of reconciliation, between God and the world” (Byaruhanga, 2005, p. 21)

The centrality of evil and the devil within the concept of Christus Victor gains additional significance when seen from the perspective of the African religious cosmological systems in general and the Acholi spiritualities in particular with a myriad of both malevolent and benevolent spiritual forces; all perceived to significantly influence humanity (Mbiti J, 2015, pp. 203 - 205). These spiritual forces include ancestral spirits and deities, seen as integral to maintaining or disrupting societal harmony, with sin and evil, deemed not only as moral issues but also spiritual disruptions caused by malevolent forces (Mbiti J, 2015, p. 205).

The concept of Christus Victor theory emphasizes Christ's victorious and triumphal defeat of these evils, so that Satan's hold and power over humanity in regards to sin, death, and evil have been neutralized. This narrative of Christ's victorious spiritual conquest and liberation resonates deeply within both the pre-and post-Christian Acholi belief systems, with the recognition of the existence of groups of crippling and bedeviling spiritual cosmologies that required a superior and divine savior.

With the above discussions, the specific Acholi deliverance by the victorious Christ as expounded in the Christus Victor theory in the context of sin, death and the devil can be exhaustively examined as follows:

Of key significance is the principle of restoration and reconciliation. Within the concept of Christus Victor, Aulén emphasizes the principle of restorative reconciliation between humanity and God. Through the Victorious Christ in His

conclusive battle over sin and the spiritual forces of darkness Jesus Christ did not only redeemed man but also reconciled creation back to God by atoning for the sins of humanity and by His triumphal victory over the devil. This resonates with the Acholi concept of reconciliation termed *Matu Oput*, and atonement termed, *Tumu Kir*.

The restorative and atoning outcomes in the Acholi cosmologies mirror the Christus Victor theory's redemptive and restorative concepts achieved by Jesus Christ. But most importantly is that in the victorious Christ, the Acholi found a realistic and definitive solution towards reconciliation and restoration. Through the rituals of *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* in their pre-Christian past, the Acholi had for generations unsuccessfully undertaken these spiritual rituals to sets of deities and gods and mediums that seems to matter, but whose responses where at best a charade and at worst a continuation of the bedeviling suffering of the people. Suffering from evil had become a mainstay of their spirituality, but in Christ, they found deliverance, through faith without the need to sacrifice, appease or self-atone for anything or to anyone.

The Acholi's biggest predicament was the suffering from evil as a result of satanic attacks manifested in sicknesses, omens, curses, suffering and death. While they undertook extensive measures to atone for their sins, abominations, infractions, aberrations and even sacrileges by appeasement of the gods and deities through innumerable sacrificial rituals of *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* and several other lesser but equally significant rituals such as *Culo Kwor* (restitution for unintended deaths) *Keto Wer* (animal intestinal atonement rituals), *Tedo Jok* (twin rituals) and many others,

these rituals did not in any way deliver the Acholi or provide a permanent redemption from their sufferings or put an end to the malicious evil deaths. It was until later, through the missionary exposition of the good news of the victorious Christ that the Acholi, by faith found reprieve from their torturous life and sufferings.

Relatedly, within the concept of the Christus Victor embedded in the Victorious Christ, the Acholi found a conqueror and healer, who through his life, death and resurrection defeated the devil, his evil cosmologies and the entire bedeviling demoniac world that the Acholi had been prisoner to. Their faith in Jesus Christ is reinforced by the fact that He is not just a resurrected man, but God and God's Son. While they have been accustomed to dealing with a mix of visible and invisible, indeterminate and probably dead gods and deities, they are now in their christened state dealing with a God who lives for eternity, the creator of the universe, the source of their salvation and the victorious conqueror of evil.

To the Acholi, this wholesome observation of the Victorious Christ is not far from the often holistic notion of salvation in both African Traditional Religion (ATR) and in many contemporary expression of Christianity, (Benno, 2017, p. 8). This treatment and expectation of the victorious Christ within Acholi Anglican Christianity comes from their pre-Christian experience where challenges such as illnesses were considered consequences of curses, with divine blessing expected to touch all areas of life. These are the same expectations that were in the pre-Christian Acholi, where spiritual interventions encompassed the metaphysical, physical and psychological

wellbeing of the society. The difference is that in Christendom, the all-conquering and victorious Christ is the superintendent of people's health and wellness, a real benefit, first in the here and now and later in eternity through the Victorious Christ.

Human suffering and the manifestation of evil is normally climaxed in the tragedy of death and the Acholi knew this too well in their days of self-struggle, through various defective, laborious and costly rituals. If the rituals of *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* could atone for the sins of the Acholi and appease their gods and deities, death would not have been an enemy, because it would have been a defeated foe. The pain and sufferings as a consequence of death and related evil is felt directly and indirectly by those left to shoulder the burden of loss of the departed ones. Within Acholi traditions and cultures, inexplicable, tragic and sudden deaths are the most painful.

It is common place for the Acholi to attribute deaths to the unchallengeable forces of evil, coming as a result of some vengeful spirits (*Cen*) or unsatisfied spiritual mediums (*Ajwaggi*) or unfilled clan cleansing, atonement and appeasement rituals (*Abila*). Death signifies a final irreparable and irreversible form of defeat, an enemy of humanity and his creator, the Almighty God (Corinthians 15:26; Revelations 1:18, 20:14). However, the beauty of the victorious good news is that in Jesus Christ, the final battle of redemption and conquest of evil also meant the defeat of death.

Within the concept of *Christus Victor*, the detailed exposition of the triumphal victories over sin, death and the devil also meant triple victories for the Acholi in

Christ so that in this victorious successes, Jesus Christ, is trusted to have once and for all time defeated the cosmological agents of death and their authority which is rooted in sin. This provides a firm foundation of assurance that in the victorious Christ, the Acholi can rest assured that death as an enemy is a defeated foe and their firm faith in this finished work is a guarantee of salvation and redemption from death as had been embedded in their pre-Christian cosmologies.

While individual salvation was significant, the Acholi as a communal people desired deliverance for the whole society, community and tribe. It is worth noting that the communal nature of Acholi rituals mirrored the communal implications of Christ's atonement as espoused in Aulén's concept of Christus Victor. The Christus Victor theory's emphasis on Christ's victorious liberation of entire creation from spiritual bondage reinforces the Acholi worldview that redemption is not merely individualistic but collective - emphasizing the wellbeing of the society over individual wellbeing.

From the Acholi spirituality, whenever *Matu Oput* or *Tumu Kir* rituals were performed, they were undertaken in the context of the whole family, clan, society and at times the whole tribe. This is because the Acholi pre-Christian society was more communal in nature than individualistic; the individual was because the whole society is - the ultimate expression of Ubuntu. And while Christ satisfied God the Father on behalf of creation, the Acholi rituals were presumed to have satisfied all their deities and gods on behalf of whole families, communities, clans and at times, the whole tribe.

In postulating the complete defeat of the devil and his related cosmologies, Gustaf Aulén inadvertently signified that the bedeviling cosmological forces within the Acholi spirituality such as the spiritual deities and gods known as *Cen* (malevolent gods, spirits and deities); *Ajwaggi* (Spirit mediums), *Abila* (Clan deities) and others had been defeated too, affirming to the Acholi that their suffering and fear of the bedeviling cosmologies in their pre-Christian spirituality had been dealt with.

In reinforcing Christus Victor's explanation of the defeat of Satan and his evil cosmologies, Horton asserts that Jesus Christ abrogated the powers of Satan and cast him out and in the process Christ healed the sick, reconciled the outcasts of sin to the Father and heralded the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Horton, 2012, p. 206). More authoritatively moreover is that the victorious Christ has driven the devil from God's holy garden, restored God's reign on earth, crushed the head of the serpent, and disarmed the devil of his bedeviling and torturous powers (Horton, 2012, p. 206). These are the implied assurances to the Acholi people that their spiritual woes have been dealt with by Christ; an affirmation of their deliverance and salvation.

Significantly important in the Acholi spirituality was the idea of spiritual mediation. The Christus Victor theory affirmed to the Acholi believer that in Christ's triumphal defeat of the oppressive and evil rulers of the darkness of this world; Christ earned the place of the one and only divine mediator before God for the Acholi Christians, because His atoning sacrifice had been sufficiently accepted by God. The salvation of the Acholi means that they have replaced as their mediator, the unpredictable,

bedeviling mediatory spiritual entities that had been torturous to them for generations.

This mediatory substitution signifies freedom for the Acholi from the spiritual forces that had oppressed them with Christ now as their supreme Mediator. Scripturally, the apostle Paul lends credence to this notion, writing in Timothy that; “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). With the reorientation of mediatory allegiance of the Acholi believer, their confessions, prayer, veneration and worship are now offered in the name of the victorious Jesus Christ (Mathew 28:18) or the Trinity, in the name of God: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

It is therefore not in doubt that Gustaf Aulén’s concept of Christus Victor offered the Acholi a transformative understanding of their spiritual liberation, shifting the focus from appeasement to victory, and from temporary rituals to eternal redemption in Christ. Therefore in their christened state of worship, the Acholi Christians shook off the shackles of their pre-Christian laborious and at times futile rituals and embraced the victorious Christ, who once and for all time, fought a victorious and conclusive atonement and reconciliation battle; defeating sin, death and the devil and the Acholi have as a result, received redemption from all the bedeviling spiritualities in their Pre-Christian past.

It is on this basis that we can conclude that in Christus Victor, a definitive and conclusive theory able not only to explain the past predicament of the Acholi believer, but also to demonstrate that in the Victorious Christ, the challenges of the bedeviling cosmologies of the Acholi spirituality signified in sin, death and the enslaving works of Satan have been dealt with. The Acholi believer should within the concept of the Victorious Christ live a life of hope and victory relinquishing fear towards the evils of this world for faith in the things of God. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the gospel and the related doctrines that the Church Missionary Society expounded to the Acholi people, so that in the knowledge of the victorious Christ and their accomplished redemption the Acholi Anglican now lives in victory.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: THE MISSIONARIES AND THE CHRISTUS VICTOR THEORY

This chapter examines the role of the missionaries in line with the exposition of the Christus Victor theory to the Acholi. The theory emphasizes Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil providing a compelling framework for understanding the work of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Acholi. This theory shaped their teachings, theologies, doctrines, and the overall impact of their missionary work.

For emphasis, the Acholi are part of the Nilotic greater ethnic grouping originally from Southern Sudan but now covering a greater part of Northern Uganda. Kevin Ward writes that Christianity first came to the Acholi in 1903, through the invitation of the local Payira clan Chief, Rwot (Chief) Awic (Ward, 1991). In this regard, (Otim, 2020) affirms that Rwot Awic was the first Acholi chief to invite Christian missionaries - the Church Missionary Society (CMS) - to Acoliland, even though he initially rejected conversion to Christianity until 1943, when he converted and took on the biblical name, Abraham, also pronounced "Iburaim" in Acholi (Otim, 2020, p. 58). The evangelical work of the missionaries started in Acholi in 1903.

The theory of Christus Victor envisages a battle that only the divine can overcome. This is the essence of the Christus Victor theory. The theory presents a significant spiritual framework depicting a divine battle between Christ and the forces of evil, manifested in sin, death and the devil; with the ultimate and consummate eternal victory achieved by Christ against these forces of darkness; freeing humanity from its grip (Boaheng, 2023, p. 13). The theory of Christus Victor therefore holds that, by his

death and resurrection, Christ triumphantly defeated the evil cosmologies which had held humanity in bondage, thereby atoning for their sins, redeeming humanity and renewing the relationship between God the Father, and humanity (Gustaf Aulén, 2003). Boaheng contends that “Christ's service, love, meekness, and sacrifice demonstrate his victory in this ultimate battle” (Boaheng, 2023, p. 13).

In evangelizing the Acholi heartland with the new victorious message of Christ, the missionaries encountered a people with an entrenched culture, spiritual cosmologies and mature belief systems. As Mbiti contends, the lack of developed and written doctrines was never an indication of a lack of faith on the part of the African people, for their religious system had been transmitted through human experiences and contacts, which had been alive for generations. The whole fabric of the African societal and human experience was religious (Mbiti, 2002, p. 3).

The success of the Missionary evangelisation mission to the Acholi depended on the quality of their exposition of the concept of the Victorious Christ, because there had to be something more compelling and better than what the Acholi already had in their cosmologies to convince them that indeed the proposition being offered by the missionaries was worth trying due to the “sound” of its liberating and redeeming impacts and probable salvation from their suffering, pain and cosmological torture.

The ensuing discussion captures the details of the teachings, work and ministry of the Church Missionary Society to the Acholi in relation to the theory of Christus Victor.

The concept of Christus Victor, with its emphasis on Christ's triumphal victories over sin, death, and the devil, continues to hold profound significance in modern communities of believers today across the world and particularly here in Africa, but specifically within the Acholi Anglican believers. This is because the concept offers a framework that not only addresses salvation quests but also communal and systemic struggles against evil, oppression, fear and death.

The concept resonates deeply in today's orthodox believing biblical world, where Christians grapple with the spiritual and existential challenges of modern day life. This is ably exemplified by Wright's explanation, denoting that the Christus Victor concept provides hope and empowerment by reaffirming "God's ultimate victory over all that threatens human flourishing" (Wright, 2006, p. 106)

In contemporary communities of believers today, the concept of Christus Victor is particularly popular due to its holistic approach to salvation, viewing the atonement concept not only as the forgiveness of individual sins, a final and definitive gateway to salvation, but also as liberation from spiritual and structural evils. As Gorman explains, this perspective emphasizes the cosmic dimensions of the atonement, portraying Christ as the divine liberator who "disarms powers and authorities, rendering them powerless through the cross" (Gorman, 2009, p. 84).

This all-encompassing atonement view makes the concept of Christus Victor specifically relevant in addressing topical spiritual subject matters such as spiritual

oppression, systemic injustice, and communal reconciliation. Moreover, the Christus Victor theory resonates within different cultural contexts, particularly in settings like Acholi Anglican communities where the spiritual world is perceived as deeply intertwined with the daily life of the believers.

In Africa generally, the narrative of Christ's victory over evil powers aligns with cultural understandings of spiritual warfare, providing theological grounding for deliverance practices and communal restoration. This aspect is well demonstrated by Schreiter who observes that "the Christus Victor model embodies a powerful response to the lived realities of fear and oppression, making it a source of strength and transformation for marginalized communities" (Schreiter, 2015, p. 129)

In Acholi community today, this theory holds profound significance for this Anglican Christians, particularly in their understanding of the cosmic powers of the devil and related spiritual warfare, sin and death. This concept emphasizes Christ's victory over the cosmic powers of sin, death, and evil, aligning closely with the Acholi's cosmological framework and their lived experiences and is signified in many ways, both spiritually and through lived experiences.

These can be chronicled more specifically as follows:

5.1 The Legacy of the Missionaries in the Evangelisation of Acholi

5.1.1 Salvation and Liberation from Evil

At the core of the Acholi expectation was a longing for a dispensation that would save them from the torturous effect of evil that was embedded within the Acholi traditional spirituality. It is in this that the Missionaries basing on the theory of Christus Victor presented Christianity as a triumphant faith that offered liberation from spiritual torture and from the power of evil. The Missionaries framed the pre-Christian Acholi spirituality, such as the worship of *Joggi* (spirits, gods and deities), *Abila* (Ancestral and clan shrines), *Ajwaggi* (Mediums) and many others as manifestations of evil that Christ had already defeated (Kollman, 2005, p. 89)

The missionaries demonstrated the potency of the liberating power of Christ as accomplished on the Cross using biblical examples of Christ's victorious defeats of these evils who were opposed to his kingdom as signified in his miracles, signs and wonders over demons, evil diseases and death; thereby drawing parallels to the Acholi's struggle with destructive malevolent forces in their pre-Christian past (Pirouet, 1978, p. 78). This approach of practical and spiritual evangelism by the missionaries was in resonance with the Acholi people, who were experienced in evil spiritual warfare within their spiritual cosmologies which was laden with a myriad of spirits, deities and gods that they had tried but unsuccessfully to appease and satisfy using their rituals of *Tumu kir and Matu Oput* (Behrend, 1999, p. 45).

In emphasizing salvation not just as spiritual but also as physical and practical victory, the missionaries offered the Acholi a spiritual escape route from their cosmological predicaments. On this, Omara contends that the missionary evangelisation emphasis of Christ's total victory over the evil spiritual cosmologies "provided powerful alternative to traditional spiritual practices" such as the sacrificial offertories to the several Acholi cosmologies signified in *Joggi, Abila and Ajwaggi* (Omara, 1984, p. 23).

The missionaries taught the Acholi that Jesus had already defeated the evil spiritual cosmologies in the Acholi pre-Christian spiritual life and offered the Acholi believers complete liberation, redemption and metaphysical protection from their torturous cosmologies through faith in the victorious Christ (Behrend, 1999, p. 45). This provided a powerful alternative to the traditional spiritual practices, such as the Acholi sacrificial, appeasement and atonement offerings embedded in their rituals of *Matu Oput* and *Tumu Kir* or mediums such as *Ajwaggi* or gateways such as *Abila* (Pirouet, 1978). It is believed that the Church Missionary Society's' emphasis on the victorious deliverance power and authority of Christ over all evil cosmologies was the critical enabler in their evangelistic success, especially in Acholi (Gifford, 1998).

This approach of the missionaries using the victorious aspect of the Christus Victor theory in appealing to the Acholi underlined their intentional strategy in using the Acholi spiritual predicaments to enlist converts and start a cultural revolution that was later to culminate into a permanent transformation of the Acholi, from the worship of innumerable cosmologies to the worship of the one true victorious God.

5.1.2 Victory over Death

The concept of death within the Christus Victor theory is so pronounced because death has remained one of the greatest enemy of humanity and one that the bible signify to be rightly so, as the last enemy to be completely wiped out on the last day (1 Corinthians 15:26).

The missionaries taught the Acholi converts that Christ's resurrection was a decisive and conclusive victory over death, offering the Acholi believers the hope of eternal life, one similar to their folklore dreams - of eternity with the spirits. This missionary message of the defeat of death as espoused in the Christus Victor theory was particularly significant to the Acholi people where death was the greatest source of pain, causing fear and innumerable suffering (Kevin Ward, 1999).

By presenting Christ as the conqueror of death, the missionaries sought to replace the Acholi traditional beliefs about the afterlife which was embedded within their ritualistic past as signified in *Matu Oput* and *Tumu Kir*. Middleton asserts that the Missionaries succeeded in their mission by positioning Christ as the ultimate victor over death, the hope of resurrection for all believers (Middleton, 1994). This view is shared by (Hansen, 1984); who contends that the missionary evangelism approach of positioning the victorious Christ as the conqueror of death provided comfort and hope to the Acholi, especially during periods of pain, suffering, sicknesses and death; because in this Christ, the Acholi had their ultimate hope of victory over death through the victorious Christ, who mastered and defeated death in his resurrection.

5.1.3 Divine Hope

Closely related to the above approach and worthy of noting is that the missionaries used the principle of the resurrection of the victorious Christ to offer hope in the face of pain, suffering and death to the Acholi believers. The missionaries expounded Christ's victory over death as espoused in the Christus Victor theory to assure believers of eternal life, reinforcing the way the Acholi understood mortality, as had been reflected in their pre-Christian folklore lives (Kevin Ward, 1999).

The missionaries' message of hope was specifically relevant to believing communities during seasons of epidemics, wars, and general suffering; with comfort and hope only to be found in Christ who had unassailably conquered sin, death and defeated the devil, rendering all predicaments against the Acholi null and void (Middleton, 1994).

The message of hope as expounded by the missionaries was embedded in the resurrection of Christ and the message provided a fundamental and refreshing framework for understanding death as a defeated enemy and provided a new perspective of looking at the devil as a powerless enemy. These provided a different understanding of the afterlife, based on hope and not fear in the concluded work of Christ, one that aligns with the deep religious African expectation of the afterlife (John Mbiti, 1969).

5.1.4 Salvation as Liberation

The Christus Victor theory of redemption and liberation from sin, death, and the devil also signifies liberation from evil and related spiritual bondages. The Missionaries emphasized that Christ's death and resurrection had broken the power of the devil and freed humanity from the torturous and crippling consequences of sin.

Just as the evil cosmologies in pre-Christian Acholi, especially those termed as *Cen* (Malevolent spirits and deities) were considered enemies of the Acholi, biblical references too refers to these forces superintended by Satan and signified as the devil as enemies of the Almighty God, His victorious Son, Jesus Christ and God's people (Nyende, 2023, p. 93). To this end, It is worth noting that in the final spiritual battle of liberation as reflected in sections of scripture, the victorious Christ shall subjugate and destroy the enemies of God (Satan, demons, evil spirits and the flesh, the world and death) and his people (Nyende, 2023, p. 146); thus ushering in the finality of God's Kingdom for the benefits of all believing Acholi. However in the here and now, the Acholi have been liberated both physically and metaphysically as demonstrated by the missionaries in the exposition of the Christus Victor theory.

This missionary message was particularly significant to the Acholi, who were familiar with the concept of spiritual oppression that had especially been cumbersome and painful in their pre-Christian spiritualities and had therefore sought deliverance from these malevolent forces (Kollman, 2005). This theology of spiritual and cosmological liberation resonated deeply with evangelized African communities, who saw in the

victorious Christ, the ultimate redemption, freedom and deliverance from the cosmological forces of evil that had bedeviled them greatly in their pre-Christian state (Sundkler & Steed, 2000).

5.1.5 Reconciliation and Healing

The Acholi ritual of *Matu Oput* mirrored the biblical message of reconciliation of humanity back to the Father through the victorious Christ. It was only in the decisive victory over sin, death and the devil that humanity was brought back to the Father. The Acholi had tried but in vain to achieve reconciliation with their estranged spiritual cosmologies through the rituals of *Matu Oput* and *Tumu Kir* and so continued in their suffering and pain. However, the missionaries in their message to the Acholi proclaimed that in Christ's victorious death and resurrection; death, sin and the devil, agents of separation from the Father had been defeated, removing all stumbling blocks preventing healing and reconciliation.

This messaging of the missionaries over time heralded the reinterpretation of the Acholi ritual of *Matu Oput* to signify reconciliation with the Father as accomplished by the Son, Jesus Christ both on the Cross and the Grave - with Christ seen as the ultimate agent of reconciliation and mediation (Kollman, 2005). The principle of reconciliation had deep rooted African significance as communities and societies were communal in nature and the wellbeing of all was premised on a reconciled harmony with the spiritual world. Therefore when the missionaries emphasized that in Christ alone was the ultimate reconciliation with both humanity and with God; it was a

welcome message because to these believers, Christianity rooted in Christ was a means of overcoming their social and spiritual divisions (Sundkler & Steed, 2000).

5.1.6 Sacraments

The theory of *Christus victor* fashioned the approach of the missionaries in the evangelisation of the Acholi community in as far as the sacraments were concerned as core theologies of the Anglican Church. The theory enabled the missionaries to present the sacraments as a means of participation in Christ's victorious defeats of sin, death, and the devil. The sacraments were not merely rituals but acts of spiritual empowerment, reconciliation, hope and a continuous representation of and reminder about the victorious Christ in the daily lives of the Acholi believers. While there are multiple sacraments; baptism and the Eucharist were of more pronounced relevance to the Acholi believer, as they aligned more closely to the theory of *Christus Victor*.

In their catechetical teachings, the Missionaries proclaimed that baptism was and is a sacrament of initiation into Christ's victory and asserted that it was a means of liberation from sin and the devil also signified as *Joggi, Ajwaggi, Cen and Abila*; central in Acholi spirituality (Kollman, 2005).

The Missionaries held that by undergoing baptism, the Acholi converts were symbolically cleansed of their sins and absorbed as renewed and redeemed members into the body of the victorious Christ, who had already defeated the devil and all his evil cosmologies. This teaching resonated with the Acholi, who were familiar with

their rituals of purification, atonement, appeasement and spiritual protection as signified in the rituals of *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* (Behrend, 1999).

Baptism was a permanent reminder to the Acholi believer because to participate in it was an assurance of cleansing and renewal, so that one became truly a “new creation” having shared in the victorious death and resurrection of Christ. But most importantly, having partaken and participated in the same cleansing ritual as Christ also did at river Jordan, before embarking on His ministry.

The other critical aspect of the sacraments as propagated by the missionaries and scripture is the Eucharist. The Missionaries emphasized that the Holy Eucharist was significant for spiritual nourishment, with believers sharing in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Missionaries pivoted the theological idea of the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist, providing strength needed for the walk of the believers. For the Acholi, this teaching offered a powerful alternative to their traditional rituals of communal feasting and offering to their deities and gods and mediums signified in *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* (Pirouet, 1978). It is therefore highly believed that the significance the Acholi attached to the Eucharist enabled the missionaries to succeed in their evangelisation mission, because the participation in the sacraments reminded the Acholi of the victory of Christ over all the evil cosmologies that had previously bedeviled them.

The other significant aspect of the Eucharist is spiritual and physical reconciliation with the Father. Just as the Acholi had used the rituals of *Matu Oput* and *Tumu Kir* to reconcile the communities with their estranged deities and among themselves; the Missionaries positioned the Eucharist as that sacrament that reconciled the believer back to the Father through the sacrificial body and blood of the Son, Jesus Christ.

The sacraments were not mere rituals but acts of spiritual empowerment, reconciliation, hope and a continuous representation of and reminder about the victorious Christ in the daily lives of the Acholi believers, but most importantly they are lifelong lessons of salvation and transformation that the missionaries propagated.

From the above discussions, it is overwhelmingly notable that indeed the Christus Victor theory profoundly influenced the messages, theologies, doctrines, and convictions of the Church Missionary Society in their evangelisation of the Acholi so that what the Acholi believer eventually became in their faith and worship was based on the messages and works of the Missionaries modeling the victorious Christ. By framing Christianity as a triumphant faith that was premised on Christ's victorious resurrection and effectual defeat of sin, death, and evil; the missionaries were able to challenge and change the traditional worship and religions of the Acholi while propagating a transformative message of faith based on the victorious Christ.

6 CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

This chapter contains highlights of the key findings, conclusion, and recommendation in regards to the findings and proposals for any possible future study (ies) in relation to the Acholi Christianity as it relates to the Christus Victor theory of atonement.

These are presented hereunder:

6.1 Summary of the Findings

This investigative study examined the sufferings of the pre-Christian Acholi people as a result of the evil cosmologies in their spiritualities, only eventually getting reprieve in the victorious Christ due to the work and ministry of the missionaries. The study evaluated the significance of the Christus Victor theory of atonement in explaining the Acholi challenge and providing a gateway of redemption and salvation through the victorious Christ as manifested in His defeat of sin, death and the devil.

The research noted that the Acholi had suffered tremendously in their pre-Christian past from evil cosmologies in their own spiritual framework, experiencing death, pain, poverty and general suffering. However it was obvious that the faith of the Acholi people in their gods and deities mediated through several Acholi rituals, chief among which were *Matu Oput* (spiritual and physical reconciliation) and *Tumu Kir* (appeasement, atonement and redemption) did not offer them the remedies, redemption and deliverance they had sought for from these gods and deities. Therefore when the missionaries came to Acholi in 1903 with a proposition that seems “too good to be true”, that is the message of the “good news”; the Acholi question

was whether this strange religion could be a source of redemption, freedom and deliverance from their existing evil cosmologies at the time.

It was evident that through the work of the missionaries, based on the principles entailed in the Christus Victor theory, which positioned that Christ had defeated sin, death and the devil, the cause of all these sufferings, the missionaries were able to demonstrate to the Acholi that indeed in the new dispensation of faith based on Jesus Christ, the Son of the most High God, the Acholi were able to receive not only redemption, freedom and deliverance from the torturous cosmologies that had bedeviled them in their pre-Christian past, but also receive salvation from this victorious God, through Jesus Christ, His Son.

The question from the Acholi at the time was how was this possible, if their own deities and gods did not succeed in providing salvation for them, in fact instead becoming the source of their pain and suffering?

The research revealed that the missionaries through an elaborate but simple theology used the same experiences of the Acholi embedded in their spiritual cosmologies to explain that the victories that Christ offers to the Acholi was achieved through his own perfect sacrificial offering upon the Cross and the grave so that in this sacrifice of the incarnate Christ; sin, death and the devil were defeated. The missionaries expounded that with the devil defeated, the cause of the Acholi suffering resident in evil had been demobilized and rendered powerless so that they were of no

consequence. And of sin and death, the missionaries equally positioned the same explanation that with the devil, the source of evil and father of sin neutralized; death which is a result of sin had also been dealt with. The Acholi should not therefore continue to suffer given the efficacy and potency of the all-powerful victorious Christ.

It was equally noted that in these divine victorious solutions that mirrored the Acholi cosmologies and rituals, the Acholi understood that while their practices looked similar, the potency and efficacies were not the same. The Acholi appreciated the fact that their manmade rituals, executed by fellow sinners to their gods, mediums, spirits and deities that were self-conceived and at times manmade, could not have delivered them from their suffering, pain and physical and spiritual death. They learnt that their rituals of *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* while similar in practice and character to the one offered by Christ as espoused in the christus victor theory, where defective and indeterminate in solving the spiritual and physical problems of the Acholi. They therefore accepted the liberating offer of the missionaries because in it, they perceived that if the blood of the perfect God and his death and resurrection is the solution for the sinful and suffering Acholi, then this proposition must really work. However, the question was how was their redemption possible?

The study revealed that It is in the message of salvation as delivered by the missionaries that the question of “the how” was resolved. This was to be in the abandonment of their pre-Christian spiritual practices and in the embrace of this one true God, so that the Christian Acholi worshipped only this God, the Father of Jesus

Christ. Secondly, it was in their being baptized with water and the Holy Spirit, as a gateway of sharing in the finished work of Christ as had been accomplished both on the cross and the grave. Baptism confirmed the Acholi as a member of the body of Christ here on earth and enabled receipt of a victorious assurance of the defeat of sin, the devil and the world, a signification that the forces of evil that had bedeviled the Acholi had been defeated. And thirdly, the gift of the Holy Spirit, with which the Acholi now lived victoriously, through the participation in the Eucharist, that is the “Body and Blood” of Christ, a reminder that they have been saved by this Christ.

The study revealed that, It is in these solutions that the Acholi were fully equipped with the knowledge, the means and the methodologies they required for their salvation, deliverance, redemption and freedom from the bedeviling cosmologies of their past, and moreover, with no need to undertake any costly sacrifices or participate in any more bedeviling rituals or use evil mediatory deities and spirits.

Finally, the research also demonstrated that the christus Victor theory and its eloquent and effective exposition by the missionaries enabled the Acholi to receive the required divine remedies sufficient to stem the onslaught of evil in their physical and spiritual lives and receive not only deliverance, redemption and freedom from these evil cosmologies for their physical and spiritual benefits in the here and now but also received salvation that guarantees eternal life for their dreamt after life.

While the foregone summary suffices in offering a snapshot of this study, the following additional themed outlines equally reinforces this summary:

6.1.1 Christ is the Hope of the Acholi Christians

A key revelation from the study is that the pre-Christian spiritual cosmologies of the Acholi people were insignificant and offered very little hope or victory against perceived malevolent spiritual forces. Moreover it was evident that the harm the deities and spirits caused did not in any way depend on man's behavior and that these evil spirits were by nature evil and whatever men did meant little in terms of their perceived reciprocal response because evil was in their nature and character (Wasswa, 2002, pp. 213-215). This was opposed to the God Almighty and His Son, Jesus Christ, whose nature was inherent goodness, compassion and mercy (Exodus 34:6-7). These cosmologies signified an absence of hope and explained the sufferings and pain the Acholi underwent in their pre-Christian spirituality.

However, the study also revealed that one of the greatest mainstay and escapades of the Victorious Christ is in His defeat of the powers of Satan manifested in the conquest and defeat of the forces of sin and sicknesses that leads to death (Mathew 12:28, Colossians 2:15). This is the greatest gift to the Acholi believer, the opportunity to live a life of hope. As evident from the previous submissions, the Acholi believer in an effort to survive and live for long premised on the hope of the victorious Christ now frequently turns to prayer for healing (James 5:14-15, Mark 16:18c), replacing traditional sacrifices which were offered in futility in appeasement of traditional spirits and deities (*Cen and Jok*) (Katongole, 2011, p. 81).

6.1.2 Jesus Christ is the Divine Mediator of the Acholi Christians

The study revealed that the spiritual world of the Acholi was one heavily intermediated by the spiritual cosmologies in their pre-Christian age. Blood rituals and sacrifices such as *Tumu Kir* and *Matu Oput* were used in *Abila* (ancestral and clan deities) and *Ajwaggi* (spirits mediums) for purposes of mediation with *Joggi* (gods and deities). These Acholi rituals of mediation were ineffectual, laborious and costly with indeterminate results and always resulted into deadly consequences to the people.

However, with the transformative aspect of the Christus Victor theory, the studies revealed that the present mediatory situation is that the Victorious Christ, who triumphantly defeated the rulers of the darkness of this world, and earned the place of the one and only divine mediator before God, is the only mediator for the Acholi Christians; because His atoning sacrifice was accepted as sufficient by God, thus guaranteeing continuous victory for the believing Acholi over sin, death and the devil.

6.1.3 The Christus Victor theory resonated with aspects of Acholi Spirituality

The study also revealed that while certain rituals in the Acholi cosmologies enlightened the believers to the truth and reality of the Christus Victor theory; the practice of the faith in Christ equally borrowed heavily from the Acholi pre-Christian religious setup, practices and cultures. Critically important and of significant emphasis in the present Church in Acholi is that with the over a century of adoption of the Judeo-Christian faith and its practices; one notes a clear continuity between certain aspects of the Acholi African culture in the faith and praxis of the people and

the centrality and understanding of the Christus Victor theory in the practice of faith and worship of the Acholi Christians.

However, the difference between the pre-Christian spiritual practices and the modern practices based on the Victorious Christ, is that the conviction with which the Acholi adherents now look at the *Anglicized* Christ is not born out of fear of some vengeful spirits (*Cen*), deities (*Joggi*) and mediums (*Ajwaggi*) that are inconclusive and indeterminate, but out of adoration and reverence of the Almighty God and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Acholi now look forward to the promised eternity, with hope.

6.1.4 The sacraments signifies the importance of the Christus Victor theory

Finally, from this research, it has been evidentially clear that the Acholi cosmologies had a heavy reliance on their spiritual deities, gods and belief systems intermediated by seasoned elders by means of sacrifices, atonement and reconciliation rituals such as *Matu Oput* and *Tumu Kir*. These and many other rituals were the means by which the Acholi communed with the spiritual world and sought redemption and atonement. These rituals and religious practices mirrored the Christus Victor theory and the related underlying theologies, though pales in significance and effectiveness.

However, in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, the Acholi are joined with Christ and commune with Him through these religious rituals experiencing victory in their daily lives through partaking in the “wine and bread” signified as “the body and blood of Jesus Christ”, in the gathering and fellowship of believers; a reminder of the efficacy of Christus Victor.

6.2 Conclusion from the Study

Several conclusions can be drawn from this research, but the most significant outcome is that in the Christus Victor theory, the pre-Christian Acholi learnt, adjusted, adopted and reoriented their spiritual and theological frameworks to that of a doctrine that guaranteed their freedom and redemption from the torturous cosmologies and evil that had bedeviled them for so long and caused them to stumble, suffer, and in extreme circumstances face both physical and spiritual death. The victorious Christ has indeed saved the believing Acholi from their pre-Christian evil cosmologies, which had been synonymous with pain, suffering and death.

However, while this gift is free for all, the benefit had to be accepted, and with God's love manifested in the freewill principle, this meant that some Acholi chose not to enjoy these gifts and so continued in their pre-Christian traditions and thereby remained captive to the sufferings and pains in those cosmologies.

6.3 Recommendations

While the study demonstrated an unassailable efficacy of the Christus Victor theory because of its origin in Jesus Christ and while there is insurmountable evidence that the pre-Christian Acholi cosmologies and spiritualities had bedeviling spirits and mediums embedded within them, it is characteristic of human beings to always fall back to their pre-Christian cultural practices, worship and spirituality. This has been the case with a number of Acholi Christians, some of whom practice the Christus Victor embedded faith only on Sundays while others have out rightly "backslidden".

From this study, it is imperative that the Church in Acholi deliberately explores appropriate means of evangelism and discipleship of the body of Christ and outreaches to both those in Christ and those not yet in Christ with a simple yet positive message that the victorious Christ that generations in Acholi worshipped and turned to for deliverance, redemption and salvation a century ago is the same Christ in the 21st century. Discipleship and evangelism approaches have to remind believers of the powers embedded in Christ while encouraging the nonbelievers of the benefits of salvation, deliverance and redemption rooted in the victorious Christ.

Secondly and finally, the Church must take deliberate efforts to improve the quality of the message it expounds from scripture. Through trainings and prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit, the quality of exegesis of scripture should clearly demonstrate the efficacy and power of God's word, because the same victorious Christ that Gustaf Aulén espoused in the Christus victor theory, the one who defeated death, sin and the devil is the same one who is the superintendent of the Church today. His victorious message and deeds have not been removed from the church for those who believe.

6.4 Area(s) for possible further study

While this study has deployed all technical and literary resources in the achievement of the objectives and purpose for which it was conceived and conducted, further studies may in future be necessary along other related doctrines of soteriology from a cultural perspective of the Acholi Anglicans.

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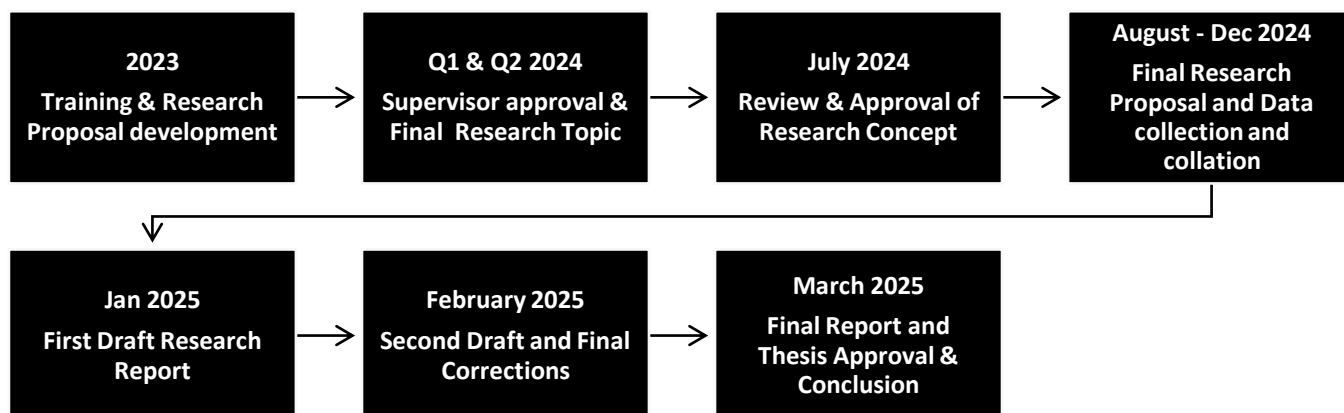
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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix I: Research Time Lines

The study took a period of two years and followed the timelines defined herein:

Research Activities



Research Study Timelines generated by the Student

8.2 Appendix II: Research Study Budget

Given that this was a literary research study, the researcher had a controlled budget for this project as indicated hereunder:

High level Illustration of Study Costs

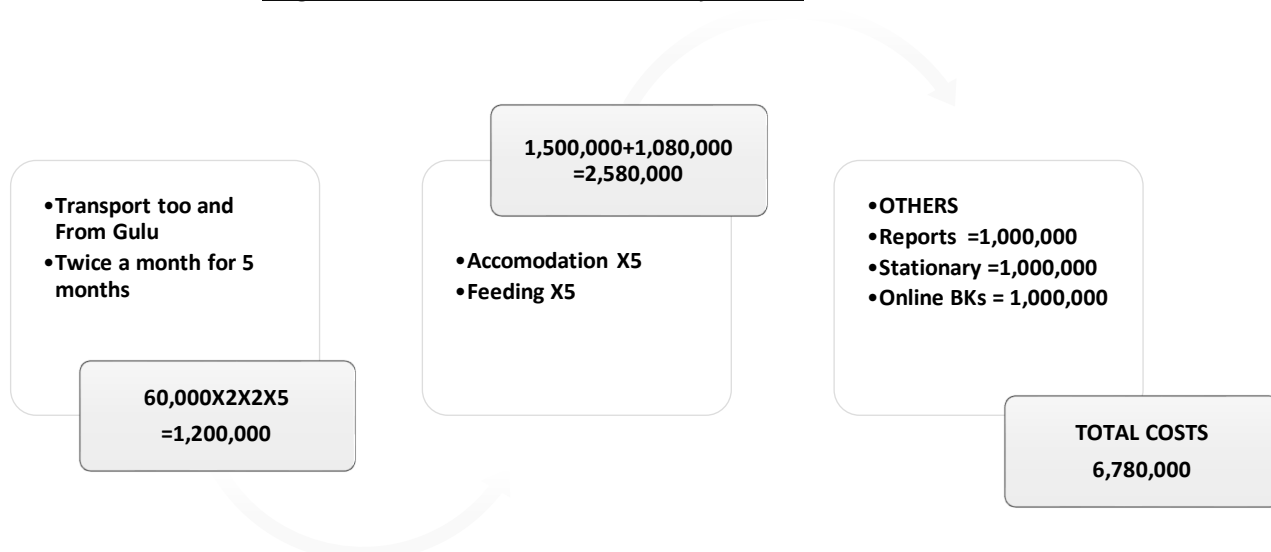


Illustration of study costs generated by the student

8.3 Appendix III: Research Ethics Committee Exemption



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Office of the Vice Chancellor
Research Ethics Committee UG-026



17th March, 2025

ALLAN OTIM OCHAKA
Uganda Christian University
P. O. Box 4, Mukono, Uganda.
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Email: jakoallan2711@gmail.com

UG-REC-026 EXEMPTION NOTICE

To: Allan Otim Ochaka Principal Investigator

Re: UCUREC Application titled: *The Concept of Christus Victor Among The Acholi Anglican Christians.*

Application Number: UCUREC-2024-814-9

Version: 1.0

Type: Exemption Request
 Protocol Amendment
 Letter of Amendment (LOA)
 Continuing Review
 Material Transfer Agreement
 Other, Specify: Initial Review



I am pleased to inform you that the UG-REC-026; UCUREC exempted the above referenced application.

Exemption of the research is for the period from 17th March, 2025, to 17th March, 2026.

This research is considered minimal risk category since there is no humans involved in research.

As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and additions to the protocol must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval prior to the activation of the changes. The REC exemption number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence.

1 of 2

Research and Ethics

P.O. Box 4, Mukono, Uganda, Plot 67-173, Bishop Tucker Road, Mukono Hill
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3. Reports of unanticipated problems during study or other must be submitted to the UCUREC for notification. New information that becomes available which could change the status of the study; i.e. involving members of the research team, guardians, or any unexpected occurrence must be communicated to UCUREC.
4. Regulations require review of an exempted study not less than once per 12-month period. **Therefore, a continuing review application must be submitted to the REC eight weeks prior to the above expiration date of 17th March, 2026 in order to continue the study beyond the exempted period.** Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study, at which point any change in approach to data collection must be communicated.

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by UG-REC _026:

	Document Title	Language	Version	Version Date
1.	Research Proposal	English	1.0	2025-03-10
2.	Request for REC exemption	English	1.0	2025-03-10

Signed and Stamped

Prof. Peter Waiswa
UCUREC Chairperson,
pwaiswa@musph.ac.ug



8.4 Appendix IV: Data Collection Approval



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24th ~~November 2023~~ Feb. 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCTION LETTER FOR DATA COLLECTION

This letter serves to introduce to you Alan Otim Ochaka a student of Bishop Tucker School of Divinity pursuing a Master of Divinity/ Master of Arts in Theology/ Master of Arts in Theology and Development/Master of Arts in Theology and Health care Management/ Bachelors of Divinity.

His/her is carrying out a research as a partial requirement for him/her to be awarded the degree he/she is pursuing. So kindly avail him or the required information for building his/her research work.

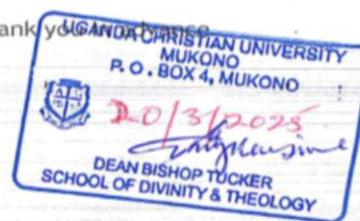
Counting on your cooperation and thank you

Yours faithfully

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Mukeshimana

Research coordinator, Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology.


emukeshimana@ucu.ac.ug, 0772505474



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8.5 Appendix V: Similarity Check Report




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