

JESUS THE MEDIATOR

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1. Abstract

It just calls for recognition that the centre of gravity of Christianity continues to shift to Africa and the third world (Cf. Jenkins 2002:2). More people seriously worship and pray to the Triune God in Africa, than in the Northern hemisphere where Christianity is merely surviving. This good news calls for a serious African Christology for the simple reason that the Christian Faith is Christologically centred. In the context where Christianity is flourishing along side several other faiths, the questions: (i) "... who do people say the Son of man is?" and subsequently (ii) "... But what do you say I am?" (Mt. 16:13-15)¹ demand more attention than ever. This presentation is an attempt to contribute some answer especially towards the second question within the African-Zambian context. We wish to argue that to the question: "... But what do you say I am?", one appropriate response is that Jesus is the Mediator. This paper further wishes to draw implications for confessing Jesus as the mediator and stimulate more research on the subject matter.

2. Towards a Working Definition

Some understanding is required for any person to genuinely confess Jesus as the mediator. A mediator can be defined as *a person or a corporate entity that bridges people or parties that live in disagreements or conflict*. Every mediator engages people involved in disagreements or conflict and tries to resolve the problem or conflict. By engaging the parties in the disagreement or conflict, the mediator is a peacemaker and relationship builder. Mediation is thus an essential part of human existence.

3. Perspectives on Mediation

The history of religion and the Bible contain many evidences of statements and figures of mediation. These evidences and figures of mediation involve the transcendent and human worlds in respect of revelation and salvation. To this I would add that mediation builds bridges between the supreme being and humankind so as to address some fundamental needs which could be health, relationship, water and food to mention but a few.

Hebblethwaite (1991:354), argues that:

Medicine-men, priests, gurus, prophets, sacred kings, avatars and founders of great religions are all in different ways believed to effect some, more or less temporary, bridging the gap between the transcendent, however it is conceived, and ignorant and sinful man

He further argues that:

In the religion of the Hebrew Bible, prophets, priests, judges and kings all, mediate as do the

¹ All Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 . Zondervan: Grand Rapids

Law and the sacrificial cult themselves, between the holy God of Israel and his wayward chosen people. They make known the will of God, proclaim the judgment and the mercy of God and represent God to the people and the people to God.

In the above-alluded to statements, mediation is very cardinal not only for salvation, but also for the normal relationships. The good creation stories where God created everything, evaluated and concluded that all was good, are eclipsed by the tragic rebellion of humankind against the will of God. That rebellion that created a steep gap between the Creator and the created, led to human rebellions. Prominent among such rebellions are those of Adam versus Eve (Gen.3), Cain versus Abel (Gen 4), and the adulterous and wicked angels versus the Creator (Gen 6) to mention but a few. These broken relationships grew from bad to worse as humankind increased on the face of the earth. The situation became so worse that in anticipating the coming of the dreadful day of the LORD (Joel 2:31; Ob 15) the climax of the prophetic tradition points to the Creator's profound yearning for a mediator. The fundamental questions :

Whom shall I send? And who will go for us (Isa. 6:8) and the charge. ... Go and tell this people (:9)

have been a subject of reflection for several generations. God is Himself seeking to a point the mediator to bridge the gap between Him and His estranged people. In other words, the prophetic tradition points to a great hope that the broken relationship will have to be mended and healed through the services of the mediator.

While we acknowledge the importance of pursuing further probing questions on the above sited texts and how they were read in context and how we should read them in our postmodern context, we choose to submit that these fundamental questions lead to the messianic hope.

In this regard, we agree with Hebblethwaite (1983:354) when he states that:

It is a cardinal principle of the NT religion that all these mediatorial roles were taken over and exercised with finality and permanence by Jesus Christ. He is the 'one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus, himself man, who sacrificed himself to win freedom for all humankind' (1 Tim 2:5; see also Heb 9:15; 12:24)

We observe that the above statements are founded on the firm belief that the *greatest mediation event* in the history of humankind is resolved through the mediatorial qualities and ministry of Jesus Christ. He has built the broken bridge and mended the broken relationship between the Creator and the created. This reality, affects so many aspects of human life and living as we explore further.

4. Implications of confessing Jesus as the mediator

As we have afore-mentioned, mediation is a peacemaking concept and in this presentation we argue that it is actually a *peacemaking way of life*. It is introduced where relationships are threatened and broken and conflict is an order of the day. This is a situation that forms the realities of the Bible and our African contexts.

Poirier (2006:185) contends that:

From Genesis 3 to Revelation 21, the Bible is a book abounding with conflict – man against God, God against man, man against man. But the Bible is more. The Bible is God's special revelation of his reconciler. It is the good news of God's promise of a Mediator - the coming Prince of Peace. The story of redemption is a story of reconciliation, and that reconciliation is about assisted peacemaking. Redemption calls for divine action; we cannot save or reconcile ourselves. Reconciliation demands another. Reconciliation requires the Messiah as Mediator.

There are a number of issues contained in the above quotation that are relevant to our subject matter. Not only is the Bible a book abounding with conflict, but more so, our own

African continent. As afore-mentioned, on the one hand, the African continent is one place in the World today where more people seriously worship and pray to the triune God. Christianity has greatly outgrown the missionary era, yet on the other hand, the paradox is that there are more unresolved conflicts today in Africa than there were in the same missionary era in contrast. There are conflicts based on land, extractive minerals, crude oil, ethnicity, religious beliefs and affiliation, political beliefs and affiliation to mention but a few.

Perhaps, one lesson to learn from Poirier quoted above is that the African continent cannot save or reconcile herself, but needs “another”. We can qualify that “another” may not necessarily be a stranger but one of a different type even from within a wider context, one with mediatorial attitude and qualities and who comes with a different attitude and frame of mind.

African cultures always value the role of mediation. In many African cultures, people seek mediation of counselors (*ankhoswe*) in marriage and further seek mediation of the medicine wo/man (*sing'anga*) when life is threatened or even ancestors for general wellbeing. Van Breugel (2001:233) writes about the Chewa people:

For the Chewa people, illness and death are rarely due to natural causes but to spirits or enemies. It is the task of the diviner (sing'anga) to indicate who caused or “sent” illness or death. The diviner holds a very important position in Chewa society because he is the only man who can interpret by means of his lots (ula) the will of the spirits of the dead. These mizimu are believed to send misfortune in order to warn or to punish their living descendants. The interpretation by the diviner is essential to ascertain what the mizimu want to convey.

For the purposes of our subject matter, what is worthy noting is the importance of mediation ascribed to the medicine wo/man (*sing'anga* or *ng'anga*). The conflict between the living and the invisible realities is resolved through mediation. In other words, a mediator of some type facilitates harmony and builds bridges over brokenness of diverse nature.

5. Conclusion

In concluding this brief presentation that aims at stimulating further research that can contribute to the African Christology which we contend is of critical necessity, the following propositions are submitted:

- Jesus is the Mediator according to the fulfilled prophetic tradition and primarily He bridges the gap between the Creator and the created. The greatest conflict narrative is through the mediatorial services of Jesus Christ resolved thereby transforming fear, sin and death into love and relationship.
- Confessing Jesus as Mediator has implications for Christianity and the World we live in today. To be Christian is to embody Christ Jesus in daily living and confessing Jesus and the Mediator means that mediation is not a technique but a mandatory way of living. Christianity must get concerned whenever conflict escalates in any given society because peace is a gift of our Triune God. When conflict erupts, Christians need not ask why they should be involved but why they should not be involved because conflict challenges the very core of the identity of their saviour and themselves.
- No human society can save or reconcile itself no matter how sophisticated that society becomes. The place of “another” or “assisted peacemaking” which can only be done by one or more objective outside person or people to have an audience with the estranged parties and them in finding appropriate possible solutions (Sande 2004:21-27).

- Christianity has potential to contribute greatly to peacemaking efforts of individual governments, the African Union and the United Nations in resolving several of the conflicts that have engulfed the African continent and the World. Perhaps the error has always been sidelining of Christianity in peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts that perpetuates conflict due to hidden interests of some of the “peacemakers” and “peacekeepers”
- Only Jesus who is the Mediator, peace bringer and concerned with every human and natural conflict and who approaches conflict as a premise of peacemaking is worthy of the designation, believing in and confessing.

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