

## DECOLONISATION OF CHRISTOLOGY IN ST. MARKS GOSPEL: PERSPECTIVES OF AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIAN

Peter Adelaja Oyebanjo, PhD, Oluwafemi Tolulope JEMIRIYE, M. A

Department of Religious Studies Ajayi Crowth University Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria

Department of Religious Studies Ajayi Crowth University, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria

**ABSTRACT:** The African Christian Theologians are currently working towards the decolonisation of the biblical concepts. This decolonisation is based on some of the theological themes and their implications for African readers of the scriptures. There are scholarships in the discourse of Christology in the African context. But there are few literatures in the discourse of Christology from St. Marks Gospel. This study is a furtherance synthesis of the Christology in the Gospel of Mark and its Afrocentric Discourse in Yoruba Christian system of belief. It discusses the epistemic relevance of Christology in the Gospel of St. Marks Gospel to Yoruba Christian Faith. It interprets the concept of Christology in the second gospel and juxtaposes it with the concepts of Christology in the Yoruba Christians practices and spirituality. The work is a further contribution to the efforts of African Christian theologians towards establishing the African Christians spirituality different from the western philosophical perspectives on Christology. The work adopts inculturation hermeneutics approach. Data were gathered using qualitative methods analysis. Therefore, data were retrieved from lexicons, journals, books and internet material. The work observed that African theology is committed to reappropriating African culture and religion as a significant source for understanding Jesus Christ. It found out that the goal of African theology which is also an inculturation theology is to integrate Christianity into the life and culture of African people. It recommended that Yoruba Christians should be ready to interrogate the Bible and put their own questions to it because the African life experience is equally valid as a resource for theology.

### I. Introduction

The doctrine of salvation is the centerpiece of Christian theology and without it the whole Christian religion disintegrates.<sup>1</sup> At the core of the doctrine of salvation is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Waje quoting the Swiss theologian Hans Kung, said that “Jesus Christ is neither an unhistorical myth nor a super historical idea, doctrine or world view. He is rather the historical Jesus of Nazareth, who according to the testimonies in the New Testament is the standard for believers of all times and all churches as the anointed one of God.”<sup>2</sup> Any detracts from this complete understanding of Christ will lead to a distorted view of Christology.

Western theologies have often ignored the African context, therefore African theologians have felt the need to express the Christian faith in a way that is deeply rooted in their own cultures and expressed in their own language. In present day African theology, probably the most developed area is that of Christology which treats the person and the identify of Jesus Christ.

Different scholars have studied the person and works of Christ as suited to specific regions in order to make Christianity relatable to people living in such regions. An instance is the African Christology specific to African nations and their understanding of the works and person of Christ and Christianity in general. The ultimate for African Christology is to present Christ to the African population through concepts to which people can relate.

However, there are also problem with any branch of theology that originates from human culture than from divine revelation. A theology written “from below” tends to emphasize how we relate to God rather with how God relates to us.<sup>3</sup> The implication of this is such that western theologians perceives African Christology as making no attempt to deal with who Christ is but instead focus only on what He does for people. This has led to so much debate

as to whether African Christology is plausible considering how most African nations made their acquaintance with Christianity along with their perceptions of the concept in conjunction with their various indigenous traditions.

There have been significant changes in African Christology over the last two centuries leading to doubt of the existence of African Christology as an independent form of Christology and not a concept adopted from western nations. Some of these changes include the adoption of certain practices through globalization, thus resulting in striking similarities between African Christology practices and those from other regions.<sup>4</sup>

The decolonisation of Christian thoughts by African Christian Theologians further pointed to the type of Christology the Africans wanted. Part of the opportunities unleashed by decolonisation is the formation of various theological themes in the African context. Top most and in the front burner is the person and works of Christ. The weight of the historiography of recent years testify that African religious genius has struggled for long to break from the boundaries set by the initial gospel bearers. Kalu said,

They wanted to certain type of religion which was biblical, tapping the full pneumatic resources provided in the canon, responding to an environment with a predominantly religious cosmology, through integration of life, breaking the wall of the sacred and profane and thereby bringing the resources of the spirit world to bear on existential problems and social experience and applying scriptural ethics to family and communal relationship.<sup>5</sup>

To some, the word African signals a rejection of anything that has links to the west, colonialism and economic imperialism, and thus an African Christian theology is perceived as reactionary and hostile to any theology developed in the west.

This paper presents the thesis; although there are scholarships in the discourse of Christology in the African context, this is a furtherance synthesis of the Christology in the Gospel of Mark and its Afrocentric Discourse in Yoruba Christian system of belief. The paper juxtaposes the concepts of Christology in the second gospel with the concepts of Christology in the Yoruba Christians and spirituality.

## II. Conceptual framework

This work adopts inculturation hermeneutics approach as its conceptual framework. Justin Ukpong, a Nigerian New Testament scholar propounded the inculturation hermeneutics theory. He argued that the past of the biblical text is not supposed to be studied as an end in itself, but as a means to an end.<sup>6</sup> Inculturation hermeneutics is a contextual hermeneutic methodology that seeks to make any community of ordinary people and their social-cultural context the subject of interpretation of the Bible through the use of the conceptual frame of reference of the people and the involvement of the ordinary people in the interpretation process.<sup>7</sup> This precludes that the lens through which the Bible is read and the text interpreted is developed within African context. The task of interpretation for Ukpong basically entails bringing the text within its historical-social context to bear on the (*African*) contexts of the present-day ordinary Bible readers.<sup>8</sup> The African social-cultural context is to be intentionally made the subject in interpretive endeavours. As reasoned by Ukpong, 'The primacy of the reading activity is located not among individual theologians working in isolation but among theologians working among communities of ordinary people - It is the ordinary people that are accorded the epistemological privilege.'<sup>9</sup>

The Bible remains a critical resource in Ukpong's inculturation hermeneutics as he affirms that the text of the Bible has a message for the present-day readers. The Bible has the capacity to effect not only personal transformation in the lives African Christians but also societal transformation.

Larger percentage of the theological reflection in Africa is informed by western thinkers and their understanding of scripture. Masenya in her work called out African biblical scholars 'to get out of our silos (read: disciplines) and embrace MIT's (multi-, inter- and trans- disciplinarily) in our theory and praxis of biblical scholarship.'<sup>10</sup> African theologians must take up the task of saying what they believe regarding Christ. The possibilities of misunderstanding and of being misunderstood may be very real due to the colour divide and bias but the African theologian must make the Bible speak the language of the native people, understand their world and relate to their creator.

The Markan Christology has been a subject of great scholastic debate among western theologians especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with this question in mind: What is the more basic element in the evangelist's witness? Is it his proclamation of the specific role of Jesus as the Christ in the economy of salvation or his statement of the quality of human existence that contributes salvation – his Christology or his anthropology?<sup>11</sup>

This study is not a continuum of the Christology debate in the gospel of Mark either pattern after the western theological opinions or after available scholarships discourse of Christology in the African context. It rather

employs theinculturation hermeneutics principle to produce an Afrocentric Discourse on the epistemic relevance of Christology in the Gospel of St Mark's Gospel to Yoruba Christian faith.

### III. The Trend of Decolonisation in African Christian

The coming of the European colonizers to sub-Sahara African beginning in the fifteenth century succeeded in replacing the African way of life with European political, economic, social and religious institutions. No aspects of the African life were leftuntouched. Colonialism has left a thorough imprint on Africa; in particular, the political, economic and religiocultural legacies of colonialism confront African theologians.<sup>12</sup>

Decolonisation is the undoing of colonialism – the process whereby the imperial nations establish and dominate foreign territories. The meanings and applications of the term have been debated by scholars. By decolonisation, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past. The crucial word in this formulation is 'undue'. Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of colonial ancestry.

Some scholars of decolonisation focus especially on independence movements in the colonies and the collapse of global colonial empires. Otherextended the meaning to include economic, religiocultural and psychological aspects of the colonial experience. Indigenous and post-colonial scholars have critiqued western worldviews, promoting decolonisation of knowledge and the centering of traditional ecological knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

Colonisation was used as a means of absorbing and assimilating foreign people into the culture of the imperial country which in this context mostly refers to the western European countries. Some of the European colonisation focused on short-term exploitation of economic opportunities or address specific goals such as settlers seeking religious freedom. Christianity and colonialism are often closely associated with each other due to the fact that the impact of religion was a frequent justification among the motives of colonists. Christian missionaries were first viewed as pious free moral agents, however as the colonial era drew to a close, missionaries were viewed as 'ideological shock troops for colonial invasion whose zealotry blinded them, colonialism's agent, scribe and moral alibi.<sup>14</sup>It is imperative to elaborate the issue of colonisation and its impact to the African continent to understand the concept of decolonisation and the development of African theology.

Scholars have argued that the collapse of colonialism and broader cultural challenges to western power fostered new organizations, theologies, and political engagements across the world, ultimately setting Christianity on its current trajectory away from its colonial heritage.<sup>15</sup>

WaSaid trace the argument for the theology of decolonisation as a antithesis to the thesis of Bourgeois theology or white theology.<sup>16</sup>Bourgeois theology was perceived as anti-Christ, in human, atheistic whose main purpose was to save the white race by all means and to dominate non-whites economically, politically, socially and spiritually.

Thus, Bourgeois theology is an ideology of dehumanization and depersonalization in the name of Bible.<sup>17</sup> It boasts of two main contents; that the white missionaries were actually agents of white imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism; and that of white supremacy.According to Said, two ideologies were proposed that oppose Bourgeois theology; Ethiopianist theology and Black power theology.<sup>18</sup> Both Ethiopianist and Black theology represents a theology of decolonisation. Their main purpose is the liberation of the third world from the spiritual, socio-political, economic colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism. This theology proposes a God and a Jesus who can respond to the cry of the oppressed. The positive side to it is that it calls for reconciliation between races in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Christianity was an agent of great change in Africa. It disestablished the status quo, bringing new opportunities to some, and undermining the power of others. With the Christian missions came education, literacy and hope for the disadvantaged. Decolonising Christianity traces the dramatic transformation of Christianity from its position as the moral foundation of European imperialism to its role as a radical voice of political and social change in the era of decolonisation.

The most important issue regarding the theology of decolonisation in African Christianity as raised by Said, is that Africans Christians should not just forget history and embrace Christianity blindly without rooting themselves to the African ideals and values.<sup>19</sup> This is important because Africa still suffers from wounds inflicted by missionaries and colonialist. The trend of decolonization has led to a theology of dialogue and mutual understanding without viewing one as inferior and the other as superior.

### IV. Conceptual Analysis

In its mostliteral sense, Christology connotes how Jesus came to be called Messiah or Christ and what was meant by that designation. In a broader sense, Christology discusses any evaluation of Jesus in respect to who he

was and the role he played in the divine plan.<sup>20</sup> Scholars have identified different kinds of Christology. According to Brown, Low Christology which covers the evaluation of Him in terms that do not necessarily include divinity e.g. Messiah, Rabbi, Master; High Christology which covers the evaluation of Jesus in terms that include an aspect of divinity e.g. Lord, Son of God.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the terminology used, none of the NT writers denies the divinity of Jesus, yet several do not use terminologies or descriptions that enables knowing with precision their Christology stance. Appreciation of the knowledge that they wrote in different places in the Mediterranean world during a period of almost 100 years will clarify 'why the high Christological terms meant different things to different people who used them'.<sup>22</sup>

Through the centuries theologians have debated over the nature of Christ; upon His deity and upon His humanity.<sup>23</sup> Most subjects in biblical and theological study are closely connected and anyone who dares to embark on a study of the person of Jesus Christ will very quickly find himself attempting to cover the whole range of Christian thought stretching over many centuries and encompassing a wide variety of themes.<sup>24</sup> Much of the modern debate about Christology is on how the data supplied in the New Testament should be utilized either in theology or as dogmas. Agreed that the New Testament especially the gospels have said so much about the person of Jesus, the question is, how are these evidences to be used in the construction of a modern understanding of him?

In the New Testament there are ranging conceptual frameworks articulating the meaning of the Christ-event. The task of the contemporary interpreter is in no way different from that of those who stand within the cannon itself. Every new situation demands a new interpretation. Interpretation means the translation from one historical linguistic tradition to another and consequently criticism of tradition.<sup>25</sup> Concepts change in the course of time, neither Paul, theology or Christology can be understood without criticism. Christology was not a matter of major disagreement at the time of reformation, nor would it feature prominently in the theological debates of the period of orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> The only major Christological debate of the period centered upon two groups of Lutheran theologians, then 'protestant theology was perhaps ill-prepared to meet the new concentration upon the person and significance of Jesus Christ, which was the direct result of the rise of the enlightenment in the early eighteenth century'.<sup>27</sup>

A significant challenge to orthodox Christian belief concerns the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the significance of His death, which gave rise to the quest of the historical Jesus. Where orthodox Christianity tended to treat Jesus' death and resurrection as possessing greater inherent importance than his religious teaching, the enlightenment marginalized his death and denied His resurrection in order to emphasize the quality of his moral teaching. There is therefore no final interpretation of the New Testament –no abstractable essence will be intelligible in all times and places.<sup>28</sup>

Marshal in his survey of the origins of New Testament Christology aware of the danger of presenting a definite word which may easily be taken by the reader on the subject matter limited himself to one particular approach, the titles of Jesus and to one particular historical period, the pre-Pauline era. There are limitations imposed by the vastness of the subject. Marshal sited an example of such limitation due to the amount of controversy which surrounds the subject.

According to Marshal,

At the outset we argued for a stance which is not shared by many of the principal students in the area. We claimed that the indirect evidence supported the view that Jesus had a Christology, and we criticized the assumption that the thought of the early church can be analysed in terms of Palestinian, Hellenistic Jewish and Hellenistic Gentile components. But the survey had only reported opinions briefly analyse them and criticize them from our particular point of view.<sup>29</sup>

His conclusion was that the roots of Christology lie in the application of categories right from the Old Testament and Judaism to Jesus. Christology developments were rooted in "Palestine and Syria where the church began".<sup>30</sup> Behind the developments stands the "the figure of Jesus and the claims, indirect and direct, which he made for himself."<sup>31</sup>

The roots of Christology lie in the pre-Easter period as evidence supports the view that it was the resurrection of Jesus which gave the decisive impetus to Christological thinking. The earliest Christology stressed the way in which Christ fulfilled the Old Testament promises of a coming deliverer. It saw in Jesus the agent of God entrusted with the power to save and to judge, and it addressed him as the Lord to whom was given absolute authority.

### **Christology in the Gospel of Mark**

Mark is regarded by some to be the earliest gospel to have been written. This follows from the Markan priority theory created to explain the synoptic problem and it is also one of the most debated of the gospels as well.

Mark, also called John Mark, a relative of Paul's associate, Barnabas was believed to have documented the gospel based on Peter's firsthand encounters with Jesus with Mark being his interpreter. This is historically solidified based on the statement of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia that, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered ...to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it would suffice to say that the "Gospel of Mark is historically and Christologically"<sup>33</sup> accurate as Mark interprets it from the words of an eyewitness.

The gospel of Mark is an action narration of the Jesus story. Mark's pace was rapid and without pause all the way to its closing comments.<sup>34</sup> Mark selected from the wealth of material in Jesus' life and ministry, deliberately leaving out Jesus' birth or early years but begins with His entrance into public life and ministry as a Rabbi.

In Rome, a city with an extremely high percentage of slaves, Mark elevates Jesus by thematically describing him as the servant par excellence. Christology has been classified into two kinds by scholars, Low Christology and High Christology. Mark preserves the greatest amount of the lower kind by describing a precrucifixion ministry in which no human being recognizes or acknowledges Jesus' divine sonship. Thus, the Christological identity of Jesus is a "secret" known to the readers (who are told at the baptism) and to the demons (who have supernatural knowledge, Mark 1:24, 5:7) but not to those who encounter him or even to those who follow him as he preaches and heals.<sup>35</sup> The secret identity of Jesus in Mark has led to the Messianic secret theory. A protagonist of this theory was Williams Wrede, a famous theologian whose work has greatly influenced the way Christology in Mark is being interpreted. Wrede's theory of the messianic secret was first proposed in 1901.<sup>36</sup> According to Kingsbury, Wrede's theory is an aggregate of three interrelated contentions but briefly summarized that,

Mark is perceived to be a document of the later part of the first century (AD 60-70) which was written for the purpose of describing the earthly Jesus as the Messiah. The non-messianic nature of the life and ministry of Jesus had not yet been forgotten but was rapidly fading from sight. Increasingly, the notion was asserting itself that if the risen Jesus is the Messiah "now," then he has always been the Messiah, also during his life on earth. As spokesman for this view, the second evangelist wrote of the life of Jesus in such fashion that he gave a messianic cast to the non-messianic traditions of the sayings and deeds of Jesus by presenting the earthly Jesus as the Messiah who was intent on keeping his messiah a secret.<sup>37</sup>

Wrede's theory has been vigorously debated by scholars because he argued that Mark is theological in nature and not fundamentally historical.<sup>38</sup> Those who construed Mark as a reliable historical account and not necessarily a biography of the life of Jesus of Nazareth; as well as those who hold the second evangelist as a conservative, redactor were behind this opposing views. Nevertheless, scholars continued to be of the opinion that the messianic secret played a vital role in Mark's story. By the mid 70's the "messianic secret no longer existed as the main motif of the gospel of Mark as Wrede constructed.

Wrede's thesis had proved itself to be overdrawn, instead of being the sole motif of the Gospel, it is in reality one motif among others.<sup>39</sup> Admitted that the messianic secret is only one motif among others, but this does not mean that it cannot develop in concert with other motifs. Wrede's inclusive concept of the messianic secret has been pruned considerably. As stated by Kingsbury, defining afresh on literary – critical grounds the nature and scope of the motif of the secret of Jesus' identity in Mark,

It is not characteristically a "messianic" secret but the secret that Jesus is the son of God. This secret remains in force from the time Jesus first appears at his baptism to the time of his crucifixion (15:13) and resurrection (16:6-7). To preserve this secret intact, the most prominent device the evangelist employed is in fact the "commands to silence" which Jesus gives to the demons (1:24-25, 3:11-12) and to his disciples (8:29-30; 9:7-9) to the end that they should not make him known. Kingsbury.<sup>40</sup>

The real secret however, concerns Jesus' sonship rather than his messiahship for none of the human characters in the narrative recognised Jesus as the son of God until he died and then the proclamation of the centurion that this man was truly God's son (15:39) paradoxically revealing his divine sonship.<sup>41</sup>

The title of "the son of man" does not function in Mark in the same way as does the title of the "son of God," and one of the central problems in coming to grips with Christology in Mark is how to relate the title of "the son of Man" to the title of the "Son of God."<sup>42</sup>



The title 'son of man', *hohuiostouanthropon*, is central to Mark's Christology interpretation because it was not a confessional title used by any of the characters in the gospel narrative to identify Jesus. This term was only used by Jesus himself and is "much akin to circumlocution rather than a title of honor"<sup>43</sup>. It was used severally in the gospel to highlight Jesus' authority (2:10); his suffering, death and resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 10:33, 14:21); to explain the significance of his death (10:45); and to point to his *parousia* (13:26; 14:62). It rather points to the fulfillment of Jesus' destiny than his identification. Son of Man is the necessary complement to Messiah and Son of God, ensuring that neither title will be interpreted apart from Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>44</sup> For Mark, Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, because He fulfills the destiny of the Son of Man.

Contrary to the view that the gospel of Mark developed its Christology into two stages; the period prior to Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah and the period following that confession culminating in the centurion's confession that Jesus was truly God's Son, Raymond argued, "Mark's is not a two-step Christology where Jesus gains a new and higher identity after death and resurrection; but seemingly the full identity of son/servant, already present at the baptism, is neither experienced or manifested until the cross."<sup>45</sup>

Although Mark wrote the shortest gospel, it is one of the most descriptive as its Christological image of Jesus is seen from the very beginning, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God (Mark 1:1). Mark is not so much concerned with the details of Jesus' birth or early life but focuses on the major activities of Jesus' life that proved him to be the son of God. The thesis here is that Mark portrays Jesus as the Son of God.

### **Christology in the Yoruba Christians spirituality: An Afrocentric Discourse**

African Christology is a branch of Christology specific to African nations and their perceptions of the works and person of Christ and Christianity in general. In many African nations Yoruba inclusive, the introduction to Christianity came about as a result of the colonization process that occurred mostly between the 1920s and the late 1980s. Christianity was used as a means of attracting support and encouraging assimilation of foreigners into African territories.

The majority of Indigenous African people at the time was skeptical of the teachings the missionaries and colonial masters proposed while spreading the gospel due to the already existent traditions at the time including worshipping other gods, social hierarchy, gender roles, economic, and political backgrounds.<sup>46</sup> For instance, explaining the incarnation of God into human form resulting in a God-made-human baffled most Africans as it went against the perception of any god as a supernatural being devoid of any vulnerability.

Explaining some of the miraculous acts of Jesus during his earthly existence in a context that an African would understand was difficult due to the insinuation that a human could perform functions that defy logic. Therefore, most teachers had to elaborate on the person and works of Christ in ways that made sense such as Christ's ability to solve problems that most other people would not understand.<sup>47</sup> Some of the major classifications' preachers adopted at the time that still shape part of African Christology today are concepts of Christ as a leader, liberator, master of initiation, son of God and Christ as an ancestor. A serious weakness of the African Christology which evolved from all these, is that it tends to see Jesus Christ simply through the lens of human images.<sup>48</sup> To describe him only as a healer, diviner and proto-ancestor is to honour his humanity and neglect his divine attributes.

Although some of these concepts have evolved due to changes in societal structures and eradication of colonisation, most of them remain relevant in creating a better understanding of the gospel from Christ as a person and the work he did.<sup>49</sup>

The Yoruba people inhabit a significant portion of Western Africa including Nigeria and have their own unique set of religious customs. The Yoruba religion is a blend of indigenous beliefs, myths and legends, proverbs and songs, all influenced by the cultural and social contexts of the Western part of Africa. Unlike many western religious belief, Yoruba spirituality emphasizes living a good life and having good deeds. With the incursion of the white missionaries into the foray of Africa, many natives drop their religion and embrace the Abrahamic religion spread by colonization and white imperialism. Most Yoruba drop their ancestral beliefs and traditions to embrace Christianity.

The world view of the Yoruba Christian still tends to affect his understanding and interpretation of the Bible. The interpretation of the Bible is easily affected by the lens of culture and old beliefs. The effects of the early missionaries in simplifying the faith for the Yoruba rather than fosters his understanding tends to weaken the formation of correct dogmas. The Yoruba Christian visualizes an image of Christ who specializes in meeting the needs of people. This was because the missionaries focused on society's problems and needs in introducing the gospel of Christ to the communities in ways that people could relate to. This is to ease the acceptance of Christian teachings and incorporate such teachings in the everyday lives of the indigenous communities.

The Christology of the Yoruba Christians is thus shaped by their belief and underneath is the way African Christians understand their world and relate to their creator. Biblical interpretation and application have much to do with world view and native religious belief systems. Scripture is always interpreted within a context, and it is within the Yoruba language, culture, belief that the Yoruba Christian will seek the true meaning of the scripture. This is important, because these beliefs provide an important bridge to a meaningful discussion of a Christology that makes sense to Africans. Waje corroborating this said,

The African church is composed largely of people who come out of the African religious background. Their culture, history, world views and spiritual aspirations cannot be taken away from them. These impinge upon their daily life and experience of the Christian faith. So, the church which exists on the African scene bears the marks of its people's backgrounds. No viable theology can grow in Africa without addressing itself to the interreligious phenomenon at work there.<sup>50</sup>

These religious beliefs and the African world view are not lost when Africans become Christians. African theologians including John Mbiti, Charles Nyawinti, AnselmSanen and B. Bujo have defended the existence of African Christology through the development of themes explaining the relevance of the person of Christ and his works through traditional African religious practices<sup>51</sup>. The result is that many African Christology make no attempt to deal with who Christ is but instead focus only what he does for us.<sup>52</sup> Even when they do address the bigger question, they often contain sweeping generalizations rooted in anthropology rather than in theology.

#### **Christology in Mark and Yoruba Epistemology: Meeting Points and Divergence**

Much of our theological reflection in Africa is informed by Western thinkers and their understanding of scripture.<sup>53</sup> But recent studies have shown that African Christians have long sort to break free from the boundaries set by the initial gospel bearers. Africans saw decolonisation as the opportunity to enshrine deep religious structure which undergird all the varieties of African traditional religion, a religion of power.<sup>54</sup> The cumulative effect is that it changed the face of Christianity in Nigeria and among the Yoruba Christians. The rise of the African indigenous churches popularly known as the 'Aladura' churches brought about a wave of charismatic that tend to bring about fusion of Christianity and the African traditions. This form of pneumatic response to the gospel was 'setting to work' of missionary preaching, a recovery of the old Evangelical spirit which had catalysed mission, a seepage to the surface of the Christianity which Africans wanted and their perception of the opportunities unleashed by decolonization.<sup>55</sup>

African theologians have long wanted to express the Christian faith in a way that is deeply rooted in their own cultures and expressed in their own language. The Yoruba Christian wanted a type of religion which is biblical, embracing the full truths and revelation provided in the canon yet responding to an environment charged with religious inclines while bringing it to bear on existential problems, social experiences, family and communal relationships.

African theologians have developed several themes in explaining the relevance of the person of Christ and His works through African religions practices. One such theme is the perception of Christ as an ancestor. In Yoruba epistemology, of the concept of ancestor, it is believed that ancestors are human beings who die and transcend into another dimension to become mediators between human beings and a supreme being. Mark Christology also attributed to Christ mediatory roles as well as titular roles such as 'son of David' (Mk. 10:46-48; 12:35-37) which depicts His royal descendancy and roots. The similarities between the African concept of ancestor and Christology according to the Markan gospel, lie in their function about mediation between human beings and God. But a sharp contrast is in the methods of how dead relatives rises to their new role and gain supernatural ability to guide those on earth. Christ's divinity according to the gospel was not only realize after His death but was fully with Him all the while even when He was on earth.

The Yoruba Christian also focuses more on the 'miraculous' activities of Jesus Christ more than on His person. The works of Christ seems to make more sense considering His ability to solve problems that others may not understand. On this view, the Markan gospel contains a Christology that focuses more on the nature of the person of Christ and not just on the works. Thus, western theologians have regarded the African Christological view as anthropomorphic rather than ontological. The African Christology tends to see Jesus Christ more through the lens of human images. Describing Him as Healer, diviner or witch-doctor and proto-ancestor is to honour his humanity more and neglect his deity and divine attributes.<sup>56</sup> Theologians such as Barth, has put his Christocentrism over and against this anthropocentrism, which according to him was fully in conformity with the New Testament itself.<sup>57</sup>

Changes that have taking place over the last two centuries has brought similarities between African Christological practices and those from the western world. Thus, African Christology presently bears significant

similarities with other contemporary forms of Christology, but the teachings remain essentially different in conformity with African culture.

## V. Conclusion

Every theologian must come up to discourse what he believes regarding Christ sooner or later. Of course, the challenge of being misunderstood is very real but it is a task that must be done. African theologians must rise up to the call of providing the Africa nation with her own theology which takes into account the continent's religious legacy and traditions. The Yoruba Christian came out of an African religions background with culture, history, and worldviews which cannot be taken away from them. Any theology that fails to address itself to the interreligious phenomenon at work in Africa cannot thrive in Africa. Therefore, the Yoruba Christian spirituality Christological understanding will be different from the western philosophical perspectives of Christology based on contextual interpretation of the sacred texts and not necessarily in approach.

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