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ARTICLE TWENTY ONE

'The Jesus I Didn't Know': The Historical Jesus in an Unappreciated African Basket

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Abstract

The emergence of the Age of the Enlightenment ushered in critical thinking about the Gospels and Jesus. This makes the hypostatic perspective of Jesus as being God and human to be subjected to academic scrutiny. Modern critical scholars predominantly in North America and Germany have attempted to place Jesus on the scientific scale which seems to view Jesus as being human rather than divine. Using the historical-critical method, this paper surveys the various depictions of Jesus in the Jesus scholarship and it adopts Crossan's categorisation; the traditional Jesus, the Historical Jesus and the fictional Jesus because of its reliability and clarity in surveying the entire Jesus studies. It also surveys the understanding of Jesus in Africa following Taylor's perception of Jesus's question, 'Who do men say I am?'. An evaluation of these Western and African portraits of Jesus was made and it is obvious the Africans are left to select from the various options of Jesus in the African basket: the biblio-western and African biblio-cultural contexts. Lastly, the paper argues for the Bible depictions of Jesus as reliable and authentic portraits of Jesus of all times which are foundational for faith and spiritual growth in both scholarly and spiritual searches for Jesus.

Keywords: Gospels, Historical Jesus, African basket, fictional Jesus, Enlightenment

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Age of the Enlightenment, the Gospels and Jesus have been opened to serious scrutiny particularly among the critical scholars in search for the dichotomy between the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Despite that the Jesus of the Gospels has become a 'light or darkness' for many people, some critical scholars still turn Jesus to be the object of human propaganda in terms of his humanity, his Jewishness, and his divinity. Ben Witherington III rightly observes, "Jesus continues to raise profound questions about what it means to be human, what it means to be a Jew, what it means to be a Christian. Jesus is still the stumbling block or the building block which defines how we construct our world views" ("Wright Quest"). In the same vein Craig L. Blomberg observes that "there is no body of literature in the world that has been exposed to the stringent analytical study that the four Gospels have sustained for the past two hundred years" (ix). Also, within the same context particularly the understanding of Jesus' words, which are predominantly documented in the Gospels, Albert Nolan notes, "His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing" (19).

This paper discusses the Jesus studies and follows John Dominic Crossan's approach and classification to the entire Jesus research; the traditional Jesus, the historical Jesus and the fictional Jesus ("In Their Own Words" 22). Crossan's approach has been adopted in considering the entire matrix of Jesus studies with the view of presenting new insights into the studies, which have battled the minds of scholars for centuries. An analysis of these Western and African portraits of Jesus was made and it is obvious that the Africans are left to hand-pick from the various options of Jesus in the African basket or context i.e. the Bible-centred, biblio-western and African biblio-cultural Jesuses. Although Crossan's approach has not been highly regarded, such a tripartite approach to the historical Jesus becomes relevant, comprehensive and recent in critical scholarship as we study in search for ways to remove the Jesus of the Gospels from the African

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basket, which is adorned with many alternatives. The paper also argues for the Bible depictions of Jesus as reliable and authentic portraits of Jesus of all times which are foundational for faith and spiritual growth in both scholarly and spiritual searches for Jesus.

Jesus in Western Scholarship

Discussing the issues surrounding Jesus studies depends on the categorizing and placement of the scholars within the entire matrix of Jesus studies. Recently, in a study on the different stages of Jesus studies as means to clear the misunderstandings within the entire Jesus research, John Dominic Crossan shows remarkable categorization, which is different from the perspectives gotten from numerous Jesus scholars. Crossan divides the entire matrix into three stages; the first is the traditional Jesus, which was established by the church fathers from the early church to the reformation. The second is the historical Jesus, which came as a product of the Age of the Enlightenment and sought scientific approaches (see vanAarde" Methods and Models") to the study of Jesus and the Gospels. The third is the fictional Jesus, which started with the *Jesus Seminar* to the present ("In Their Own Words" 22).

1. *The Traditional Jesus*

The first stage of Jesus studies is the traditional understanding of Jesus as depicted by the apostles, the early church fathers to the time of the reformation. A lot of Jesus discussions surfaced after his death and resurrection among his followers as recorded in the Gospels. Many books were written about the life of Jesus during and after the first century. Some of these books include; *the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary Magdala, the Gospel of Philip* and *the Gospel of Peter etc.* Of all those books, only four of those biographical materials later proved authentic, inspired by the Holy Spirit based upon the test of the Church fathers.[1] These four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were selected and included in the New Testament canon of scriptures as the Gospels. These four Gospels have become the primary objects of study for the life of the historical figure, Jesus, in terms of understanding his words and activities on earth.

During the second century CE, before the selection of the Gospels, the Church fathers devoted their strength in search for the reliable and authentic words and deeds of Jesus. This laid the background for the traditional view of Jesus, which considered Jesus as the Lord, the Savior of the world, eternal God-man, a miracle worker, among many other depictions. Within the second century, the doctrine of the person of Christ was developed at least partly in response to heresy of different kinds. The influence of Cerinthianism and Docetism was quite evident in the teachings of the heretic Arius, whose ideas prompted the development of classical Christology by the early church fathers (Bray 138).[2]

Dominant among the works of the early Church fathers was the work of Clement of Rome, which viewed Christ as God but still admitted the incarnation of Jesus in a bodily form. Ignatius also emphasized the true deity and humanity of Christ. There was also the Ebonite's threat, which attempted to view Christ as only human but Melito of Sardis spoke of Christ as God and man. Irenaeus clearly returned to a more biblical view of the person of Christ (Bray 138). Tertullian combated Gnosticism[3] and first taught that the Father and Son are of "one substance" and that there are three persons of the Godhead. Also, Origen from the East taught the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. Later, the School of Alexandria stressed the unity of Christ as being a divine person of the Son of God, who became fully human (Bray 138).

During the Medieval Ages, the authority of patristic Christology was fully accepted. But later it was believed Christ had only one nature (divine), which had brought the genuineness of his humanity into question. In order to meet such debate, St. Augustine stressed the real humanity of Christ in his atoning work. From CE 451 to CE 787, many people agreed that the human nature of Christ was hypostatized in the *logos,* the Son of God. The basic problem during this time was the witness of the Gospels to the miracles and other extraordinary deeds of Jesus (Bray 138). Even the first century struggled with the miracles of Jesus, for example, the healing of the blind man which attracted the attention of many people of Jesus' days. This problem can only be subjected when the person of Christ is seen to be in union with both the divine and

human nature of Christ.

The Reformation witnessed Christological discussions. Martin Luther's Christology was based on Christ as truly God and truly Man with inseparable unity and spoke of the "wondrous exchange" (Wallace and Green 242). Calvin approved the traditional Christology of the Church councils and taught that when the Word became incarnate Christ, that did not suspend nor alter his normal function of upholding the universe. Calvin found Lutheran Christology guilty of a tendency toward the heresy of the Eutyches, the belief that Christ had only a divine nature. However, some Anabaptists also rejected the teachings of the Chalcedonian definition and maintained that Jesus' body was composed of "celestial flesh," a unique product of the virgin's womb, substantially different from ordinary human flesh (Wallace and Green 242-3). Luther and Calvin opposed such views because the Holy Spirit was guiding their studies of the Gospels into all truth as Jesus promised (Jn 14.16-17; 16.13).

Generally, faith was fairly regarded within the traditional understanding of Jesus, although there were some threats which orthodoxy of those centuries dealt with particularly the ecclesiastical corruptions of the Medieval Ages to the Renaissance Age. The understanding of Jesus was very firm as many Church leaders safeguarded the doctrines of the God-man which gave Jesus a higher place of glory and many regarded him as being the Lord of the centuries.

2. *The Historical Jesus*

Objecting to the traditional view of Jesus, research, in recent forms, discovers an interest in the critical and a historical Jesus rather than the understanding of Jesus, which has been held since the early church to the Reformation. After the Age of the Enlightenment and with the rise of liberalism in the eighteenth century, the Gospels, and Jesus in particular, have been subjected to higher historical and literary criticisms, which was based upon anti-supernaturalism (Harley 221-58; Verhoef 1-7; Ellens 437-40; Meier, "Historical Jesus" 52-79; Meier, "Historical Herodians" 740-6). This anti-supernatural view led to the critical views of Jesus and in the course of time, scholars were not sure whether 'the methods of historical science could uncover the true Jesus of history" (Coleman 43). It is reasonable enough to say that the Bible can be subjected to scientific enquiries but the context for which it was written and expected to function as a Christian document must be dignified.

This historical study of Jesus emerged in three stages of enquiry; the first, second and the third quests for the historical Jesus (Rubio 211-253; Segal 190-208; Meier, "Historical Jesus" 52-79; Bock 3-25; Thomas 447-97). From an anti-supernatural view, the critical historical form of study views Jesus in history to be the same as any historical figure[4] and the Gospels in any other literary compositions. Faith was sidelined and reasoning took over. Their aims and presuppositions have attracted the attention of people (Christians and non-Christians, scholars, pastors and laymen) within the last three centuries. This made Blomberg to observe that Jesus has been studied in literature beyond any man for more than the past two hundred years (*Making Sense* ix), a similar view shared by Nolan as the words of Jesus have been turned to mean everything, anything and nothing (Nolan 19).

This period resulted in a critical and secular re-evaluation of the traditional view of the Gospels with various proponents such as Reimarus, Strauss, Wrede, Schweitzer, Bultmann and Robinson, among many others. Faith became a "minor voice" and reasoning has been enthroned in all dimensions to depict the Gospels. Scholars like Crossan, Witherington III, Wright and Borg among many others, currently are well-known scholars in the historical Jesus research movement.

Within the quest for the historical Jesus, the first quest started in 1776 and centered on a distorted view of the Gospels as anti-supernatural and as myths of the early church dominantly in the works of Reimarus, Strauss, Wrede, Renan and Bultmann (see Strimple *Modern Search*; Abogunrin, "In Search"; Schweitzer *The Quest*; Kee, *Jesus in History*; Brown "Quest"). Though many scholars of Jesus tend to call the end of the first quest, the no-quest, thinking Jesus discussions got into silence after the work of Schweitzer, it has been argued that the designation '*no quest'* is probably an overstatement because what is called 'No Quest' was the end of the first quest (Blomberg *Jesus* 84; Bock *Studies* 18-24, 141-52; Porter 31-4). The second quest started

around 1953 and laid emphasis on the renewal of interest in the historical relationship between Jesus' life and message and the view of the early church about him as revealed in the works of Kasëmann, Fuchs, Bornkamm and Robinson (see Robinson *A New Quest*; Bornkamm *Jesus of Nazareth*; Fuchs, *Studies*). The third quest of the 1970s laid emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus particularly the socio-historical setting of Jesus in Palestine (Le Donne 63-86; Holmen 175-97; Evans "Assessing" 35-54) with bulk of primary scholars such as Geza Vermes, Crossan, Borg, Wright, Sanders, Witherington III and many others (See Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*; Vermes *The Religion*; Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*; Borg, *A New Vision*; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*; Crossan *Who killed Jesus?*; Borg, *Conflict*; Witherington III *Jesus Quest*; Witherington III *What have They*). Jesus has been viewed within his socio-economic and religio-cultural context of Palestine as being the sage, cynic Jewish peasant, eschatological prophet, and a spirit-filled person, who worked so hard to renew religious beliefs in Israel community.

3. *The Fictional Jesus*

There is another arm of Jesus studies under the umbrella of the Jesus Seminar, which started in 1985 by Robert W. Funk, and it holds also to an anti-supernatural Jesus who did no miracles and did not rise from the dead, a belief held by the first quest. But the Jesus Seminar uses advanced and unique means for the understanding of Jesus, which are new and foreign to the entire Jesus studies. The group aims at analyzing the words of Jesus (like in the days of Bultmann and the second quest) but uses different technical criteria (Keener 68; Tambiyi 40-1, 96; Evans 48-51; Guthrie 243-7; Weren 263; Boring 9). This view of Jesus, by the Jesus Seminar, questions the Gospels' records of Jesus and emphasizes non-canonical Gnostic documents to portray an "alternative Jesus," that differs from the biblical Gospels with the aim of correcting the portraits of Jesus over the years (Hays "The Corrected Jesus"; Neave "The Real Face"). Most of the higher critical scholars are attempting to set Jesus in his socio-historical context and have even considered the hypothetical *Q (Kloppenborg 307-344; Kelber 213-224),* and the Gnostic Gospels, discovered in the twentieth century at Nag Hammadi Egypt such as the *Gospel of Thomas,* the *Gospel of Phillip* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene and* dated around third and fourth centuries CE, to be authentic and reliable at the expense of the canonical Gospels. These critical scholars in North America, predominantly the members of the Jesus Seminar, discovered they can fairly rely on the Gnostic Gospels rather than the canonical Gospels. This makes the historical Jesus scholarship extensive with innumerable contributions based upon their criteria for authenticity.

A similar fictional view of Jesus is held by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code* which has become one of the popular blockbusters in the world. There are also some extremists, who deny the existence of Jesus (cf. Robert M. Price's *Jesus is Dead* in 2007). *The Da Vinci Code, which relies on several Gnostic sources, enthrones Mary of Magdala above even the apostles because she is believed to have a close marital relationship with Jesus which led to the birth of a daughter, Sarah, a position which is differently portrayed as having three children in the movie, The Last Temptation of Jesus. The ascendancy of Mary Magdalene has been a debatable issue among many Jesus scholars (Brown,Da Vinci 312-34; McGirk, "The Titanic"; Jacobovici and Wilson The Lost Gospel).* Jesus has been suggested to have gotten married, had children and had lived a normal life like anyone else on this earth (cf. *The Last Temptation of Jesus*) but this alleged marriage with Mary Magdala has been debated for lack of evidence. In the search to quench such an academic thirst, Karen King of Harvard during the *International Association of Coptic Studies* in Rome made a tabloid claim in 2012 from a fourth century discovered Coptic papyrus, which claimed Jesus making a reference to 'my wife…' ("Jesus Said to them"). This effort was tagged 'Mrs Messiah' by Robert M. Price (Price "Mrs Messiah"; Jones 137; Tambiyi, "Mrs Messiah?"). However, scholars are certain that this Coptic fragment is not capable of defending the so-called marital relationship of Jesus as scrutinized by international Coptic experts as a forged document (Wallace "Jesus' Wife"; Wallace, "Reality Check"; Pettengale, "How the Jesus"; McCoy, "How Harvard"; Goodstein "Fresh Doubts"; Jarus, "Gospel of Jesus").

Afro-Biblical Portraits of Jesus

Within the African theological discussions, one appreciates the efforts put by most of the "founding fathers" of theology and biblical studies, which led to the development of the Jesus discussions. This, to me, is the influence of the Western expositions and higher criticisms on the Gospels, particularly the life of Jesus after the Age of the Enlightenment. Discussing Jesus within this African matrix on the African continent, which started in the 1960s began with the questions of John V. Taylor about how the Africans would respond to the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say I am?". Affirming this, Taylor observes:

> Christ has been presented as to answer to questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, saviour of the world of European worldview, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the question that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the church universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of her total, inhabited humanity would they be acceptable? (16).

There are several works, which elaborated the concerns raised by Taylor for Africans (Udoh 263; Cook 668-92; Zvomunondita "Who do people say"; Wendland "Who do people say"; Akinade "Who do people say"; Gwamna "What do people say"). It is obvious that the effort to render solution to the questions of Taylor on the need for African Christological contents raise the understanding of Christ from the African cultural milieu through the comparative, systematic, liberation and grassroots methodology, which involve the interaction of the Bible with the African worldview. These works delve into portraits of Jesus, which are within these Christological methodologies (Okoye 9-17; Michael "African Christological Discourse"). Such theological assertions end up creating various options of Jesus in an African basket.

Kwame Bediako a Ghanian theologian, has been one of the famous African theologians, who engages in the contextualization of theology within the African context, particularly the Gospels and Jesus. Bediako's contributions are the cultural depictions of Jesus Christ as our ancestor, elder brother and sole-mediator[5] within the Akan people of Ghana yet he considers Christ as unique for salvation (Bediako, *Christianity and Identity;* Bediako *"*Biblical Christologies" 81-121; Bediako *Jesus in African Culture*; Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*; Bedialo, *Jesus in Africa*; Gehman 85-97). Although Bediako's portraits of Jesus remain, they have been subjected to critical investigation as to when Jesus had attained such significant positions of ancestor, elder brother and mediator among the African people.

Another scholar one finds important within African Christological discourse is Charles Nyamiti as his work seeks to answer the allegations of the Christ our ancestor theology, which caused him to systematize the doctrine of the Trinity to fit into the category of ancestorship. Nyamiti observes that "With an understanding of ancestral relationship it is possible to examine the inner life of God (trinity) and discover that there is an ancestral kingship among the divine persons: the Father is ancestor to the Son, the Son is the descendant to the Father" (Nyamiti "Trinity" 21-22; Nyamiti "Christ" 9-11). Michael Matthew challenges this Christological framework particularly the fact that the Father is ancestor to the Son that, at 'what point has the Father died to attain such a status of ancestor?' (11). Death should not only be considered when raising questions to such divine ancestral depiction. Biological children makes one attain ancestorship, which should be far removed from the life of Jesus unless the marital relationship of Jesus is believed to be on the affirmative.

Samuel Oyin Abogunrin also in "Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa"presents an evangelical attempt to deal with the present discourse of Christology within the African continent. Abogunrin counteracts the contemporary Christological frameworks such the Bediako's Christ our ancestor, Harry Sawyer's Jesus as the Elder Brother, Jesus as Chief or King, blackness of Jesus, and the comparative analysis of Jesus with African divinities and presents a biblical response to

all those Christological frameworks in Africa which are basically from the traditional perspectives. Abogunrin urges for a Bible-centered Christology, an incarnational-centered Christology, and a Christology in context. Abogunrin concludes in search for a living Christology in Africa when he states that 'Christology in African context is the road to a truly incarnational faith and relevant Christianity in Africa" ("Christology" 22). However, his assertion that "Jesus was born in Africa and grew up in the Hebrew context" ("Christology" 21) is derailing for Jesus was born in Israel and the Holy Family only visited Africa (Matt. 2:13-15).

Je'adayibe Dogara Gwamna's works focus on contextualizing the message of Jesus. The aim of African theological discourse, that is, to bring the Bible to the African *sitz im leben* has been illustrated in his book *Perspectives in African Theology* (11). Gwamna depicts Jesus to be a '"contextualist" par excellence' and that Jesus used the metaphors of salt and light because they were common and popular elements used among the Jewish people. Gwamna focuses on providing scholarly solutions to the problems with an intriguing, educative and encouraging versatility when he surveys the entire issues in current New Testament studies and the Jesus studies ("What do people" 1-15). Gwamna expresses a sense of audacity, orthodoxy, academic maturity and passion for the African Church.

Similarly, Godwin N. Toryough depicts Christ as a revolutionary person in the African context particularly in his event of cleansing the temple in the book of John 2.12-17. Toryough defines revolution to be 'a sudden and far-reaching major break in the continuity of development' and because the definition fits in the political, industrial and otherwise. Having looked at the life of Jesus, Toryough views Christ to have employed some level of violence to achieve his purpose though he did not commit any sin (349).

In his study of Jesus, J. N. K. Mugambi in *Jesus and Rural Society* depicts Jesus to be a rural dweller. Mugambi considers the African context to be a context that best fits the life of Jesus despite that He was born in Bethlehem and lived with his parents, who were predominantly poor dwellers. Jesus spent most of his youthful life in the rural province of Galilee, which influenced most of his ministry days while on earth. We can be sure that the life of Jesus has been within the poor context. We could see the depiction of Mugambi to be challenging for it really delves into the poor context of an African man. For one to have a clear picture of an idea, experiencing it places the person above peripheral knowledge. Mugambi's work is a quest "par excellence" that places Jesus within the African context.

Also, within African thoughts, Jesus is being seen as a black person particularly within the context of liberation theology and the black search for Jesus within the contexts of South Africa and Congo. This grew out of the unjust and inhumane treatment of the blacks in such areas. Jesus is being classified to be for the poor. For a white person to be saved by this black Jesus that white person must come into the black community to receive the black gospel which is by black faith (Siker 26-53; Cook 668-92).

'Jesuses' in the African Basket

It should be stated that the African is left carrying a basket which contains many Jesuses from the traditional, historical, fictional and afro-biblical perspectives. Choosing from these views of Jesus has always been challenging as one struggles with faith and reasoning. The question is; why is Jesus under such scrutiny in the hands of critical historical Jesus research? One sees the traditional view of Jesus to have been distorted by the modern understanding of Jesus. Jesus has been misused and misunderstood by the critical scholars, who have used anti-supernatural bias against the Gospel records. Why do modern scholars have a 'negative view' towards the canonical Gospels, which were selected under the leadership of the Holy Spirit? Members of the Jesus Seminar include the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* (Perrin 184-206; Patterson 111-9) alongside the edited four canonical Gospels as equal sources of information about Jesus in their main text, *The Five Gospels*. The doctrine of inspiration is no longer credible and not considered to be innocent. It has been seriously distorted by the liberals, who claim to have offered a better understanding of Jesus and the Gospels by giving preference to hypothetical Q and some Gnostic writings over the canonical Gospels.

These attempts are causing much confusion and proffering misleading suggestions concerning

Jesus in the contemporary Christian church. The ignorance of this subject in the modern church is harming the Church as well as some students and lecturers of New Testament in Africa because these discussions are on the Internet and books, which members access. In a conversation, particularly with some seminary students of New Testament studies, who are writing their theses,[6] it was clear that some of these students are ignorant of these developments in New Testament scholarship, though some Universities and Seminary schools have the subject on their curricula.[7]This is as a result of fear that the students and teachers would become liberals and putting aside orthodoxy. Do African scholars recognize that these students would compete with other students of New Testament Studies from other schools in and outside Nigeria? Do African institutions realize that Africans are in the twenty-first century, a century in which the study of the New Testament is growing more wings? Does knowing these critical methods for the understanding of Jesus matter to African Christians? Is there need to read the works of critical scholars? Will reading their works affect the African biblical scholar in regard to the knowledge of the Gospels? Do these critical scholars affect our understanding of Jesus within the African Church?

It is quite reasonable to state that knowing these ways of studying Jesus, particularly the historical-critical study of Jesus from the eighteenth century to the present (that are dominant in the West principally in Germany, England and North America) are necessary areas of study within the African continent so that African Christians can respond to them and evaluate them. These have become a thing of concern within the continent, which forms the environment for this research. Despite the works that preceded this study, questions concerning Jesus still remain and are asked with passion far beyond the past understanding. With all these, it is reasonable to investigate thoroughly in order to fill these gaps and to enlighten Africans on the necessity of getting acquainted with the studies on Jesus, which have dominated the New Testament scholarship and have raised serious controversies about the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Apart from the historical and fictional quests for Jesus, which antagonized the traditional understanding of Jesus, African Christians are also faced with biblio-cultural portraits of Jesus. The traditional understanding of Jesus and the Gospels as promoted by the Church Fathers should be highly regarded and elevated by evangelicals in total faith and purity (Lemerson 61-87; Dewey 1-8; Hurtado 35-52). When I was introduced into the historical Jesus research with its arms in the Western and the recent moves in Africa, I found many critical portraits of Jesus, which are not familiar and friendly to the traditional view of Jesus, which have baffled orthodox scholars. It is obvious that many Africans are still in the dark on these issues and cannot engage in raising questions or answering questions from these compendiums of Jesus in the modern research.

One can be sure that the product of the quest for the historical Jesus is the several discussions of Jesus in the European and African contexts particularly the search for the methodologies that best fit the Christ of the African context in the quest for Jesus as our ancestor, elder brother, king, ruler, healer, liberator, and many others (Stanton *Jesus of Africa*; Schreiter *The Faces of Jesus*). Whether all the African exposed ideas of the Gospels in the African basket, particularly the African Christological constructions, are valid for the understanding of Jesus from the Gospels is a thing of concern for any reasonable New Testament scholar, any religious department or any Christian religious institution.

Conclusion

Despite the many faces of Jesus in the African basket as promoted by African and Western scholars, African Christians must choose properly now that there are various options whether to depend on the portraits of Jesus proffered by the West or to depend on the biblio-cultural portraits of Jesus given by the African scholars or find none or both convincing. In a basket with so many kinds of *fruits*, one must make a choice of the best *fruit,* which would depend solely on conviction and relationship (Bock "Faith" 3-25). The African basket is filled with many portraits of Jesus, which are conflicting to the faith offered by traditional Christianity and Jesus, which many Africans have been introduced to over the years.

One sees the Bible depictions of Jesus to be the only reliable and authentic portraits of Jesus of all

times. The self-understanding of Jesus revealed in his early ministry (Luke 2.46-52)[8]and the self-depictions of Jesus (Charlesworth 3-46; Foster 191-227) are foundational for faith and spiritual growth in both scholarly and spiritual searches for Jesus in any University, Seminary and the African Church entirely and the Universities would produce sound apologetics for the nation if the contents of the critical Jesus studies are introduced. These would make us see Jesus as the messiah, the son of God, the resurrection and the life, the miracle worker, the son of man, the prophet, and the saviour of the world.

End Notes

1. There were 57 books, which were written and a lot of them are classified Gnostic. Many of which have been published by Philip W. Comfort and Jason Driesbach *The Many Gospels of Jesus: Sorting out the Story of the Life of Jesus* (Illinois: Tyndale 2008). The Church Fathers had to select four based on certain criteria for authenticity. Selection was considered heretical in the Early Church. The Church Fathers selected yet people like Marcion and others were considered heretics on the ground of selection and abandoning other books. Marcion and others might have started emendation of the Bible text. See Bruce M. Metzger *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration 2nd ed.* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 150. A. G. Padgett, "Marcion" in Ralph P. Martin and P H Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 1997), pp. 705-8. E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948), pp. 128-71.
2. Arius believed Jesus Christ was a heavenly being, intermediate between God and man nevertheless a creature. If he was not, he wouldnot have suffered and died. Arius was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325 but his views live till today among critical scholars.
3. This is very difficult to explain. But Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word ς (knowledge) and refers to a heresy, which became advanced in the second century. It teaches that one needs some special knowledge to attain salvation in Christ. The Gnostics perhaps were predominantly Gentiles sometimes the Jews and the Greek's influence is evident on the belief that the body or matter is evil. See J. D. Turner "The Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism: Interpretations of the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*" *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006), pp. 9-64.
4. Many people have existed before Him and have done interesting things and contributed positively to history of the world but none of them have attracted the attention of people as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth. What made Jesus so special?
5. To this he observes, "Our Lord is our Elder Brother who shared in our *African* experience in every respect, except in our sin and the alienation from God…being our Elder Brother now …he displaced the mediatorial function of our natural 'spirit-fathers….' Kwame Bediako "Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanian Perspective," in William A. Dryness, ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1994), p. 102.
6. These are students that have finished their class work yet have not heard of the historical Jesus research.
7. For example, in Nigeria, ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro and ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos have the course "Historical Jesus" in their Master of Arts in Biblical Studies (New Testament)'s curriculum yet the subject is not being fully taught because they feel such area of historical-critical study is unhealthy for evangelical faith.
8. Luke 2:52 reveals that Jesus grew like any normal child after he was presented in the Temple intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. On the biological, psychological and spiritual identities of Jesus see T. H. West, *Jesus and the Quest for Meaning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 53-59.

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