

AN EVALUATION OF MAJOR HERESIES ON INCARNATION
AND THEIR CHALLENGES TO PASTORAL MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The testimony of the scripture from its first book, Genesis, that the seed of the woman would be born (Gen. 3:25). This seed has come in the person of Jesus Christ according to the Johannine account (Jn 1: 1-14). This is what the Theologian described as the incarnation. The confessions of the early disciples and the church down the centuries is that the incarnated son is God lived perfectly as human being.

An attempt to reconcile this mystery has led to serious controversies and heresies. This work is therefore an attempt to evaluate these various heresies both in the past centuries and contemporary times especially how its denial can affect both the Christian faith and pastoral ministry.

In doing this, a survey of the development of this controversy is done with an emphasis on how the church fathers reacted to the prevalent heresies. This is the focus in chapter two of this work.

In chapter three, a presentation of the theological bases for affirming the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is done. This is to answer the question why incarnation is necessary.

Chapter four of this work presents the various challenges the denial of this doctrine poses to the pastoral ministry while the last chapter gives some recommendations especially to pastors on how to respond to these heresies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has evaluated the various heresies on the incarnation of Christ in the past and recent centuries. It has also shown that the person of Jesus has been an object of attack and controversy right from the earthly life of the saviour himself. This is nothing but a calculated attempt by the devil, the arch enemy of the church, to prevent the message of God's salvation "that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). This should be expected because the person and work of Jesus make Christianity what it is. No Christ, no Christian faith. If the devil could therefore succeed in thwarting this essential of Christianity, then he has indeed made a plus.

However, because of the scope of this work, an exhaustive treatment of all the heresies there are on incarnation cannot be done. There are still numerous ones, the aim and purpose of which is to pervert the essential ingredient of the Christian faith. While some may think engaging in this kind of argument is not relevant to African, the writer holds the view that African Christian especially pastors should be on guide to defend "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

As much as we can claim that the debate over the issue of incarnation is of the western or European concern, we cannot at the same time deny the presence and practice of these heresies on the soil of African continent. Fortunately people like Athanasius, St. Augustine are from the African continent who stood against the spread of these heresies in the early centuries. Islam has spread to almost every part of the world, preaching hard against the sonship of Christ; Jehovah's witness are gaining more ground spreading their false teaching that Christ is no more than an Angel, Christian science and theophysical

movement are also making strenuous effort to making their impact felt in every nook and cranny of the world.

This therefore is a serious issues of concern for those involved in pastoral ministry. The early church Fathers “have fought the good fight “ of the faith to ensure that we are partakers of the authentic, genuine faith, as delivered unto them. What then should be the response of the present day church leaders to the challenges these heretical movements are posing to the church? One of the ways to respond is to look back to history. We have a lot to gain by doing this since those who have gone ahead have contended with the same. We can with confidence adopt their methods with little adjustment, if need be, taking into consideration our own context and provide relevant measures.

A close study of the pastoral letters (Titus, I & II Timothy) and indeed other new Testament epistles gives us an understanding that these writers wrote on many occasion to correct prevalent heresies and to provide principles and guidelines for the recipient on how to respond the them. We can make use of those resources in our own time too.

Paul made it known to Timothy that the aim of every heretic is always to become teachers (I Tim. 1:7). They always posses an intense desire to have followers. They achieve this by a way of perverting or introducing false doctrines. Since human being by nature love to hear new things like the Athenians, it becomes easy therefore for these false teachers to achieve their goals. Pastors should always be on guard for these kinds of people and device appropriate way of taming them.

Because of this, Paul instructed Timothy to watch his life and doctrine. (I Tim. 4:16) This same instruction is relevant to the contemporary pastors. What a leader teaches goes a long way to influence the people they lead. Leaders must be deeply convinced that what they propagate is solidly based on the word of God and not on feelings or

experience. The early disciples nearly ran into the same problem when some men were teaching that “unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, they cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). This is tradition rather than biblical teaching. It was not until the Jerusalem council was held that the situation was arrested.

To ensure this, Paul counseled the young pastor, Timothy, to do his best to present himself to God as one approved., a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15). Ministry work does not call for laziness or mediocrity. It requires diligence and competence. The early church fathers were able to resist the fiery force of heresy because they were intentially and spiritually sound. They were vast in the intricate of their faith. They knew the length and breadth of their beliefs. This is necessary because one cannot understand the error in a teaching unless one understands his own belief in detail.

Before Jesus committed the leadership of the church into the hands of the twelve they have been taken to the school of discipleship for not less than three years and even after his departure “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” (Acts 2:42). This became evident when the sanheldrin “saw the courage of peter and John.... and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

This is where the relevance of seminary training comes in. Proper exegesis of the scriptures is needed before a balance theology can be formulated. Many of the heresies in our society today are from those whose theology is truncated. They approach the scripture with self-motive and ignore the principles for interpreting the passage.

Finally, pastors must devote themselves to the constant teaching of doctrine (II Tim. 2:14) Teaching is an integral aspect of the Kerygma of the early disciples. Any sermon that lacks a teaching point has failed to achieve its purpose. When the truth of the faith is not properly communicated to the members, they are left as victims of the heretic, yet “all

scripture is God – breathed and is useful for teaching...” (II Tim. 3:16) Biblically based

study of issues should be a constant practice of the church.