

INCARNATIONAL CHRISTOLOGY IN JOHANNINE GOSPEL: IMPLICATIONS FOR
AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY.

INTRODUCTION

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." John 1:14(NIV)

That discipline in Christian theology that deals with God indwelling among his people in Christ is known as Incarnational Theology. The verb *incarnate* is formed from the Latin roots *in*, meaning "into," and *carn*, meaning "flesh." In other words, it literally means to "in-flesh" something ... to make something in the form of a human being. It also has the figurative meaning of "to put an abstract concept or idea into concrete form."¹ In Christian Theology it is the word used to describe the coming of Jesus Christ to live among us, to be one of us. As the Nicene Creed states:

For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human (No. 880 *UMH*).

Milliard Erickson notes

The doctrine of the Incarnation states that Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good and deliver those who were oppressed of the evil and who died on the cross for our sins ... this same Jesus was also God, come to live with us and as one of us, in human flesh. As the opening sentences of John's Gospel puts it: "the Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus is the eternal Word, the creative agency through whom the Father created all that is or ever shall be. And, as John also affirms, this Word of God *was* God (Erickson 3).

A proper understanding of Christ is John's major aim: Christology is a central theme of this gospel. The book clearly defines eternal life as the life which Christ imparts to those who believe in him. Christology strictly speaking, is the study of Christ, his person and natures. The importance of Christology for Christianity is obvious, since without Jesus Christ, Christianity would never emerge. Modern scholars debate the role of the historical Jesus in

¹Gregory S. Neal *Incarnational Theology* www.revNeal.org Accessed October 20, 2011

the formation of Christianity in a way that is quite unique. The aim of Christology is to give an account of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, of whom he is and why he is important.

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John form the prologue (1:1-18) to the whole. Some scholars believe that the prologue circulated as part of the earliest published form of the Gospel and that this prologue may incorporate and redact an earlier hymn familiar to the Johannine communities (Ngewa 17). In other words, the prologue was not part of the original Gospel. Many more scholars, however, see the prologue as systematically according with the following verses and thoughts of the Gospel. Some of the great thoughts include the Excellency of Christ, who is the Word of God, the eternal strife between light and darkness, and the Baptist's witness. But the principal topic in these verses is the incarnation, the major focus of this paper. Incarnation means literally "enfleshment" or slightly more fully "embodiment in flesh". Incarnation is the central Christian doctrine that the eternal Word of God (logos) became man in Jesus Christ, who was then truly God and truly man.

This paper focuses on the concept of incarnation Christology with special reference to the Gospel of John. The expression "Logos" will be shown in its original historical background with a view of determining its significance for the New Testament era. An exegesis of Logos within the framework of the prologue will be justifiably done. Theological implications will also be considered, since exegesis is not complete without elucidating sound theological significance. And in counteracting many modern views of Christology, emphasis will be placed on the historical, orthodox incarnation Christology with a view of formulation or articulating a pattern of contextualization for the African version of Christianity.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is clearly to justify the contextualization of John 1:14 “and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...,” this is the most comprehensive Johannine statement concerning the incarnation. The term “Word” appears to have been used by the evangelist at least partly in order to contextualize the gospel message among his Hellenistic audience (Kostenberger 26). Three primary backgrounds proposed include (1) Greek philosophy (Stoicism, Philo), (2) The personification of wisdom, and (3) the Old Testament. Details will be provided later in the course of this research paper.

The employment of the Logos concept in the prologue to the fourth Gospel is the supreme example within Christian history of the contextualizing or communication of the Gospel in terms understood and appreciated by the nations. As Paul stood on Mars Hill and declared “Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23), so the Evangelist set forth to the world of his day thoughts familiar to all about the Logos in relation to God and the world, startlingly modified by the affirmation of the incarnation, and then went on in the gospel to tell how the Word acted in the words and deeds of Jesus and brought about the redemption of the nations (Beasley 10).

LOGOS IN GRECO-ROMAN (HELLENISTIC) WORLD

The term ‘Logos’ is attested 331 times in the New Testament (appearing in all writings except Philemon and Jude) with both secular and theological meanings (Klappert 1106). However, in this study the writer will be particular about the meaning of ‘Logos’ as Jesus the word of God. Scholars (e.g. Ladd 274-278, Smith 10-12, Carson 114-116, Blomberg 73, Johnson 41, Tenny 33) have attempted to find the source of John’s concept of the ‘Logos’ in Hellenistic thought, Ladd (274-278) gives a detailed and critical explanation of the historical background of wisdom. According to him, the idea of ‘Logos’ goes back to the philosopher Heraclitus (6th BC). Heraclitus taught that all things were in a state of flux, that nothing ever

remains the same. However, order and pattern can be perceived amidst the eternal ebb and flow of things in the 'Logos' the eternal principle of order in the universe. It is the 'Logos' behind everlasting change that makes the world a cosmos and an ordered whole. James Parker citing J. Adams writes,

“He seems to conceive it as the rational principle, power, or being which speaks to men both from without and from within--the universal word which for those who have ears to hear is audible both in nature and in their own hearts, the voice, in short, of the divine”(CTR 3.1 (1988): 31-43).

The 'Logos' was one of the most important elements in Stoic theology. The Stoics used the idea of the Logos to provide the basis for a rational moral life. Faced with the usual Greek dualism of God and the world, they employed the concept of Logos as a unitary idea to solve the problem of duality. The entire universe was conceived as forming a single living whole that was permeated in all its parts by a primitive power of this essential fire is not clear; writers pervading fire or fiery vapour. The precise character of this essential fire is not clear; writers differ in their understanding of it. It was a diffused, tenuous kind of fiery air, possessing the property of thought. This very refined substance was thought to be immanent in the entire world to appear in living beings as the soul. It is a divine world power, containing within itself the conditions and processes of all things, and is called Logos or God as a productive power, the divine Logos was called the *spermatikos logos*, the Seminal Logos or generative principle of the world. This vital energy both pervades the universe and unfolds itself into innumerable *logoi spermatikoi* or formative forces to energize the manifold phenomena of nature and life. This Logos', pervading all things, provide the natural order to the universe and supplies the standard for conduct and conduct and for the proper ordering of life for the rational person the rational individual is the one who lives in accordance with nature, and thereby finds an all-determining law of conduct.

Philo, an Alexandran Jew (c20 BC-AD 42) attempted the formidable task of marrying the Jewish religion with Hellenistic philosophy. He preserved the Jewish attitude toward the Old Testament as inspired Word of God; but his extremely allegorical interpretation he found philosophical concepts in the Old Testament. He held the Greek view of a God utterly transcendent and separated from the world; and he employed the concept of Logos to provide a mean of mediation between the transcendent God and the creation. God himself is absolute and outside the materials universe. He comprehends all things and yet is himself incomprehended. He is outside of time and space and is in his being knowable. The only names by which God can be designated in himself is pure being to on, being himself without attributes. Since God himself cannot be the immediate creator of the world, Philo conceives of intermediate forces or ideas which are manifestations of the divine authority manifested thus as creative power, directing ad sustaining the universe, God is called 'Logos' (Reason). Philo does not present any consistent concept of the Logos and its relationship to God.

The Logos is conceived as inward, i.e. as the universal plan of things in the mind of God; and as outward i.e., the plan made objective in the world. The Logos is both the original pattern of the world and the power that fashions it. It is at once the chief of the series of forces or ideas emanating from God, and the totality of them. Philo developed a 'Logos' doctrine through the hermeneutical method of allegory, Philo attempted to trace Greek ideas to a Hebrew origin. With Plato, 'Logos' belong to the world of ideas; however, Philo went further than Plato and linked 'Logos' with the expression of the idea as well. Donald Guthrie summarizes five points distinctive of Philo's logos doctrine:

(i) The 'logos' has no distinct personality. It is described as 'the image of God. . . through whom the whole universe was framed.

(ii) Philo speaks of the logos as God's first-born son (*protogonos huios*), which implies pre-existence. The logos is certainly regarded as eternal.

(iii) The logos is not linked with light and life in Philo's doctrine as it is John's, and combination cannot have been derived from him, although it would have been congenial to him.

(iv) There is no suggestion that the logos could become incarnate. This would have been alien to Greek thought, because of the belief in the evil of matter.

(v) The logos definitely had a mediatorial function to bridge the gap between the transcendent God and the world. It can be regarded as a personification of an effective intermediary, although it was never personalized. Philo's logos has, therefore, both parallels and differences from John's logos (See Donald Guthrie *New Testament Theology* 313-316).

Appeals have been made to two other sources as a background to explain John's logos doctrine: the Hermetic literature, speculative philosophical writings of the second and third centuries A.D. and the Mandaeans liturgies, dated even later, and for that reason held to be insignificant as related to John (Dodd 10-53). Even though the logos idea is used, frequently in the tractate *Poimandres* (a tract that speculates on Genesis' cosmogony), there is no evidence of literary dependency. C. H. Dodd says that the parallels seen can be attributed to "the result of minds working under the same general influences." (10-53)

LOGOS IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

The word of God was an important concept of the Jew; creation came into being and was preserved by the word of God (Gen. 12:3, "And God said", cf. Ps. 33:6, 9; 47:15-18); and the word of God is the bearer of salvation and new life (Ps. 107:20; Is. 4:8; Ez 37:4-5). In the Old Testament, the word is not merely a utterance, it is a semi-hypostatized existence so that it can go forth and accomplished the divine purpose (Is. 55:10-11). The word of God uttered at creation, expressed through the mouths of the prophets (cf. Jer. 1:4; 11; 2:1) and in the Law

(Ps. 119:38, 41, 105), has a number of functions that may very well be compared with those attributed to the Logos in John (Ladd 276, Kostenberger 25, Bock 410-411). Kostenberger (53-54) indicates that there is a significant connection between Isaiah's theology of the word of God (55:9-11) and Johannine Christology and notes that the word of God in Isaiah remains a hypostatization (personification) of God's word, while John's Logos refers to an actual historical person, the incarnate Lord Jesus (cf. Guthrie 321).

In recent years the attention of scholars has turned from Greek to Jewish sources as a background for John in general and the logos concept in particular. Several major Jewish sources have been suggested: for example in the OT, non-cannonical wisdom literature, rabbinic idea of Torah, and Qumran literature.

First, the divinely spoken "word" (*dabar*) of God in the OT communicates the creative power of God (cf. Gen 1:3ff.; Ps 33:6; 107:20). Sometimes *dabar* is translated as "deed,"¹⁹ thus indicating the "dynamic" coloring of the word. God's word is His creative act, His powerful agent. God's *dabar*, in its creative faculty, possesses the power of self-realization (Isa 55:10, 11): it will accomplish what it purposes. Parker notes another group of *dabar* passages is used to indicate divine revelation through the prophets to the people Israel (Amos 3:1, 8; Isa 9:8; Jer 1:4, 20:8; Ezek 33:7). To some degree the term is identified with the Torah, and in Ps 119:9, 105, the whole message of God to humanity. Not found in the OT is the idea of God's word as a distinctive "entity" existing alongside God. While Ps 33:6; 107:20; 147:15 and Isa 55:10f. may approach a personification of the word, one does not find a hypostasis.

Wisdom is another OT concept that has significance for the logos idea.²⁰ Wisdom is not the product of creation²¹ but is initiated from God; it is a gift of God. In Proverbs 8, a personified wisdom is spoken of as having been present at the world's creation (8:27ff.). However, the fact of it also speaking of its own creation in 8:22 must qualify the

understanding given to its pre-existence. In other Judaistic thought and the intertestamental literature which preceded it one finds the concept of a mediating divine hypostasis more closely aligned to John, but even here it does not parallel it in equal force, originality or content. In the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon the Logos ("thine all powerful word") "leaped from heaven down from the royal throne, a stern warrior, into the midst of the doomed land" (Wis 18:15). Wisdom is furthermore spoken of as a "semi-divine" figure whose source is the Deity and whose works include the following: the creation and preservation of the world and the purification and inspiration of men (7:22-8:3; 9:4, 9-11).²³ In this literature one finds that while wisdom is personified it is not personalized (i.e., it is spoken of in personal terms without being regarded as a person).

A third Jewish source is the rabbinic idea of Torah. The parallels between this and John's Logos are as follows:²⁴ "First, the Torah was believed to have been created before the foundation of the world; in other words, its pre-existence is asserted. Secondly, the Torah lay on God's bosom. Thirdly, 'my daughter, she is the Torah.' Fourthly, through the first born, God created the heaven and the earth, and the first-born is no other than the Torah. Fifthly, the words of the Torah are life for the world." John, however, asserts the superiority of Jesus Christ to Moses the Torah-giver (John 1:17). Moses gave the Law, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John far surpasses the affirmation of the rabbis by offering and producing much more than the pre-existent Torah could.

The concept of personified wisdom also provides Jewish background for the Logos concept. In Prov. 58:22-31, wisdom is semi-hypostatized. Wisdom was the first of all created things and at the creation of world, "I was beside him, like a master workman" (Prov 8:30). Wisdom is a poetic personification of the power of God at work in all world. Many striking similarities can be drawn between the Logos and wisdom. However, wisdom is never called the word of God, even though she came forth from the mouth of the Most High (Ladd 276).

To the Greeks especially, but also to the Jews, the description of Christ as Logos points emphatically to His pre-existent state as Son of God and mediator of the creation. In John's thought, however, the conception rises far above that of a mere Son of God, a figure who partakes in some measure of God's nature, to describe the Son *par excellence*--eternally existing with God, partaking in its fullness of the divine nature, and acting with God in the creation (v. 3) and the preservation of the world (v. 4). To the Jew the 'word' recalls creative action, action which is at once a revelation of God's person and of His inscrutable will. John adds, however, that the revelation in Christ, God's perfect Word, reveals as no other the fullness of God's glory in its aspects of grace and truth (v. 14) and is that which above all else summons men to repentance and to the acceptance of light and life through Him.

LOGOS IN JOHANNINE GOSPEL

The Logos terminology rises to new heights in John in expressing a two-fold significance of Jesus Christ--the significance of His person in its pre-existent and incarnate states and the significance of His ministry as an act of revelation and reconciliation. All these John did without in the least distracting from the importance of the historical Jesus as the focal point of the divine disclosure. For whatever may have been the teachings about the Logos in the first Christian century, it is John's first and distinctive teaching that *Jesus*, not another, is the divine hypostasis who had been with God from all eternity, who was God, and who took on human form by incarnation, appearing on earth for the saving revelation of the Father, and that the Logos, in spite of contemporary teaching and the philosophical speculations attaching to it, is only to be found in this historical personage and at this moment in history in which He made His person known. We now turn to defend and substantiate the conclusion just described by a careful examination of the usage of Logos in John.

Some scholars still insist that the Johannine Logos can be understood only in the light of the Hellenistic usage. “The opening sentences then, of the prologue are clearly intelligible why when we admit the Logos, though it carries with it the associations of the Old Testament word of the Lord, has also a meaning similar to that which bears in Stoicism as modified by Plato, and parallel to the idea of Wisdom in other writers. It is the rational in the universe, its meaning, plan or purpose, conceived as a divine hypostasis in which the eternal God is revealed and active” (Dodd, quoted by Ladd 277). However, in spite of certain similarities, neither the idea of Logos nor wisdom approaches the truth John sets forth by his logos doctrine: the personal pre-existence and the incarnation of the Logos – the Philonic Logos is sometimes hypostatized and personified, but it is never personalized. Philo’s Logos concept is employed in the interest of a dualistic cosmology that uses the Logos concept to bring God in Christ directly into his creation.

EXEGESIS OF JOHN 1:14 ON THE INCARNATION OF THE LOGOS

Since Harnack, Ladd notes, that some scholars have argued that the prologue especially vs. 14: “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...” was not part of the original Gospel (333). Such scholars contend that the prologue circulated as part of the earliest published form of the Gospel and that this prologue may incorporate and redact an earlier hymn similar to the Johannine communities (Keener 334, Haechen 101). Matera (216) believes that the prologue including vs. 14 was composed at a later stage in the Gospel development. Still many form critics assert that the concept of incarnation of epiphany, meaning that the godhead manifests itself or appears in the world. In Tibetan Buddhism the Dalai Lama is understood as an incarnation of a certain bodhisattra. In Hinduism, the concept of *avatar* is similar to incarnation, meaning that the godhead appears in different human or

animal forms and is partially or totally present in these forms. In the intertestamental period and in the Judaism, there was the expectation of a heavenly, angel like being who would appear on earth in the last days (Schwarz 230-2310. however, this writer will attempt a traditional exegesis of John 1:14

It is only in the prologue that Jesus is called the Logos or “the Word” the most probable explanation is that John wants his readers to understand the expression “the Word” as Christological umbrella term for the entire Gospel. The characterization of Jesus as the “Word” is designed to encompass his entire ministry as it is narrated in the remainder of John’s account. All of Jesus “works” and “words” flow from the eternal fount of Jesus eternal existence as the “Word” (Kostenberger 51).

Lewis and Demarest (268-269) consider John 1:14 the most complete Johannine statement concerning incarnation, in four perspectives: (1) the *subject* of the incarnation is “the word” (*ho logos*), that is the divine Logos that existed in communion with the Father from eternity (cf. John 1:1-2). (2) The *substance* of the incarnation; the “became flesh” (*sarx egeneto*). The noun *sarx* here connotes human nature without moral disparagement (John 1:13; 3:6; 8:15) John states, not that the Word ceased to be what he was before (i.e. God) but that the Logos assumed our nature and our human mode of existence (sin excepted). (3) The *scene* of incarnation and lived (*eskenosen*) for awhile among us”. The verb is the ingressive aorist of *skeoo* which appears to take up a temporary dwelling place. Just as the divine presence made its abode in the tabernacle (2Sam 7:6), so John claims that God dwelt among us for a season in the man Jesus. And finally, (4) the *substantiation* of the incarnation; “we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only (so) who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). John and others observed the story of the majestic God showing through Jesus human flesh. These eye witnesses testified that the eternal God had indeed become a man in Jesus of Nazareth.

The most concise statement of the incarnation: “The Word” refers to him who is nothing less than God. “Became” is in the aorist tense, and indicates action at a point in time. “Flesh” is a strong, almost crude way of referring to human nature (cf. its use in Rom. 1:3; 8:3; 1Tim. 3:16; 1John 4:2; NIV tends to paraphrase). John does not say “the Word became man” not “the Word took a body.” He chooses that form of expression which puts what he wants to say most bluntly. It seems probable that he was confronted by opponents of Docetism which affirmed that the divinity of Christ but denied his humanity (Morris 90).

Further commentaries by Ridderbos (49-50) show that “flesh” is not just the material side of human existence but in the Old Testament sense, all of the human person in creaturely existence as distinct from God (cf. Matt. 24:22; “flesh and Blood” in Matt. 16:17). Also in view here is that which is human as such apart from sin (which is sometimes referred to with “flesh” notably in Paul; Rom. 8:4 etc.), that the word became flesh therefore does not implicitly mean that it also took upon itself the sin of the world. Although “flesh” as a term for the creaturely human in itself is also intended as a description of human weakness, perishability, dependence, and the like, one cannot say that the word is used here on account of the offence that the Logos, by appearing as a man and a nothing more, occasions to the natural intellect – a notion strongly advocated by Bultman. The flesh is the medium of the glory and makes it visible to all people.

By means of incarnation God has visibly appeared among humankind. Ridderbos further underscores that:

The Word became flesh does not mean changed into, it only denotes an identification... to become flesh is more than to appear in the sphere of the flesh, that is, as Jesus Nazareth. It is an identification that, though it is not further defined here or linked with the virgin birth does not mean that all the redemptive categories (the “life” and “the light of humanity”) thus far

attributed in the prologue to the Word now apply with the same absoluteness and exclusiveness to the man Jesus of Nazareth and in his person as the possessor of that which belongs to God alone, completely transcend and exceed the possibilities of a mere man (49-50). The Word “made his dwelling among us” (NIV).

More literally translated, the Greek verb *skenoo* means that the Word pitched his tabernacle, or lived in his tent, amongst us. The evangelist so implies, God has chosen to dwell among his people in a yet more personal way in the Word-became-flesh (Carson 127). And it must also be stressed that the Word-became-flesh is a repudiation of all Gnostic disparagement of man’s physical nature, for the statement asserts the real humanity of Christ (Howard 472).

DIFFERING THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS ON THE INCARNATION

Kenotic Theory

The term *kenosis* comes from the Greek text of Phil. 2:7 which refer to the fact that the one eternally in the form of God emptied himself to become a man. In general kenoticism interprets the incarnation as the transformation of God into man, or the exchange of divinity for humanity. Two types of kenotic Christology exists, the first, championed by Thomasius and Delitzsch in Germany and by Gore and Fairbairn in England, was the less radical of the two.

Thomasius distinguished between God’s relative attributes (omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience) and his immanent attributes (holiness, power, truth, love) in an act of self limitation, the eternal second person of the Trinity was said to have divested himself of the relative attributes when he assumed the limitations of space and time. Thomasius insisted that if the Son of God had retained the so called relative attributes, he could not have lived a truly human existence. At this exaltation to heaven, Christ reassumed

the relative attributes that he had temporarily set aside. Delitzsch shares similar theological opinion.

The second group of kenotic theories advanced by Gess, Godet, Clarke, and Mackintosh, took the kenosis doctrine to this logical extreme. They integrated Philippians 2:7 in the sense that at the incarnation the Logos gave up all the divine attributes, laid aside his deity, and so was transmuted into a man. Gess insisted that when the Son became a man, not only did he lay aside all the divine perfections but, initially at least, he had no consciousness of his Logos – nature, no longer experienced the mutual indwelling of the Father and spirit, and ceased to govern the universe. At the incarnation, the Trinity of God was profoundly altered. When Christ later returned to the Father in heaven, he recognized the divine life he possessed prior to his incarnation. God upholds similar incarnation by divestiture. He insists that in John 1:14 (“the Word became flesh”) the verb “became” signifies a profound alteration in the subject’s mode of being, and the predicative “flesh” connotes complete human nature. In his essential being, the Logos depotentiate himself into the form of a man, although his personal subject or ego remained the same. Following the ascension, the Son regained his original divine state. All these kenotic theologians upheld Christ’s pre-existence and deity, and most subscribed to his virgin birth (Lewis and Demarest 252-253, of Berkof 327-329, Grudem 549-552).

General Incarnationists

A. Dorner together with a few other European theologians rejects the notion that the Logos assumed human nature and a human mode of existence at the Jesus’ conception and birth. Rather, Dorner explicates the incarnation developmentally as a moral union of the Logos and the humanity of Jesus. That is by a gradual moral process that respects Jesus’ human development; the Logos became more fully joined to the representative head of humanity. At

the beginning of his life, Jesus was not the God-man. But as Jesus yielded himself to the Father in submission and prayer. The Logos progressively penetrated his humanity. The theory postulates that as a result of Jesus' self-surrender to the Father, the separate divine and human egos gradually united into perfect God-manhood. The divine and human natures united indissolubly at Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven (Lewis and Demarest 253 cf. Berkof 329-330)

Liberal Theologians

Lewis and Demarest (254) describe the three major assumptions that shape the liberal view of incarnation of Jesus. (1) A growing antipathy to the supernatural. These theologians viewed the incarnation of a heavenly being as a primitive "myth" unacceptable to the modern scientific mind. (2) The supplanting of ontological concerns by ethical interests. Kant's polemic against knowledge of God in himself in the *Critique of Pure Reason* paralyzed discussion of Christ's pre-existence and incarnation. For Kant, incarnation is the embodiment of the eternal idea in a human life. (3) Emphasis on the divine immanence rather than transcendence. From a pantheistic or panentheistic perspective, liberal scholars focused on the presence of God in the man Jesus, who by word and example functioned as the revealer of God. Ritschl, following Kant eliminated metaphysics from theology. He abandoned theoretical questions about *en Logos* and the two natures in favour of value judgments namely, the function or Jesus performed in establishing his kingdom.

Adolf Harnack insists that the doctrines of Christ's pre-existence and incarnation represent the intrusion of Greek religious philosophy into the sphere of Christianity. Harnack identifies the Greek Logos doctrine as the entry point what he calls the acute Hellenization of the faith.

Existentialist Theology

Theologians aligned with the movement minimize the historical aspects of the incarnation while emphasizing the existential. The focus of the incarnation is said to be the meeting of divine and human subjects.

Soren Kierkegaard view the incarnation an offensive to conceptual thought, since the view of the Eternal becoming temporal the Absolute becoming relative, the Being-in-itself becoming history, cannot rationally justified.

Guided by Kierkegaard's dialectic between heaven and earth Brunner denies the existence of any connecting links between the Christ event and history (*urgeschichte*), connotes the encounter between the divine "I" and the human "thou" in which God addresses the person with the divine claim and elicits a decision of faith. Brunner concedes that Christ did assume our humanity. The real focus of the incarnation, however, is not historical but existential or suprahistorical; it resides in the personal meeting between divine and human subjects (Lewis and Demarest, 255-256).

Process Theologians

Followers of Whitehead reject as grossly pre-scientific the claim that the second person of the triune Godhead literally assumed human flesh. The process world view renders impossible the idea of an intrusion from outside the natural order. Instead, the incarnation must be interpreted solely in terms of the cosmic world process. The neoclassical version of the incarnation is rooted in its understanding of the Logos. Not an eternally divine person, the Logos is identified as the impersonal and timeless principle of order and purpose in the universe. In the Whiteheadian scheme, broadly speaking, the incarnation represents the immanence of the Logos in the man Jesus.

John B. Cobb, Jr., argues the substantialist model of incarnation. The incarnation, Cobb insists, describes the indwelling of the Logos, or the power of the creative transformation, in the historical Jesus. To be sure, the Logos is incarnate and operative in all persons and religious traditions. But the dwelling of the logos in Jesus was so complete that it shaped his very being (Lewis and Demarest 257-258).

Evangelical Theology

Evangelical and mainline theology, based on biblical teaching and reasoning on the basis of the Chacedonia logic of the hypostatic union and *hmousious*, has argued that Jesus' humanity, in full union with divinity, represented the pure, unadulterated image of god and was not subject to sin (Karkeine 175). The confession of a genuine incarnation is one of the fundamental affirmations of Christianity (Borhett 119).

PARADIGM SHIFTS FROM ORTHODOXY AND RADICAL INCARNATION

THEOLOGY TO THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Is there any continuity between the incarnate Christ presented in the Gospels with the Jesus of history? This is the question which occupied the first two "quests for the historical Jesus" and which again surfaces in the current trends which may summarize as the "third quest". The "first quest" began with the assumption that there was a radical difference between the Jesus of history and the incarnate Christ of faith who was the invention of the early Church. The effective end of the "first quest" came with the publication of Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of Historical Jesus*. Schweitzer argued that the Jesus of history which was portrayed in the "lives of Jesus" was nothing more than a figure designed by rationalism. The true Jesus was a strange apocalyptic figure who "comes to us as one unknown".

The “second quest” began when Ernst Kasemann gave his monumental lecture in 1953 entitled “The Problem of the Historical Jesus.” In this essay he argued that through the Gospels presented interpretations of Jesus (Kerygma), they also preserved authentic historical narratives. In contrast to the “First quest” this “second quest” assumed that there was much more common ground between the Jesus of history and the incarnate Logos – Christ of faith. The “Second quest” came to an end in the late 1960s and early 1970s and only recently has a “third quest” begun. The “third quest” is inaugurated to locate Jesus within his social context. The “Jesus Seminar” has been a major player in this search with their novel method of voting to identify the authentic sayings of Jesus and the inclusion of the Gospel of Thomas as a source for Christology (Blomberg 179-184). The images of Jesus which have merged from those involved in the “third quest” include Jesus as the itinerant cynic philosopher, major proponents being John Dominic Crossan, Burton Mack and Fi Gerald Downing (see Witherington III 58-92); Jesus as the eschatological prophet who awaits the restoration of Israel, the major proponents are E.P. Sanders and Maurice Casey (Ben Witherington III 116-136); Jesus as the charismatic teacher, the major exponents being Marcus Borg, Geza Vermes and Graham H. Twelftree (see Ben Witherington III 137-160); Jesus as the prophet for social change or for pacific love for one’s enemy. By Gerd Theissen Richard A. Horsley and R. David Kaylor (Ben Witherington III 137-160); and Jesus as the Sophia (wisdom of God), by Elizabeth Schussler Firoenza and Ben Witherington III (Ben Witherington III 161-198).

Among those participating in the multifaceted “third quest” are a number of evangelical theologians who are attempting their own new appraisal of Jesus, such as N.T. Wright. Wright affirms that Jesus is the Messiah and as such was the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hopes. Scripture witness to be the source of evangelical Christologies as Millard Erickson shows in his contemporary incarnation Christology (Wallace and Green, 245).

EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATION OF THE LOGOS CHRISTOLOGY

Ladd (277-278) observes that the most important question on the incarnation is the theological use John makes of the Logos which can find no parallels in either Hellenistic philosophy or in Jewish thought. The first and most important theological implication is the pre-existence of Jesus, who is the Logos. “In the beginning” a point behind creation, for the Logos was the agent of creation. The pre-existence of Jesus is reflected elsewhere in Jesus’ own reported teaching. Before Abraham was I am” (8:58). This amazing affirmation is an allusion to the Old Testament usage. God revealed himself to Moses as “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14). Pre-existence is also predicated in Jesus ‘last prayer’ “Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (17:5; cf. 6:62). The idea of pre-existence was no invention of the evangelist. Paul expresses it clearly in his great incarnation hymn (Phil 2:6 cf. Col. 1:15ff) and alluded to it in earlier correspondence (1Cor8:6; 2Cor 8:9).

Second, John uses the Logos idea to assert the deity of Jesus. The Logos was with (*pros*) god, and the Word was God (*theos en ho logos*). The Greek words express two ideas: the Word was deity but the word was not fully identical with deity, the definite article is used only with Logos. If John had used the definite article also with *theos*, he would have said that all that God is, the Logos is; exclusive identity, as I is, says that all the Word is, God is, but he implies that God is more than the Word.

Third, John asserts that the Logos was the agent of creation. He is not the ultimate source of creation, but the agent through whom God, the ultimate source, created the world. This same theology is expressed in Paul’s words: that all things come from God through (*dia*) Christ (1Cor. 8:6).

Fourth, there is the amazing assertion that “the Word became flesh” (1:14). Such an affirmation would amaze and refute all Hellenistic philosophical and Gnostic dualism that separated God himself in the Word who entered human history, not as a phantom but as a real man of flesh. The Word translated “to dwell” (*eskenosen*) or “to tabernacle,” is a biblical metaphor for God’s presence. This statement implies that God himself was present in the flesh, in abasement (J. Jeremias, cited by Ladd 278).

The fifth meaning of Logos is that he has come in the flesh as revealer. He came to reveal to human being life (1:4), light (1:4-5), grace (1:14), truth (1:14), glory (1:14) even God himself “No one has ever seen God, the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (1:18). While John may not make further use of the Logos idiom beyond the prologue, it is clear, however, that the Logos theology pervades the entire Gospel.

CHRISTOLOGY AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH IN AFRICA

Christology is the doctrine of Christ, his person and natures-divine and human (Bray 137). And the main aim of Christology is to give an account of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, of who he is and why he is important (Marshall 80). Also, Christology is a department of theology, which deals with the Person of Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humankind. (Abogunrin). According to Abogunrin, Christology is rooted in the experience of Jesus Christ and the earliest Christian communities believed in him and owed their existence to him (1).

Christology, with reference to Africa, lays emphasis on the fact that God reveals himself in love in Jesus Christ to humankind. And in consequence of this, Jesus is found transforming the relationship between man and God and between man and man. The emphasis is shifting from how God become incarnate to how we ourselves can become

incarnate; our spirituality must be an incarnate spirituality, heading us more and more to find God in Christ through our own human existence (Abogunrin 16).

Furthermore, Abogunrin (18) proposes a form of Christology relevant to African Christology that is bible-centered. Abogunrin is convinced that authentic and enduring Christology in Africa must drive from African reading of the Bible. If an African theologian si to enjoy any originality he must go him self to the Bible, the source of Christian theology and make it a key of his own understanding of the complex issues involved in Christology form the earliest period until now. Also, an African reading to the scripture must be an informed reading and of the Christology which grows out forth this effort must be authentically African and at the same time universal in scope.

Abogunrin (18-19) is also convinced that incarnation should be presented in such a way that will distinguish it from various myths of incarnation in Africa. Africa is full of stories of spirits and animals incarnating as men and returning after death to what they were before their incarnation. The story of God becoming incarnate in Christ may not too strange in the African context, but it will only reduce Jesus to one of the many divinities of African Traditional Religion. The presentation of incarnation should emphasize the fact that Jesus Christ was the manifestation of God's love for humankind. Through the incarnation God came to share in God's victory over death and all other disastrous influences that threaten men.

INCARNATION THEOLOGY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH

Most recently, beginning with the 20th C. in particular, a diversity of Christologies has arisen in the contexts of the post-Enlightenment West and in flourishing independent movements of

Africa, Asia, and Latin and America. In Africa, black liberation and functional Christologies gain a prominence.

While we maintain that contextualizing the gospel in the Africa terms is relevant and emphasize certain aspects of functional Christologies, we, however, remain committed to the historical expression of Christian faith and the integrity of the scripture witness. We are therefore wary of all contemporary Christological discussions that have a distorted view of the incarnate Logos. For the African version of Christianity, we must realize the fact that “the Word became flesh” tells us that God is intent on communicating about himself. The “Word became flesh” tells us that. The message (the logos) is accessible and not hidden away for mystics and scholars among us but was in the world and was touched and heard by many.

In the incarnation God has exhibited the glory and grace that is native to his selfhood; and through this incarnation, humankind, including Africans can regain the glory and grace it once had when it was created. When God takes this initiative, new possibilities are born. Divine power is released into the broken world and its broken lives so that new life is possible. In the midst of the broken socio-economic conditions of Africa and the new possibilities of God’s grace, salvation, redemption, liberation, and deliverance have been released upon us in the fact of Jesus incarnation.

The cognitive significance of the incarnation -the fact that the eternal person of the Son took on himself nature is an amazing redemptive act of God. Christ’s primary purpose in coming to earth was to save the lost the redemptive action seems to important that some rationalists and functionalists (we must guard against extreme functionalism in the African Church) have lost sight of the One who accomplished it. The crucial point, they maintain, is what Jesus did, not who he was (in his metaphysical or ontological being). They seem to overlook the fact that that the value of Jesus’ dynamic work depends on who he was. The question Jesus asked

must still be answered: “who do people say the Son of man?” Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who is also portrayed in the Gospel of John as the functional liberator from every demonic influence and corrupt power structure. The African Church must come to grips with this revelation.

The fact of incarnation also shows that God values sinful persons highly. In the darkest hours of our experience we know that God cares for us. Although transcendent to humans both metaphysically and morally, God has taken the initiative to reach out to us. The incarnation demonstrates the fact that it is no mere myth that God loves sinners in spite of the fact that they are holistically depraved, personally estranged, and deserving by guilty. God the Son valued lost humans so greatly that he willingly left heaven’s glories to seek and to save them! What greater light for the missionary advancement of God’s Gospel in Africa?

The eternal Word so valued his fallen image-bearers that he took human form, humbled himself as a human child, became a carpenter’s helper. To save the lost the Messiah gave up his life and bore the penalty fallen humans deserved. Even though humanity’s functional *mago* is inspired and the relational image lost, Christ did not consider humans mere beasts. To Christ humans are worth thriving for! Humans are worth dying for! This is the gospel of eternal redemption that must be proclaimed in our cultural terms to make Christianity truly global religion.

The challenge before the African Church is to be like Christ, to be in the world but not of it. The incarnate Logos identifies with the fallen people of the world in their humanness, but not in their private sins or public crimes. Jesus says, “But they are still in the world” (John 17:11), but he added. “For they are not of the world” (vs. 14). Exhortations to separate ourselves from the evils of the world by people may be misconstrued to mean isolation from non-Christians. For Webber:

The incarnation is the center point from which to reflect on the role of the Christian in the world. As a revelation of the Father, Christ was *identified* with the natural and social order, he was separate from the powers of evil that rule the course of the world, and He began the three sided view of reality points to the relationship that exists between the Christian and the World (Webber, cited by Lewis and Demarest 303).

Although the eternal Word was spiritually rich beyond description, “yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty might become rich.” (2cor. 8:9). “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he became obedient to death and even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:5-8). Like Jesus, African Christians should exemplify the servant ministry they teach. Christ’s incarnation has not yet had his full effect on that continent. But the incarnation indicates that in spite of the ugliness and pervasiveness of sin creation is open to its Maker and full of spiritual significance. The incarnation given us reason to be believing participants in Christ’s present spiritual kingdom.

Jesus was incarnate in order to inaugurate the New Age or God’s Kingdom on earth. In the incarnation, Jesus enters time and space and asserts his power over sin, evil, Satan corruption, and every diabolical influence. For the African Christians, we must seek the ongoing assertion of God’s power over every form of or manifestation of evil in the lives of men. For Wallis:

Jesus’ healing ministry is...an aspect of evangelism, which anchors the call to discipleship, and God’s offer of communion with himself within concrete possibilities of human experiences where the outworking of evil inflict such physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual wounds that God’s love is rendered meaningless and out of reach, there needs to be a prior action of liberation by god before there is freedom to respond (Wallis, quoted by Folarin 310-311).

CONCLUSION

The paper has so far evaluated the various strata of major discussions on the incarnational theology of the fourth Gospel, with a view of articulating a sound exegesis and systematizing into an organic unity with the rest of the biblical revelation.

The historical backgrounds of the term Logos were explored in Greek philosophy, Old Testament, and the hypostatization or personification of wisdom (Sophia). George Eldon Ladd describes the various theological implications of Logos from the evangelical perspective. He relies on the reliability of Scripture witness in doing Christology.

An exegesis of John 1:14 was done, not in isolation, but within the framework of the entire prologue (1:1-18). Its unity with the rest of the Johannine thought was also shown. The exegesis done from historical, theological, grammatical perspectives revealed the rich mystery of the fact of incarnation. The study was not limited only to exegesis, but various theological implications of the logos revelation were spelt out.

Many divergencies from the historical position on incarnation were evaluated in the light of evangelical theology. Such theological divergencies include the liberal, neoorthodox, existentialist, kenotic, and process models of Christology.

For the study to be more relevant to current issues on the Jesus of history, the three quests or movements for the reconstruction of the historical Jesus were appraised. The writer links the searches for the historical Jesus to radical shifts from the historical incarnation theology of Christ.

The study is made relevant to the African situation by considering the functional aspect of Christology, that is what Christ did, in order to effect redemption, liberation and deliverance for mankind: the major strengths and weaknesses of functional Christology were highlighted, though not in details: the detailed study is beyond the scope of this present work. The ontological (who Jesus is) and functional (what he did) Christologies are more appropriate to

the African situation. And also, various applications of the fact of incarnation for the African church were discussed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author of this work recommends a contemporary incarnation Christological model based on such scholarly works like Millard J. Erickson's *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology*. The model will prove to be a great tool in modern researches in African contextualized Christologies. The model escapes the weaknesses of black, liberation, and functional Christologies and synthesizes the best of these Christological patterns with the historical theology. The model is based on four major premises, viz;

1. The doctrine of Jesus Christ as fully god and fully human, and yet one person, while it is not totally comprehensible, is not a logically untenable or internally contradictory concept.
2. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is a historical occurrence. This event, which makes him unique among human beings, including the founders and leaders of other religions, justifies the claim that salvation is only through him.
3. Jesus showed his concern for all segments of society and is therefore able to be Saviour of all, no matter one's race, gender, or social class.
4. The teaching that in Jesus of Nazareth God was completely present in union with a fully human individual provides us with significant motifs for understanding and explaining the problem of evil in our world, and gives us basis for hope in the face of such evil.

The first two premises in Erickson's model refer to the metaphysical or ontological dimension of Christology, that is, who Jesus is. The last two propositions include functional or practical Christology, with an emphasis on the salvation, redemptive and liberating works of Jesus. Jesus, who entered as God into the context of humanity, has shown and is still

showing his love and compassion to the sufferings of mankind. He is therefore concerned about our daily life and existence.

Erickson's model of contemporary incarnation Christology, relevant for the African situation, is a Christology both from "above" and "below", does not bypass the ministry of Jesus does not separate the person of Christ from his work that is to day, separates Christology from soteriology.

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