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AN EVALUATION OF SOME
CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS
IN AFRICA

by

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ABSTRACT

This work is primarily the examination and evaluation of some Christological models in Africa. The introductory chapter sets the pace for the research by defining the purpose, limits and key operational terms. A historical and contemporary survey of Christology is also undertaken. This survey begins with the Christology of the early Jewish Christians which is resident mostly in the Gospels and the Epistle to the Hebrews. In view of the varying messianic expectations among the different Jewish religious groups, the Christology of this period was divergent and can best be described in the plural as Christologies.

Classical Christology began in the fourth century A. D. While, like the Jewish period, there were various Christologies during this period, a distinct Christology was sustained through ecclesial authority. This Christology is best represented in the Chalcedonian formulation of the two natures of Christ: fully man and fully God. This ontological approach was a product of a theology influenced by Greek speculative thought of the period.

Modern Christology began in the eighteenth century under the critical theological approach brewed in the ferment of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was a period of an unprecedented upsurge of freedom of thought, rejection of authority (ecclesial and political) and a

revolutionary push towards egalitarianism. Modern Christology is a hodge-podge of different perspectives, with most perspectives emphasizing one aspect or the other of the classical formulation. However some approaches, such as the praxis Christology of liberation theology, mark a radical departure from the ontological approach of the classical period but signal a return to the functional approach of early Jewish Christianity.

This survey shows that Christology, both biblical and post-biblical, is not monolithic but divergent. Although these divergencies do not necessarily imply an aberration of the incarnate Christ yet some approaches are outright heresies.

Chapter two is an explication and evaluation of the ancestral Christological model in Africa. In order to grasp the place of the ancestors in African community and religion, a summation of the nature of community in African worldview is made. Central to the ancestral model is the quest for mediation, however our research reveals that this model is inadequate since the purported mediation of the Ancestors, upon which Christ's mediation is modelled, is not real.

Chapter three discusses the Liberator model. Christ as Liberator presupposes a situation requiring liberation. The African political, social, economic and religious circumstances show that such a situation exists. Liberation then becomes a broadened concept of salvation, or

salvation is interpreted liberatively to take care of the wide-ranging nature of the African situation. The validity of this model rests in its functionality and congruence with the biblical presentation of Jesus Christ and the salvation which He brings.

The fourth chapter considers Christ as Chief. The political power and responsibilities of the chiefs, their roles in ancestral mediation and their almost always divine nature, makes them the central point around which the turn-table of the community revolves. However, the enormous powers which they exercise make this model suspect in the light of such biblical images of Christ as "the Suffering Servant" and "the Lamb of God." Any Christological model built on the concept of power as exercised by chiefs in Africa is a misrepresentation of the Christ of the cross.

Our conclusion is a commendation of all adventures in Christology but such efforts must always be faithful to the biblical accounts of Christ and in tune with relevant tradition within a particular culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

What we have presented in this research proves Jaroslav Pelikan's words right; he said that "the presentation of Jesus in the New Testament is in fact itself a representation: it resembles a set of paintings more closely than it does a photograph."¹ A photograph presents an object as it is while a painting is a rendition of the object according to the understanding and creativity of the painter. A photograph is bare facts, a painting is a purposeful interpretation of the facts. A photograph gives no room for variations, a painting is dynamic. The Jesus of the New Testament is indeed a painting and that is why every age has depicted him from its own purview based on the bedrock presupposition of the age. In spite of the enormous variety in the questions raised through the ages Jesus has remained the answer. This is so because:

. . . the life and teachings of Jesus represented an answer (or, more often, the answer) to the most fundamental questions of human existence and of human destiny, and it was to the figure as set forth in the Gospels that those questions were addressed.²

¹Jaroslav Pelikan, Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture (New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 9.

²Pelikan, p. 2.

