Social Identity Reading of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ (Luke 3:23-38): Lessons on Inclusivity for the Christian Church in Kenya

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Abstract

Ethnic identity, viewed as the basis of ones' belonging or otherwise is one major cause of disunity in both the biblical and contemporary world. The impact of ethnic identity on Christian unity should be viewed as a strong case for the existence of Christians and a key identifier of whose they are. The main objective of this paper is to understand the impact of the ethnic identities in the genealogy of Jesus on unity in the Christian Church, while examining the integrative effects of various ethnic identities in the genealogy of Jesus Christ as recorded in Luke, through the lenses of Social Identity Theory (SIT). Using a library-based study, this paper seeks to demonstrate that Luke employed cultural memory, a view point of SIT to create a new identity among the followers of Jesus through an inclusive agenda that decentralizes ethnicity as presented in Jesus' genealogy by including some individual characters who do not belong to the Jewish ethnic group. By so doing, Luke presents Jesus prototypically as a superordinate Christian identity for the entire human race. Thus, redefining the concept of 'ethnic belongingness' in a very revolutionary sense. While reference is made to the Matthean genealogy in terms of social status, it is important to underscore that the anticipated audience of Matthew which is Jewish, limits its scope and application in so far as this paper is concerned. For this reason, the book of Luke is preferred for this study because of its profound concern with universal social issues of the gospel and its spatial descriptions. The various ethnic identities in the genealogy are diverse, heterogeneous and are at the centre of inter-ethnic animosities world over. Similarly, the genealogy of Jesus comprises of various ethnic groups which share a common ethnic identity in the person of Jesus, but largely disagree on the way that identity should be expressed. While this genealogy spurns centuries of time, providing the lenses through which one can understand shifting priorities and inter-ethnic conflicts, it lays a solid foundation for celebration of unity and a common heritage shared by all members of the body of Christ. The findings of this paper will concretize the foundation for the Christian Church culture that thrives on unity in diversity as demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ, thus foregrounding the efforts towards ethnic unity in the Christian Church in Kenya.

Key Words: Genealogy, Social Identity Theory, ethnicity.

Introduction

The genealogy of Luke 3:23-38 addresses itself to the issue of the paradox of inclusion and exclusion which is characteristic of Luke's gospel. Consequently, the passage responds to the challenge of ethnic identity that more often has resulted in the culture of exclusion common in the Kenyan Church. Reading the passage through the lenses of Social Identity Theory (SIT) facilitates in the investigation of the culture of Sociality in Luke's genealogy. One of the fastest growing hermeneutical tools in the study of New Testament Scriptures is the Social Identity Theory. This approach under-covers the dynamics behind the formation of group Identities in the 1st Century Biblical world, while offering imagination of what happens when identity is purely an ethnic matter given the ethnic plurality of the Christian Church.

Therefore, the genealogy of Jesus not only reimages the historical Jesus, but also decolonizes in a sense, the concept of 'belonging' based on one's ethnic identity. The main argument of this paper is that, the 1st Century social context informed not only the author's point of view, but also the message one wrote. Consequently, reflections on the sociality of the genealogy of Jesus is meant to facilitate the culture of inclusivity as opposed to the current state of affairs obtaining in the Christian church in Kenya. Therefore, this paper approaches this subject from social scientific perspectives, as opposed to historical approaches because, while historical approaches focus on particular line of the story, Social science considers repeated social-cultural patterns in a given time and place to elucidate people's peculiarity in terms of behaviour and perceptions. The four aspects of the genealogy otherwise known as 'birth narrative' to be considered in this Paper include; the authorship, ethnicity of the author, the audience, and the comparative genealogical narratives from both Matthean and Lukan accounts, through the lenses of SIT.

Authorship

Whereas scholars have not been unanimous concerning the authorship of Luke, Morris (1974:16) sums up the arguments presented by saying that the author of Luke's gospel must have had a vast knowledge of the Septuagint (LXX) - the Greek version of the Old Testament as well as the Greco-Roman literary styles thus, a very careful writer and a cultured man, though not belonging to the twelve disciples of Jesus and possibly non-Jewish. When reading Luke 1:1-4, one gets the impression that the author though not an eye witness, must have accessed traditional history resources about the ministry of Jesus, through a careful research.

Therefore, the first evidence of inclusivity found in the four gospel books is the fact that Luke though Gentile, is perhaps the only non-Jewish gospel writer.

Internal Evidence

While the author is not directly identified in the text, there is overwhelming internal and external evidence that favours the Lukan authorship. For instance, since the book of Acts is a continuation of Luke, it follows that the author of Acts must also be the author of Luke as evident from the prologue to Luke and Acts. The name Luke is mentioned three times in the NT in reference to him being a Physician (Col 4:14) and a companion of Paul (2 Tm 4:11 and Philemon 1:24). Since Luke accompanied Paul, the 'We' sections in Acts points to him as the author. This notwithstanding, there have been arguments that the 'We' passages could be in reference to a third party, but a keen reading of the said sections demonstrate that the ancient audience would not have held Luke's gospel as reputable if the author was not an eye witness as well as a companion of Paul.

External Evidence

External evidence too, points to Lukan authorship. For example, Guthrie (1990:114) states that the Muratorian Canon and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue points to Luke as the author. He further postulates that even early Christians like Irenaeus, Eusabius, Origen and Clement of Alexandria, held that Luke was the author of the gospel.

Author's Ethnicity

Apart from explicating the issues relating to the authorship of the gospel of Luke, this paper would not be complete if the ethnic affiliation of the author is not settled. For instance, was the author a Jew or gentile? Green (2000:828) drawing from the eloquence of the Greek used by Luke, supports the idea that Luke was not only a non-Jewish Semite, but also the only non-Jewish author of the four gospels. Similarly, Patterson 2011:588) eloquently argues for Luke's gentile origin. This argument is made even stronger by Paul in Col 4:10-14, where Demas and Luke are differentiated from those who were of the circumcision. This paper argues strongly that Luke's ethnicity speaks so eloquently to the title of this paper. Luke being a gentile among the three Jewish authors of the gospels, speaks volumes about inclusion, a concept that was not prevalent in the social context of the 1st century Biblical times (Burton, 1900:248-258). This is not just a preserve of the genealogy story, but it is also in sync with Luke's portrait of Jesus as one most sympathetic with the Samaritans, Gentiles,

outcasts and invalids. In fact, Ladd (1993:240) asserts that Luke appeals to both his fellow outsiders- the gentiles, and the insiders- the Jews of the inclusive nature of Jesus and his mission to save mankind.

Audience

Luke's gospel is addressed to Theophilus (lover of God). Further, Luke refers to him as κράτιστε "most excellent" perhaps an indication of the rank he occupied in government. However, if Theophilus was a Roman official, then he must have been a Gentile, as supported by the contents of Luke and Acts that bear the testimony of gentile audience. For gentiles to have a book that resonates with their plight in so far as God's people were concerned, must have been a great achievement. As a matter of fact, as the gentile audience saw themselves in the picture as the gospel was read to them, they must have been encouraged for once. This perhaps demonstrated to them that God was as much interested in them as a people, over and against the peddled lies by the Jews that gentiles were not welcome. The Matthean audience is laudably considered to be Jewish, hence the concept of inclusivity is alien to them. However, as already stated. The Lukan audience being gentile, the concept of inclusivity is considered as the heart of the Christian message. This explains the reason why Lukan account is preferred over and above Matthean account, but not to its total exclusion.

The Two Genealogies

From this paper, it is probable to assert that biblical genealogies contain profound truth claims, and are a means of passing theological truths. Both Matthew's and Luke's readers were advantaged than us in that they clearly understood what the evangelists wrote. The gospels present two accounts of the genealogy of Jesus, found in Matthew (1:1-16) and Luke (3:23-38). The Matthean account traces the roots of Jesus to Abraham while Luke traces the roots to Adam. Furthermore, while Matthew begins from Abraham descending to Jesus, Luke starts with Jesus and ascends to Adam. Whereas, the two accounts are in sync in their lists between Abraham and David, they differ in many ways. For the purposes of our study, this paper opines that the difference in not accidental, rather intentional to explain that inclusion is what affords the whole picture. For instance, people may differ in colour, ethnic affiliation, economic endowments, nationality, but these differences ought not to act as walls of division, rather for a robust celebration of one another's uniqueness, by cooperation and collaboration, through an active and conscious way of inclusivity.

Matthean Account

Matthew's literary structure of the genealogy has three groups made up of fourteen generations each. The first group runs from Abraham to David, the second runs from David to exile, and the last one is exile to Jesus (Matt 1:17). According to Naseri (2011:1-22), the number fourteen is significant. For instance, in the Hebrew language, he argues, every alphabetical letter has an equivalent numerical value. In this case, the Hebrew rendering for David is "דוד," with the first and third letter *dalet* being equal to 4. The numerical value of the middle letter also called *waw* is 6. Therefore, the name David has 4+6+4= 14. Consequently, the Matthean genealogy links David to Jesus. It is therefore plausible to assert that the three-letter word "דוד," represents the three groups of generations while the *gematria* numerical value of the three consonants adding up to fourteen represents each of the fourteen generations. Furthermore, Matthew refers to Jesus as son of Abraham who is considered as the father of Israel through whom God promised to bless the whole humanity. This paper humbly submits that Matthew seeks to present Jesus as a Messiah to the Hebrew nation alone, thus implicitly denying other nations an opportunity to be included at the Kingdom table. At the same time Matthew depicts Jesus as a descendant of David. The title "Son of David" is found in 1:1 refers to the royal line of King David. Whereas relation to Abraham points to belonging to the people of God, relation to David points us to the royalty of Jesus. Therefore, Matthew foregrounds Jesus as a Jewish entity, putting boundaries around him.

The Women in Jesus Genealogy

Interestingly, Matthean account includes five women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary as part of the genealogy of Jesus. It is indisputable that all the women except Mary are non-Israelites. However, the listing of gentile women in a purely patristic genealogy was not only unwelcome to the Jewish audience, but that the four mentioned women are of questionable morality. Perhaps, Matthew could have included in the list, Sarah, Rebecca, the matriarchs of Old, instead of the scandalous four who were associated with Israel's failure. This aspect of the genealogy demonstrates that God uses all people in moving forward his work. The inclusive and expanding nature of God is evident in the inclusion of the rejects and outsiders into his family. This perhaps would serve as a major lesson for inclusivity for the church in Kenya.

a. Tamar

There is no doubt that Matthew refers to Tamar who is recorded in Genesis 38:1-30. She was a Canaanite woman, married to Judah's firstborn son Er. Matthew singles her out as one through whom Judah the father in-law gave birth to twins Perez and Zerah. This abnormal incestial relationship produced Perez through whom Matthew accounts as the ancestor of Jesus. From Social identity perspectives, Tamar acted in self-preservation in order to raise descendants for her late husband Er, which resulted into righteousness on Tamar's part and sin on the part of Judah, her father In-law.

b. Rahab

Matthew identifies Rahab as one with whom Salmon gave birth to Boaz the father of Jesse, the father of David (Mat 1:5). According to Frymer- Kensky (2002:20-30), she was a Canaanite woman, who was a known prostitute in the city of Jericho. Frymer also regarded Rahab as a smart, proactive, tricky and unafraid woman. Perhaps the first Canaanite woman turned ally to the spies sent by Joshua. Her close working with Joshua's team was translated into loyalty to God and his people Israel. By hiding the spies in her house and tricking the King, she had her life and that one of the family preserved. Like Tamar, she too was a prostitute and she tricked the King for self-preservation. Like Tamar, she represents the marginalized who are relegated to the periphery by the dominant power that care less about their plight. Because she was in sync with the larger picture that God had for his people, this resulted not only in her salvation though an outsider to the covenant promises, but also her being included in the genealogy as an ancestress of Jesus.

c. Ruth

In the Matthean Account, Ruth is referred to as one with whom Boaz gave birth to Obed the father of Jesse (Mat 1:5). It is interesting that Boaz who was a son to a non-Israelite woman –Rahab, and he became the father of Obed by another non-Israelite woman- Ruth. This shows a concentration of non-Jewish blood in Jesus Ancestors. The Book of Ruth 3:1-4:17 sheds light on the identity of Ruth. She was a Moabite, married to Naomi's son who died soon after marriage and left her with no child. Like her two counterparts mentioned (Tamar and Rahab), she finds herself in a precarious position of self-preservation, a desire for a descendant to her late husband as envisaged in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. Similarly, Ruth later got a child and called

him Obed, the father of Jesse, who gave birth to David, the ancestor of Jesus. Thus, a Moabite woman by ethnic identity, is also included in the list of the ancestors of Jesus.

d. Uriah's Wife

Whereas the other three women have names, this one is called by her husband's name. Why Matthew has not supplied us with her name is a matter of conjecture. However, it is clear that Uriah's wife is called Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:3). Perhaps her sexual encounter with the King was not driven by her husband's death, instead, her husband's death resulted from the sexual encounter.

Faced with the challenge of giving in or not to the demands of the King, perhaps Bathsheba could have remained resolute as her husband was. But faced with a self-preservation challenge, she gave in, in order to preserve her life, as opposed to Uriah her husband who did not and met his death. Her far-sighted ability to seize opportunities are clear in her not only giving in to the King's sexual move, but also in becoming the King's wife, mother of a King and finally becoming an ancestress included in the genealogy of Jesus.

e. Mary

In the Matthean account (1:16), Mary, comes last on the list. She was a Jewish woman, betrothed, and married to Joseph, and became the mother of Jesus. Matthew 1:23 alludes to the fact that she was a virgin, perhaps owing to her God-fearing spirit, she had committed her ways to the Lord. When the Angel told her that she was to be pregnant, owing to her faith in the promised messiah, she quickly caught it and replied "I am the Lord's servant".

The Matthean account of the birth of Jesus concludes with these five women. Some so poor, mostly scandalous, widows, misfits, unknown, outsiders and sinful. Maybe if the women in the genealogy of Jesus were some beautiful, royal Jewish blooded, the story of Jesus would not have been complete. Again, like in the authorship where one is a gentile among Jews, in this lineage, only Mary has a good story, the rest leave a lot to be desired. Consequently, Matthew wants his readers to know that God uses all people regardless of their ethnic, national or social standing to fulfil his purpose. Thus, the portrait of an inclusive God is not just the theme of the genealogy rather the entire gospel, in which the rejects and the outcasts are welcome to be part of the family of God. Furthermore, the mention of the five women in the Matthean genealogy is an invitation to read the presence of women into the silence of

thirty-five "begets" where they are not mentioned or even alluded to in the annotations. Therefore, the fact that women could be considered alongside men in this genealogy is proof enough that God does not in any way exclude anyone based on social-religious standing. Any attempt whatsoever to exclude others is biblically illegitimate.

Lukan Account

According to Maas (2013:9), the Lukan account of the genealogy of Jesus comes at the start of the public ministry of Jesus and is done in an ascending manner starting from Jesus to Adam. Immediately after Jesus was baptized by John, Luke states that Jesus was thought of as being the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli (Lk 3:23), then continues to Adam the son of God. Interestingly, apart from the "son" of Joseph, the Greek rendering of the Lukan genealogy does not have "son" after every name, rather uses "of" (Robertson, 1960:33). The Greek word for supposed is ἐνομίζετο, meaning (thought of, considered, recognized as) could be very instrumental in our understanding of the relationship between Joseph and Jesus. It seems like Luke is simply by-passing Joseph and referring to him as son of Heli who was actually Jesus' maternal grandfather. This leads us to conclude with Schaff (1982:4-5), that whereas Matthew pursued the genealogy through Joseph, Luke followed it through Mary. Again, the same concept of interest in the down cast, outcasts will play in Luke until the end of the gospel. For instance, while Matthew focus on the aforementioned women, Luke uses the names of their husbands to reconstruct their sense of identity in contrast to the one held by the said men. The mention of Joseph an outsider, but considered as part of the genealogy is just but one such case. Other names such as Perez, Boaz, Obed, David brings to memory the women mentioned by Matthew. The inclusion of these men, though not biological father of Jesus, demonstrates the theology of inclusivity even for the undeserving.

Divergences in Matthean and Lukan Genealogies.

This paper holds that the genealogy of Jesus is more of a theological construct than real historical lineage. This is argued so, as a way of explaining the apparent discrepancies noted in the lists presented in the gospel. However, others have advanced two theories as a way of explaining the difference in the Matthean and Lukan accounts of the genealogy. The first one is called 'Levirate marriage theory' advanced by Sextus Julius Africanus (Marshall Howard 1978:158). In his epistle to Aristides, Sextus (c. 160 – c. 240) argues that the natural father of Joseph was Jacob son of Matthan, while the legal father was Eli son of Melchi. The second

theory is the maternal ancestry theory supported by among others (Maas Anthony 1913; Nolland John 2005). These argue that the reference to Jesus as a son of Eli is because, Eli was his maternal grandfather. Meaning that Mary was a daughter to Eli but perhaps had no sons to be an apparent heir, so after marriage Joseph was adopted as the heir, thus a son. This paper supports the maternal ancestry theory since Luke is tracing this line through Mary.

The Status of the Church in Kenya

The Christian Church in Kenya is more divided than political parties are in Kenya. This is happening at a time when the Christian values and resources are meant to be used in the fostering of national integration and cohesion. Instead of being the salt of the world, the church has facilitated to a greater degree the consciousness of ethnic belongingness. Increasingly, either directly or indirectly, the Christian Church has laid a firm foundation for ethnic balkanization and unending ethnic feuds and divisions among Kenyan.

It is against this understanding that this paper seeks to filter this situation through the lenses of social identity analysis of the genealogy of Jesus in order to prescribe some ways that the Church could adopt to fight the absurd reality of exclusionism. In describing the state of the Kenyan church *vis a viz* the culture of exclusion, Waruta (1992:6) states that most religious groups and denominations, closely scrutinized, are very ethnic in their composition as well as their leadership. Those that happen to be multi-ethnic with a national outlook are constantly faced with the vice of interethnic conflicts". Some of the factors that have contributed to this sorry state of affairs include but not limited to:

   a. **Regionalization of churches.**

Howell (1935:218) observes that regionalization of Churches Kenya was an effective tool in the hands of Colonizers who unfortunately were also Missionaries. Every mission group had a cut-out locale of operations and in their endeavour to concentrate their effort within a given ethnic group, they ended up creating a one ethnic-based denomination that could conduct their own services in vernacular languages, thus excluding those who did not speak their language (Waruta, 1992:7). This is unfortunately the experience of many of the churches to date, even when they are based in cosmopolitan setting.

b. Leadership

As already stated, the Colonial Masters ethnically Balkanized the country, thus leading to the formation of ethnic based churches. For instance, the north-eastern Kenya was the home of Methodist churches, while Mount Kenya region housed the PCEA. The rift valley became home for the AIC, the Kisii Nyanza housed the SDA church, and Luo Nyanza was the home tuff of Anglican Church (Nyaundi 2013:119). Therefore, the leadership of these ethnic based churches, was placed in the hands of the natives who owned and sponsored the church activities. Because of this, arrangements, church leadership and administration has always been ethnic based. Whenever new regions or dioceses are created, it is not only done ethnically, but also with an ethnic based leadership in mind.

c. Resource allocations

In her research study on the role of the church in combating negative ethnicity in Kenya, Wosyanju Mary found out that most of the respondents said that majority of them felt marginalised based on their ethnic affiliations. It was established that resource allocation was ethnically biased in a sense. Other things observed were the use of vernacular in worship service, selective transfer of church leaders, etcetra. Therefore, according to Tarimo (2000:25), the challenge of the Christian church is how to use the resources within her disposal in creating one integrated and cohesive society where ethnicity, social standing, or royalty does not matter.

Social Identity Theory Reflections

Social identity in this paper refers to a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. According to Tajfel and Turner proposed that one's group, family, ethnicity is critical in the construction of one's pride and self-esteem. They also opined that social identity group facilitates among others a sense of belonging, purpose, self-worth and identity. In reference to Social Identity theory, Hogg, Hohmann and Rivera (2008:1273-4) state;

> people represent social groups as fuzzy sets of attributes that define one group and distinguish it from relevant other groups, called prototypes, these fuzzy sets not only describe the group's attributes but also, very importantly, prescribe how one should think, feel, and behave as a member of the group.

Luke's gospel in general and the genealogy in particular presents Jesus as the most important prototype for the believers who are from either Jewish or Gentile backgrounds. The inclusive nature of the genealogy story indicates that for early Christians, Jesus was held up as the prototype of Christian identity. Thus, in Jesus, the two main ethnic blocks, namely, the Jews and the Gentiles find themselves accommodated. This can be argued from two perspectives; the first one holds that, since Jesus himself was human as well as divine, this union provides the basis of Christian Unity. The second one holds that since the genealogy of Jesus includes both Jews and Gentiles as observed by the names of men and women mentioned above, the ethnic identity of God's people is recategorized to reflect the new identity that is found in Jesus Christ. A composition though hard to comprehend, but one that facilitates the knowledge that God in his own underived wisdom, chose to unite with mankind and at the same time unite mankind. Therefore, throughout the genealogy story, the new ethnic identity explicated by way of bringing together the individuals who were considered as outsiders, and outcasts. Indeed, the high-water mark of the genealogy story is to show Jesus as a prototype to be followed, worshipped and emulated.

Therefore, the purpose of the genealogy was to reduce superficial ethnic identity differences that exists among people resulting in peace and harmony. The Lukan Jesus took note of the marginalized, outcasts, gentiles and sinners, and bungled them all together with the pious Jews and demolished the wall of separation in his own body. Incidentally, Luke's portrait of an all-inclusive Jesus is a tool of subversion, a critique of the then existing social order. By elucidating the interest of Jesus in all groups of people without any exception, Luke is simply introducing a new formula of identity for the people of God.

Conclusion

The gospel of Luke is a clarion call to all people regardless of their social or moral status, to show concern for the social interests of others. Luke's genealogy that includes the marginalized, the poor, the outcasts, women and publicans seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is a prototype of a superordinate Christian identity for the purpose of Jews and non-Jews inclusion in the Church. Luke presents the kingdom of God as one that is open and diverse, for all people Israelites and non-Israelites. Perhaps no greater impact would have been felt than the reading and hearing the stories of the five women and other individuals with questionable morals as being part of the Saviour's genealogy. Therefore, in order for Luke to demonstrate this transformative agenda of creating social identity among God's people, he

employed genealogy narrative as a forceful way of driving home a message that would have been spoken in a million words. In this narrative, Luke applies artistic skills and choses characters strategically to produce a narrative that suits his purpose of identity formation.

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