1. INTRODUCTION

Christianity is still a young religion in South Africa. The first large-scale mission project started towards the end of the 18th century in the Western Cape. In the early 19th century mission work commenced among the Tswana people in the region which is now known as the North West Province; 150 years ago mission work was started among the Pedi people in the present Northern Province. It was only 125 years ago that missionaries arrived among the Venda people, in the far north.

Since then, many things have changed in South Africa, especially in the life of the black people. Firstly, they have acquainted themselves with Western culture and technology. In the process many of them have moved to the cities. In 1996 about 54% of the total South African population was urbanized. It is estimated that between 15 and 20 million of South Africa’s blacks live in urban areas (Hendriks 1999a:1,6).

Secondly, South African blacks have accepted Christianity as their religion. According to the 1996 census 75% of them classified themselves as ‘Christian’ (Hendriks 1999b:48). It is clear that Christianity has gained a remarkable victory in South Africa. After about 200 years of mission work three out of every four black people in this country consider themselves to be Christian.

However, sobering remarks have been made regarding the vitality of Christianity in black South Africa. Research has shown that there is a large gap between the percentage of church members and the percentage of actual church goers. Research has also shown that many church members still venerate the ancestor spirits. There is reason to believe that the traditional African worldview still exerts a strong influence on the thinking of African people.

This is hardly a surprise. Mission history shows that the first generation of missionaries often gains a quick, initial victory. The missionaries get the people to leave behind their old gods and to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. What happens often, however, is that Jesus Christ is misunderstood and given a place within the old pagan worldview. In Western Europe Jesus Christ was accepted quite easily as he seemed to be more powerful than the old gods. In 724 Boniface felled the sacred oak of Thor at Geismar to show that
the old gods were useless. As nothing happened to him, the Germans concluded that the 
God of Boniface was stronger than Thor and they accepted Jesus Christ as their new god 
(Neill 1964:75). But the structure of their religion and worldview remained basically the 
same. They wanted a powerful, victorious Saviour who was able to give them strength 
and to protect them. They did not want a Saviour riding a donkey, so they depicted Jesus 
as riding a horse (Noort 1993:107-108). A suffering Saviour was meaningless to them. It 
was only at the time of the Reformation that the gospel really gained the upper hand over 
the old pagan worldview.
The question is: what has happened in Africa? Christianity is still young here. Has the 
gospel of Jesus Christ been understood and accepted? Or has the Christian message been 
twisted and integrated into the traditional African framework?
An additional question is: what has happened in the African cities? Here another 
influence needs to be reckoned with: Western secularism. To what extent have urban 
church members been influenced by Western lifestyle en secularism?

Purpose of this study

Valuable material has been published about the beliefs of African Christians in South 
Africa. Daneel’s book ‘Quest for Belonging’ offers a treatment of the theology of African 
Independent churches (AIC’s) in general. A few researchers have concentrated on 
township Christianity in particular. Möller (1972,1974) conducted a research in Soweto 
which was published under the title Stedelike Bantoe en die Kerk. West (1975) conducted 
a research on African Independent churches in Soweto. Anderson (1992a) conducted a 
research in Soshanguve, focusing on Pentecostal and some African Independent 
churches.
Despite these important contributions, we are still waiting for a study that concentrates on 
the person and work of Jesus Christ, a study that investigates to what extent black 
Christians relate to Him as the living Lord. A number of researchers has given broad 
overviews of beliefs and practices of Christians in the South African suburbs. This has 
produced much valuable information about beliefs and attitudes of Christians. However, 
to our knowledge no one has concentrated on the Christology of African churches in a
township environment, even though it is a matter of pivotal importance in assessing the vitality of the Christian faith.

This may be one of the reasons why researchers are still divided about this topic. Möller (1972), Dierks (1986) and others are rather pessimistic about the Christology of the African churches (especially the AIC’s). Anderson (1992a) and others are much more optimistic.

Having chosen the Christology of African churches as our area of research, it was necessary to restrict the research in several ways.

In the first place it was decided to concentrate on the Lordship of Christ, since this is a central tenet of Christian faith and of Christology in particular.

Jesus Christ was called ‘Lord’ by the early Christians, in Greek: Kyrios. The phrase Kyrios Iesous (Jesus is Lord) was one of the earliest credal formulae in church history. The apostle Paul states “No one can say Kyrios Iesous except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3) and again: “If you confess with your mouth Kyrios Iesous and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). This verse has been taken as an allusion to the acknowledgement of Christ’s lordship made at baptism (Kelly 1981:15). Hence, becoming a Christian could be described in terms of ‘receiving Christ Jesus as Lord’ (Col 2:6) and being a Christian could be described in terms of ‘believing in the Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g. Acts 11:17).

In the second place it was decided to restrict the research to three denominations in Soshanguve, a large township area north-west of Pretoria (South Africa).

*The purpose of this study, then, is to investigate to what extent the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a reality in the life and faith of Christians in three denominations in Soshanguve, a South African township.*
An exposition of the Lordship of Christ will be offered at the end of this study (chapter 8). The reason for dealing with the Biblical perspective at the end – and not here – is to make sure that the Biblical perspective will be directly relevant to the results of this research. Meanwhile, it is necessary to give a short sketch of the main aspects.

In the first place, the Lordship of Jesus Christ means that He is designated as the exalted Saviour, the one who has been given the divine ‘name’. The fact that Jesus was called Kyrios, is an astonishing feature of early Christianity. In the Septuagint this title was the translation of the name Yahweh. The early Christians must certainly have been aware of the implication of calling Jesus ‘the Lord’: by doing that they were giving Him divine status.

New Testament scholars like Bousset and Bultmann have suggested that the early Palestinian Christians would not have used the Kyrios-title and that this was only possible in a Hellenistic setting (Weber 1983:75). This position has been abandoned by now. It is generally accepted that the Kyrios-title goes back to the oldest and earliest Christian community in Palestine (Hahn 1995:67).

When the early Christians used the title Kyrios for Jesus Christ, it was “an unparalleled leap” (Weber 1983:75). Never before had a historical person been called ‘the Lord’. Now Jesus of Nazareth was given the divine title of Kyrios.

Though Jesus was called ‘the Lord’ even before his death on the cross (“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am”, John 13:13), the Kyrios-title is essentially a post-resurrection title which refers to present work of Jesus (Cullmann 1963:193). On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter preached about the resurrected Jesus who was “made Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The apostle Paul calls on the Lord Jesus Christ together with the Father in prayer (“May our God and Father and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you”, 1 Thess 3:11). Weber comments: Paul, “as a born Jew and formerly a Rabbinic disciple, apparently did not see any blasphemy of the Father in this invocation of the Kyrios” (1983:76). It is also significant that Old Testament statements which were used of Yahweh in the New Testament are applied to the Kyrios Jesus Christ. An example is Romans 10:13 where Paul applies Joel’s prophecy “Everyone who calls on the name of
the Lord will be saved” to Jesus. Important is also Philippians 2:9-11 “… that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”, which is a reference to Isaiah’s prophecy where the Lord (Yahweh!) says: “Before me every knee will bow” (Is 45:23).

Jesus Christ, then, as the Kyrios, is given divine status. He is one with the Father.

Secondly, the term ‘Lord’ “expresses the relationship of Christians to Jesus as subjects and followers to their master, as in the phrase ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’” (Hurtado 1993:569). Weber says: “The Kyrios is the present Master” (1983:77) with emphasis on ‘present’. Jesus is not a previous Lord, He is not a future Lord, He is the present Lord who is ruling his servants.

Paul says that a man stands or falls to his own master (Rom 14:4) but that as Christians, “if we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord” (14:8). The proper behavior in relationship to the Lord is service: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11). Passages such as these are typical for Paul’s usage of the term ‘the Lord’: He does so especially in paraenetic contexts, when dealing with matters of Christian behavior (Hurtado 1993:566). Christians are admonished to “lead a life worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10). James calls himself “a servant (doulos) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1)

Christ the Lord is the Master. All who believe in Him are his subjects. This relationship is not a cold master-slave relationship. This Master differs from all earthly masters in that He has bought his servants not with money but with his own blood (1 Pet 1:18-19). This gives the relationship a unique character. The Lord Jesus Christ establishes an intimate relationship with his subjects through the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin1 has warned that, if the Holy Spirit is ignored, the Lord Jesus will be a Christus otiosus (a Christ serving no practical purpose) and a Christus remotus (a far away, remote Christ). “Until our minds become intent upon the Spirit, Christ, so to speak, lies idle (otiosus) because we coldly contemplate him as outside ourselves – indeed, far from us” (Institutes III,1,3). Christ must not remain outside us (extra nos), but also dwell within us (in nobis). This happens when Christ unites himself to us by the Spirit. “Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he

1 My attention was drawn to this part of Calvin’s Institutes by W van ‘t Spijker’s article “‘Extra nos’ en ‘in nobis’ bij Calvijn in pneumatologisch licht”’ (Van ‘t Spijker 1991:114-132).
becomes completely one with us” (Inst. III,1,24). Some of the Scripture references used by Calvin are Rom. 8:10: “But if Christ is in you..., your spirit is alive because of righteousness”, 2 Cor 13:5: “Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?”, and Gal 2:20: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

This intimate bond between Christ and the believers transcends the earthly master-servant category. But it remains a relationship between a Lord and his servants. He has authority over them and rules their lives. How does He do this? The Biblical answer, echoed in Reformation creeds, is: by his Word and Spirit.

The Heidelberg Catechism explains the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer – “Thy Kingdom come” – as follows: “So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to Thee”. The Westminster Confession of Faith, when speaking about the work of Christ the Mediator, professes that Christ does apply redemption to those for whom He has purchased it by “governing their hearts by his word and Spirit”.

The Biblical background of this profession is found in various parts of Scripture. The Lord Jesus, speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit, said: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). The same message is conveyed in John 16:13: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you in all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” And in Eph 6:17 the Word is called “the sword of the Spirit”.

Jesus Christ, then, as the Kyrios, is the master whose teaching is authoritative for Christian conduct (Hurtado 1993:568). There is an intimate relationship between Him and those who belong to Him. He rules them by his Word and Spirit.

Thirdly, the term ‘Lord’ indicates that supreme power and authority have been given to the exalted Jesus. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (1 Tim 6:15). One day the whole world will have to confess this (Phil 2:9-11). Meanwhile, it is a great comfort for Christian believers to know that their Master/Owner (who has bought them with his own blood) is able to protect them against the power of the devil and that He is determined to preserve them until the last day.

This is beautifully confessed in the Heidelberg Catechism\(^4\): "Why do you call Him ‘our Lord’? Because He has ransomed us, body and soul, from all our sins, not with silver or gold but with His precious blood, and has freed us from all the power of the devil to make us His own possession.”

Jesus encouraged his disciples with the words: “Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me” (Mat 28:18, New English Bible). That He uses this power to preserve all those who belong to Him, is made clear when He said “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

The two aspects of Jesus having died for us and having received full authority to take the world’s history to its final completion, is shown in Revelation 5, where Jesus is both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb “looking as if it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). The Lamb took the scroll and opened the seals, which means that He set history in motion. In the first epistle to the Thessalonians the apostle Paul speaks about the eschatological return of Jesus. Several times he refers to “the coming of the Lord” (4:15). From that day onwards the believers “will be with the Lord forever” (4:17) and this message is to be used for mutual encouragement (4:18).

Jesus Christ, then, as the Kyrios, preserves and protects all those who belong to Him, whose lives He has bought with His own blood. He will make sure that not one of them is lost and that they all reach the goal of forever being with Him in the Kingdom of the Father.

Three denominations in Soshanguve

As indicated above, this research shall be conducted in Soshanguve, a large, predominantly black township northwest of Pretoria. Furthermore, we shall restrict our research to three denominations. Following the usual classification of South African churches in three main categories, namely mainline churches, African independent

---


\(^4\) Lord’s Day 13, Q&A 34.
churches and Pentecostal/charismatic churches, it was decided to focus on one church in each category.\textsuperscript{5}

From the mainline churches the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) was chosen. From the African independent churches the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) was chosen. Within the group of Pentecostal/charismatic churches, popularly called ‘Bazalwane’ churches, it was decided to focus on both older Pentecostals, such as the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), and a few new charismatic churches that have made an impact on the church scene in Soshanguve.

This approach combines broadness with depth so that it will give us the opportunity to analyse the data by studying the mission history and the teachings of the specific churches under scrutiny.

Although it would have been interesting to conduct this research in different townships in different parts of South Africa, this was not possible. For practical reasons the township of Soshanguve was chosen as field where the research was done. Through my work as a missionary/pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Soshanguve I know the place, the people and the churches. During the ten years in which I have been working here, I have learned to speak and understand the local language, which is an urban mix of predominantly Northern Sotho and Tswana. This proved to be very helpful during the course of the research.

Soshanguve also has the advantage that it has a multi-ethnic population. There are Sotho’s, Tswana’s, Ndebele’s, Tsonga’s and Venda’s. Although it is not assumed that statistics of Soshanguve accurately represent the entire urban black population of South Africa, the results of a survey here may be taken as indicative of trends in the black urban areas of South Africa in general.

\textsuperscript{5} The 1996 census of the South African population showed that 42.5\% of black christians belong to mainline churches, 42.9\% are members of African independent churches, 7.4\% are in Pentecostal/charismatic churches, and 7.0\% in so-called ‘other churches’ (Froise 1999:48).
A few words about the title 'Kyrios and Morena'.

*Kyrios* is, obviously, the Greek word for 'Lord'. The Sotho- and Tswana-languages do not have a word that covers all the aspects of the Kyrios-title. The Bible translations use different words. Sometimes the word *Mong* is used, which means: owner, boss. Often the word *Morena* is used, which means: lord, sir. Then there is the word *Kgosî* which means: king, chief.

*Morena* is closest to *Kyrios*. It is derived from the verb 'go rena' (pronunciation: go rēna) which means: to govern. As such it denotes high status. It is used in everyday life as a respectful greeting (as is the case with *kyrios*). In church language, for example when used in the phrase *Morena wa ka* (my Lord) or *Morena wa rena* (our Lord), it denotes the divinity and authority of Jesus Christ.

**Outline**

In this thesis I shall describe the research which I conducted. These results shall be evaluated in the context of relevant backgrounds. After that I shall offer a Biblical perspective on the results.

In order to get data about the beliefs of black christians it was necessary to do research at the grass roots level. This field research was conducted during the years 1996 to 1999. A number of quantitative and qualitative research methods were used such as a survey research, participant observation, in depth interviews and document analysis.

In the first phase the research had a predominantly quantitative nature. 300 questionnaires were administered to members of the different denominations (100 in each denomination). The specific method chosen was the interview survey, which means that interviewers were sent out to ask questions orally and record the answers of the respondents (Babbie 1995:264). The aim was to get an overall impression of these churches from which comparisons could be made.
The second phase, in which no helpers were used anymore, involved a qualitative research. Some of the respondents who took part in the survey research were visited again for an in depth-interview. Church services and other meetings of the different churches were visited. Interpretations were checked by having in depth-interviews with local church members and leaders. Church magazines and other documents were studied and analysed in order to shed more light on the relevant issues. I tried to develop an interaction between data collection and interpretation along the lines of the ‘grounded theory’ (Neuman 1997:334). Data were collected which led to the development of theories, which led to the gathering of new data, which again led to the theories being adjusted, and so forth.
In the chapters 3 to 6 the methods used and the available evidence shall be described in detail.

Chapter 7 offers an analysis of the results of the research against the background of African traditional religion and the context of urbanization and Western secularism, taking into account the theological premises of the various denominations.
Chapter 8 puts the results of the research in a Biblical perspective. It also discusses the question whether modern African Christologies are helpful in strengthening the functioning of the Lordship of Christ in churches in Africa.
Chapter 9 draws conclusions and gives indications for catechetical, pastoral and homiletical practice in the church.

Theological roots

It is my intention that this research should be objective and unbiased in that there be no influence from personal prejudice and that there be no room for unsupported views. Being a missionary myself, however, I do not pretend to be a neutral observer of Christianity in African churches. I wish, therefore, to indicate briefly what my theological background is.
My roots lie in the Reformed Churches (liberated) in The Netherlands and the Free Reformed Churches (Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke) in South Africa. I have studied theology at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (liberated, vrijgemaakt) in Kampen, The Netherlands. For the past ten years I have been working as a missionary for the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa.

Theologically I align myself to the tradition of the Reformed Churches, a tradition that in many respects has been moulded by the theology of John Calvin. I do not know a better summary of my faith than the one professed in Lord’s Day 1, Q&A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. As the theme of this Lord’s Day is closely connected to the theme of this research, I quote it in extenso:6

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own,
but belong with body and soul,
both in life and in death,
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.
He has fully paid for all my sins
with His precious blood,
and has set me free
from all the power of the devil.
He also preserves me in such a way
that without the will of my heavenly Father
not a hair can fall from my head;
indeed, all things must work together
for my salvation.
Therefore, by His Holy Spirit
He also assures me
of eternal life
and makes me heartily willing and ready
from now on to live for Him.