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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EVALUATION OF POPULAR FUNCTIONAL CHRISTOLOGIES AMONG THE NDIA CHRISTIANS OF KIRINYAGA WEST SUB COUNTY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluated popular functional Christologies among the Christians of Ndia in Kirinyaga West sub-county, Kenya. Popular Christologies reflect people's real understanding of Jesus Christ. The objectives of the study were to establish social, political and economic functional Christologies among Ndia. The target population comprised of all churches in Ndia, which comprised of 25 Catholic, 29 Anglican, six Lutheran, six Presbyterian, 40 Pentecostal and ten Afro-Pentecostal congregations with an estimate population of 11,600 faithfuls. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The data showed that social, economic and political functional Christologies were well balanced. The study recommends that churches in Ndia encourage people to appreciate the relationship between work and wealth and medicine and healing. It is envisaged that the results of the study will be useful to social workers, scholars, churches, other non-governmental organizations and government agencies intending to or already working with the Ndia people.

INTRODUCTION

Politics behind all church councils that came up with church doctrines concerning the Christ's person and event indicate that popularity and politics influenced the construction of church doctrines more than did scripture and revelation. A crush of popular Christologies split the church. This study examines popular Christologies among the Christians of Ndia with the hope that theologians will take up the challenges arising from our findings to do more practical work in the formalization of the various popular Christologies identified so that the Ndia Christians may be in a position to fully internalize the Christian faith in their own contexts.

Statement of the Problem: Theological constructions are scholarly and only understood by the elite. There exist various popular and informal theological constructions among ordinary Christian which influence life in Christian communities more than formal theological positions held by churches do. The popular constructions among ordinary people ought to be the basis for church positions which is not the case today.

Popular Functional Christologies: Respondents were asked to state what Christ did for them and for others beyond saving them and promising them a better home paradise.

The responses given were categorized into three: social, political and economic functional Christologies. Data collected indicates that out of the functional Christologies 33.03%, 33, 96% and 33.01% were Economic, social and political respectively. This data indicates that the balance of life Christian among Ndia Christians where society, politics and the economy are equally influenced by the Christian faith. These findings agree with Kenyatta (1989) that the political, social, economic and religious life of the Agikuyu is intertwined. The findings concur with Mbiti's (1969) assertion that Africans are "notoriously religious".

Social Functional Christologies

72 respondents equivalent to 33.96% of the sample gave social functional social Christologies. Tables 4.1 shows a summary of these responses. Data in Table 4.1 shows that 38.8% of respondents who indicated social functional Christologies regarded Jesus as a holder of marriages. 23.61% regarded Jesus as defeater of their enemies while 12.5% regarded Jesus as a giver of faith. Another 12.5% indicated that Jesus gave them children. 6.94% stated that Jesus gave them peace. 13.8% perceived Jesus as their cleanser from their spiritual uncleanness. 13.8% indicated that Jesus was a giver of humility. Another 1.38% said Jesus was their destiny leader. Another 1.38% indicated that Jesus gave them wisdom. The data indicates the importance of marriage among the Ndia Christians.

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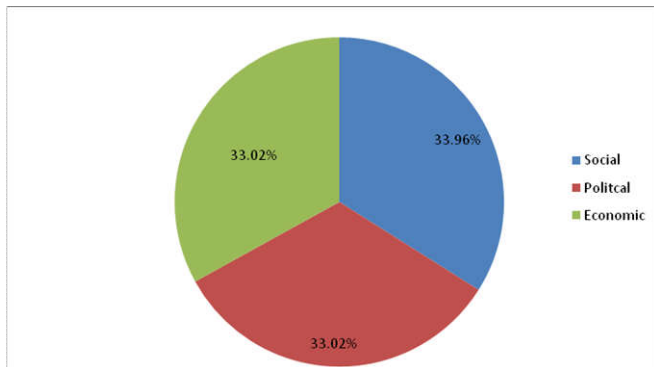


Figure 1. Social, Political and economic functional Christologies

Table 1. Social Functional Christologies

Christology	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cleanser	1	1.38
Destiny Leader	1	1.38
Giver of Faith	9	12.5
Defeater of Enemies	17	23.61
Marriage Holder	28	38.8
Giver of Children	9	12.5
Giver of Peace	5	6.94
Giver of Humidity	1	1.38
Giver of Wisdom	1	1.38
TOTAL	72	100

The high number of Christologies indicating that Jesus was their defender and “defeater of enemies” indicates the competitiveness of the Ndia Agikuyu in farming, business, politics and in the amassing of wealth. The “defeater of enemies” Christology may also have arisen from the fear of witchcraft which is widespread albeit unpopular among the Agikuyu of Ndia and their neighbors, Mbeere and Akamba.

Political Functional Christologies

70 respondents comprising 33.02% of the sample gave political functional Christologies on the role of Christ. Table 4.6.2.1 summarizes their responses.

Table 2. Political functional Christologies

Christology	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fighter Bull(Fights for me) and or Fighter Cock(Fights others for me)	56	80
Kingmaker (Makes me King)	1	1.43
Chairperson(Makes me glorious and important)	1	1.43
Remover of poor leaders from power	12	17.14
TOTAL	70	100

The data in Table 5.1 shows that 80% of the respondents indicated political functional Christologies perceive Jesus as a fighter bull or a fighter cock who fights for them. 1.43% indicated that Jesus is a Kingmaker while another 1.43% stated that Jesus is a “chairperson” who makes them important. 17.14% regarded Jesus as a remover of poor leaders from power. The perception of Jesus as a fighter bull and a fighter cock must be an influence from the Luhya culture of Western Kenya where bull and cock fight games are a sport. Many Ndia residents have interacted with the Abaluhya through education, business, intermarriages, sports and politics. This is probably because the Agikuyu are traditionally a decentralization community (Muriuki, 1974) where the idea of a human being rulling over the rest is foreign. The

perception of Christ as the one who removes poor leaders from power agrees with Kenyatta’s (1989) assertion that Jesus (though in the 1930s) was regarded as a savior from foreign religious domination and political and economic subjugation of *Arathi*, a Gikuyu Christian group that was independent of Western missionary supervision. The findings indicate that Reconstructionist ideologists such as Mugambi (1995) have already been overtaken by popular theological formulations that are able to combine both liberative and reconstructionist views and apply them to actual day-to-day survival.

Economic Functional Christologies

Table 6 shows a summary of the responses indicating functional Christologies.

Table 1. Economic Functional Christologies

Christology	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Destroyer/Eradiator of Famine/Hunger (Giver of food)	3	4.28
Giver of rain/ rainmaker	2	2.86
Blesser/Giver of the soil	1	1.43
Grower of maize and beans.	1	1.43
Keeper of animal/livestock	1	1.43
Destroyer/Eradiator of poverty(Giver of property and money)	62	88.57
TOTAL	70	100

The data in Table 6 shows that of the 70 respondents who gave economic functional Christologies, 88.57% stated that Christ destroyed poverty, gave them property and money to them and the others. 4.28% stated that Christ provided them with food or destroyed hunger. 2.86% indicated that Jesus gave them rain while 1.43% indicated that Christ gave them soil. 1.43% also indicated that Christ was the grower of maize and beans and another 1.43% also said that Jesus was the keeper of livestock.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made

- Churches operating in Ndia ought to teach faithfuls such doctrinal positions as regards the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Christ so as to avoid further drift into heresy.
- The cause-effect relationship between work and wealth and medicine and healing ought to be emphasized among the Christians of Ndia so that overdependence on religion which might not serve all the needs of the 21st century may stop.

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