Coming back from two days of exposure to the tough South African reality, it was the crucified Christ that many of us bore in mind when we were meeting for the first time in our mission study group. The linocut by Charles B.S. Nkosi (Ill. 1; 1976) appears nowadays like a look into the painful memories of the apartheid victims. It shows a person being tortured with electricity somewhere in a secret place. The picture is structured through three vertical beams, one on each side and the third in the middle. A crossbar is fastened to the two outer beams with screws. The center of the picture is taken by a black muscular male body being attached to the wooden construction with screws, a nail and ropes. The oversized hands are still under electricity. His head has fallen to the back.

Quite a different image of an African Christ is the sculpture done by Francois Goddart from Zaire (Ill. 2). He depicts the Crucified as a mask.
hanging on the cross. The crown of thorns is stylized as an aura with a star ornament as a sign of his glory. On his forehead he wears three Kauri shells, symbolizing fertility but, in this context, the Trinity as well. The central function of masks in Africa is the representation of ancestors and ghosts, who become present in them at certain occasions. The mask of Christ is analogously representing the Christus praesens. This crucifix is not a depiction of the suffering on the cross. It is the Christus victor, the source of vitality.

Chris Manus from Nigeria shared with us his vision of Christ as the African King (see Ukachukwu Chris Manus, Christ, The African King: New Testament Christology (Frankfurt a. M, 1993). We could experience the presence of the Risen Lord in South Africa in the morning devotions conducted by our black South African brothers and sisters. He is present in the will to reconciliation and “healing of memories” (Michael Lapsley). The two images are like the two sides of a coin—“Reflecting Jesus Christ crucified and living in a Broken World”.

One premise of our group discussions was that the Christological reflection in the Third World has to be dealt with in the broader framework of contextual theologies as such. Even though Christology is probably one of the key issues for most of the contextual theologians there are but a few books about the topic. The relevant material is quite often hidden in single chapters or articles (see Volker Küster, Die Vielen Gesichter Jesus Christi: Christologie interkulturell [Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1999]; The Many Faces of Jesus Christ [London, 2000]; Anton Wessels, Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures [London, 1990]), As the material basis of our discussions however we relied exclusively on art work: images of Christ done by artists from Africa, Asia and Latin America. No written texts were used. As a facilitator I only gave a brief general input on the theory of contextual theology (see Volker Küster, Theologie im Kontext. Zugleich ein Versuch über die Minjung-Theologie [Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1995]) and provided the visual material. The aesthetic dimension can hardly be reproduced in a few written pages (see my articles on Christian art in the Third World in Mission Studies XI [1994]: 108-129; XII [1995]: 92-112; and XVI [1999]: 151-172, which provide some reproductions of art work and interpretation). It was a dense christological interaction between the many-faced Jesus Christ coming to us through the about fifty pictures, and the members of the group in that particular moment. The following report is therefore an account of the theoretical framework of our discourse that I presented, as well as a patchwork of concluding statements by the participants.