

SHOULD JESUS BE WORSHIPPED? EVANGELICAL MONOTHEISM AND THE JESUS-WORSHIP PEDESTRIAN IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY*

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ABSTRACT

There have been several debates on the worship of Jesus within the context of monotheism, with viable theological and historical evolutions of the worship directed towards Jesus in African Christianity. The worship or no-worship arguments of Jesus elucidate the dualistic relationship between the affirmation of Jesus's divinity and the traditional commitment to monotheistic tendencies, particularly how early Christian communities have addressed these doctrinal dynamics. This study focuses on situating the Jesus-worship discourse within African Christianity, considering both doctrinal and lived religious experiences. Using comprehensive historical analysis and engagements with nuance of scholarly discourse, this work engages New Testament texts, current theological debates, early Christian practices, and both historical trajectories in contemporary Christian expressions. This work discusses the highlighted perspectives that emerged in the quest for the legitimacy and the parameters of Jesus-worship. It evaluates whether the veneration of Jesus is situated in the internal development of classical monotheism or a deviation from it. It also argues that there is an interplay between inherited Christian theology and African indigenous concepts of divine mediation, whereby a quest into Jesus' worship should consider the realities of religious diversity and continuous dialogue between tradition and innovation.

KEYWORDS: Monotheism, Jesus, Worship, Christians, and African Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

In many African church contexts, the worship of Jesus transcends mere liturgical observance, serving as a central dimension of the spiritual life that informs

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personal and communal identities. These practices are firmly rooted in efforts to reconcile the mystery of Christ's divinity with the strict monotheism characteristic of the Abrahamic faiths. For adherents, worshipping Jesus is commonly seen not as a divergence from monotheism, but as its fulfillment, grounded in the belief that the revelation of God in Christ represents the consummate expression of divine unity.

Additionally, theological reflection within African contexts routinely incorporates both the continuities and discontinuities between scriptural traditions and local customs. The contours of religious devotion—regarding whom, when, and how reverence is expressed—are continually shaped by dialogue with ancestral beliefs and evolving social circumstances. This dynamic has fostered distinctive forms of Christological worship that may diverge from conventional Western paradigms while remaining anchored in the broader monotheistic tradition.

These complexities underscore the necessity of a multifaceted examination of Jesus-worship in Africa, integrating historical, textual, and contemporary perspectives. A nuanced understanding of the diverse modes of faith practice enables scholars to more accurately assess how devotion to Jesus simultaneously redefines and reinforces the fundamental tenets of evangelical monotheism within African Christianity.

Within this understanding, this paper discusses the nature of monotheism in religions, considering the various traditions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and the various traditions that reveal an interplay among them. It also considers the worship of Jesus as revealed and traditionally passed down to generations, which plays a central role in the Christian religious setting. Lastly, it evaluates the idea of Jesus' worship and the various monotheistic tendencies paraded in African Christianity, giving us a direction and a faith upon which to lean or not.

MONOTHEISM IN JUDEO-CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

It is clear from the various traditions that the three religions under consideration are known to be monotheistic in their religious beliefs. These religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all fall under the same religious configurations, even though certain traditions differentiate them. Jane Dammen McAuliffe stated that "Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are commonly characterized as religio-cultural siblings, religious traditions that began in the same geographical region and that share many theological similarities" (v). With this whole tripartite nature of the religions, McAuliffe also went further to say, "In addition to their monotheistic

focus, these three religions profess a mutual belief in divine-human communication as expressed and encoded in written form. Each of these three traditions has canonized a core set of documents as the repository of this revelation. Each, in other words, reveres a "scripture" as a central component of its self-understanding" (v). Possessing beliefs, written documents revered as scripture, reflects in many religions, not just these three, but the monotheistic tendency has been a distinctive feature reflected in the double conspiracy theory (Veklych 1-16; Lincoln 639-658).

The concept of monotheism holds that there is one God, with many prophets and messengers, as recognized by many of these religions. James F. McGrath believes that the term "monotheism" should be understood within the context of second-temple Judaism, considering the actual beliefs and practices of the Jewish people at that time, and emphasizes that there was diversity in the worship of the one true God without other related images. But McGrath also stated that determining when and how the Jews and Christians became "divided over the understanding of God's oneness" (73-6) should be the pivot point and cannot be overlooked in any reasonable discussion.

However, the term "monotheism" has been a subject of debate. Many scholars have challenged the usage of the word to mean that there is no single religion that does not have an iota of strict adherence to only one deitic belief. One of the popular works that have challenged the usage is the work of Paula Fredricken, who demanded that such understanding of the term should mandatorily be retired within the context of Jewish and Christian religious discussions (321-46; Capes, DeConick, Bond, and Miller 25-38). Although this is not the first work to have made such an enquiry, her work has placed certain mandatory demands on the usage of the term; hence, such religious beliefs are polytheistic in nature. With this, she stated, "My point, quite simply, is that ancient monotheists were polytheists" and constitutes "a large part of the problem" (Fredriksen 37). Such a polytheistic nature of God can be seen to be predominantly a dominant understanding of God in African traditional religion.

Despite such understanding by Fredricksen, one can say that Peter Hayman had made an earlier and similar enquiry that there were many divine beings in both ancient Jewish and Christian traditions, and even the ancient pagans accepted such an understanding of gods (1-15), whereas the definition of "monotheism" typically is the belief that only one deity exists. This understanding is a clear indication in African traditional religion. In the midst of these arguments, Hurtado finds it interesting that scholars are inquiring that a modern term does not necessarily fit an

ancient description of the ancient religious worldview, a position he also alluded to as not consistent with the ancient religious practice of the ancient people (*One God, One Lord* 151). Though he has not in any way alluded to the ancient Jews and Christians who denied the existence of other “divine” beings, Hurtado’s focus is on whether such gods deserved to be worshiped (*One God, One Lord* 152). As a result, Hurtado argued that, “ancient Jewish monotheism” was neither “pagan monotheism” (many deities presided over by one high deity, all of them deserving of worship, or one divine notion or being of which all the specific gods are expressive, all of them worthy of worship), nor was it the “monotheism” of typical modern dictionary definition. The key distinguishing factor, and the most blatant expression of “ancient Jewish monotheism,” was not in denial of the existence of other divine beings but in an exclusivity of cultic practice (*One God, One Lord* 153).

Many scholars have argued for Jewish monotheism within the context of creedal constraints and how the high view of Jesus got reflected and warranted him such a monotheistic level of conferment in the Jewish Christian thought. With this, Anthony Harvey cited the incident of Ignatius of Antioch referring to Jesus within the divine confines (esp. *The Constraint of Monotheism*). Harvey finds Christianity sanctioning a position of Jesus’ divinity which Judaism wouldn’t have adopted. Hurtado cited the reference to Jewish monotheism reveals a rigid doctrinal commitment that could easily be broken, and the portrayal of Jewish monotheism in terms of doctrines and concepts with insufficient information on the cultic/liturgical practices and scruples (*Lord Jesus Christ* 43).

Similar to Harvey’s thoughts are those of Maurice Casey, whose lecture underscored Jewish monotheism by arguing the impossibility of Jesus’ divinity, considering that Christianity was dominated by Judaism. The Johannine community after 70 C.E. exposed that as the community became increasingly dominated by the Gentile converts. It was then that Jesus was hailed as being divine and as God (Cassey 138,144, 156; Cassey, “Monotheism” 214-33; Dunn 437-52), a monotheistic discussion Hurtado almost avoided (*Lord Jesus Christ* 43; Lortz 301-27).

One finds the Jewish people to have formed a natural environment for themselves and a community of faith that is distinct, which is reflected even in their daily social, cultural, and political lives. Their history has been outstandingly painful, and it has helped in shaping the existence even in other countries. Jacob Neusner states, “...they look back on a very long and in some ways exceptionally painful history” (16). For the Jews during the late antiquity, the word Torah had lost its capital letter force and the definite article and became ‘torah.’ Instead of

becoming a particular scroll or book, it has come to mean a system of an entire life. Within this understanding, how the word torah is related to Judaism is not understood, but it is obvious that it has come to mean the symbol of Judaism, and the doctrine of Judaism is the doctrine of Torah. Judaism can be seen as the way of the Torah, which can be seen as ‘rabbinic Judaism’ or ‘Talmudic Judaism’ (Neusner 3-5).

To discuss Judaism, one is expected to understand the build-up of any religious system. This is captured by Neusner, “the sort of holy building people build, the sort of holy activity they deem worthwhile, the sort of consecrated family life they propagate, the sort of holy leaders they envisage, the sort of holy community they form, and the sort of life beyond this life and promise -all express an essentially harmonious and cogent conviction” (6).

When one walks into any Jewish synagogue, the first thing that comes to mind is “an ark containing a scroll, a Torah-scroll, a scroll containing the five books attributed to Moses” (Neusner 6). Within the synagogue, one understands that there are prayers and studying of the Torah, with the rabbi giving guidance to young students on studying the Torah and doing what the Torah commands. Within this context, torah, according to Neusner,

stands for a kind of human being. It connotes a social status and a sort of social group. It refers to a type of social relationship. It further denotes a legal status and differentiates among legal norms. As symbolic abstraction, the word encompasses things and persons, actions and status, points of social differentiation and legal and normative standing as well as ‘revealed truth.’...Torah stood for salvation and accounted for Israel’s this-worldly condition and the hope, for both individual and nation alike” (8-10; for other torah meanings see pp. 11-73).

This makes the Torah take three forms: as an oral and memorized revelation of the Mishnah and other rabbinic writings, as a symbol of Israel’s salvation, and as an embodiment of the person of the Messiah, that is, the rabbi. Such injunctions became relevant to the Christians in the first century. The Old Testament was adopted as part of the Christian canon, and it has helped in shaping Christian understanding of the discussions on Jewish and Christian monotheism. With this, Neusner states that “The Torah in all three modes confronted the cross, with its doctrine of the triumphant Christ, Messiah and king, ruler now of earth as of heaven” (38; see Wright 486-9). All that was expected about God has been captured in the Torah, which became the centre of all Jewish religious activities, together with the Temple, and has shaped the

Christian understandings of Jesus as being divine, whether or not he should be worshipped.

THE WORSHIP OF JESUS IN CHRISTIANITY

The worship of Jesus has attracted the attention of scholars of early Christian writings and practices, but scholars have never attained a level of consensus. Shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus, there were attempts by the early Christians to worship the risen Lord. Even when Jesus was alive in the course of his ministry, each time he performed a miraculous act, the people were moved emotionally to attribute worship to him and most times, Jesus would reject such act of worship, stating that worship only belonged to God the Father alone (Luke 4:8; Matt. 4:10). Does this show Jesus' equality with God as theologically implied by many Christians and theologians today?

The bulk of Jesus' life is contained in the Synoptic Gospels, considering that such information fits into the context of Jesus' life in his Jewish context. Most of the highly exalted early Christological contents got developed in the Pauline and other later epistles, even though Pitre considered them to "originate in the fire of Jesus's own divine messianism" (331). Despite Pitre's assertion, one can still rely on Maurice Casey's earlier position that the Christological developments reflected in the Pauline letters were not perceived by Paul or his earliest readers as "a breach of Jewish monotheism," and so do not give us "the historical origins of the worship of Jesus, though some steps in that direction have been taken" (233; Cassey, "Lord Jesus Christ" 83-96; Cassey, "Devotion" 97-104). We find Hurtado disagreeing with Casey on several issues, particularly on the breaching of monotheistic beliefs from the mother religious traditions becoming unacceptable, making the mutation to become a separate religious movement within the framework of the Jesus-devotion. Secondly, if the understanding is that God was the one who exalted Jesus, then the early church writers would not have been guilty of breaching any Jewish religious monotheism. As stated in Philippians 2:9-11 and Romans 10:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:4, the early Christian writers were proud to document the existential reality of Jesus being seen within such a promoted view of monotheism, in which God is said to have inaugurated himself. With this, the early Christians did not consider such devotion as a breach of commitment to the one God nor idolatry or the worship of a second deity, but a unique reverence to the Lord, on whom the Lord has bestowed such reverence (*One God, One Lord* 160).

Hurtado went on to argue that “In their beliefs and devotional practice the circles reflected in the NT placed Jesus in relationship to the one God, as the unique agent and expression of the one God, the unique Son, the image of God, etc.” and also believes that Dunn has neglected the heart of the argument and went into contemporary versions of Christian piety, where Jesus is the only recipient of worship and Jesus is worshipped to the exclusion of God, a term Dunn called Jesus-olatry, closely related to idolatry (*First Christians* 147-51). Dunn concluded that “the first Christians did not worship Jesus as such” (*First Christians* 150).

Hurtado also then stated that the central argument is not whether Jesus was worshipped instead of God or as another deity alongside God. “The proper questions are whether Jesus was included uniquely in the sort of reverence that was otherwise reserved for God, and whether Jesus shared in the sort of reverence that in ancient Jewish and Christian circles was typically denied to any other figure (than God)” (*One God, One Lord* 163-4). Hurtado believes that these are on the affirmative and stated that “the remarkable way that Jesus features in early Christian worship is presented in NT writings “not as something optional but as mandatory, as obedience to ‘God’, and that this “dyadic” devotional pattern involving Jesus programmatically was now the requisite way of worshipping God (as reflected, e.g., in Philippians 2:9-11)” (*One God, One Lord* 163-4). He considered Dunn’s book to have been incapable of challenging the existing works by Bauckham and himself within the context of the complexity of devotional patterns attested to the early New Testament writers, though it is a useful review of relevant data (*One God, One Lord* 164).

Because of what God has done for the people of Israel, he expected that the people would reciprocate such an act of kindness and fairness to him. All the Lord had wanted from his people was acknowledgement. He does not share his glory with humans (Isa. 42:8); he wanted his people to stick to him as their God. As a result, to forsake the Lord was and is still blasphemy to the name of the Lord (Ezek. 20:2). Also, we find them presenting unholy gifts and worshiping idols instead of the Lord, acts considered as profanity on the name of the Lord (Ezek. 20:39). To act against the will of God was forbidden to the people. But the children of Israel decided to provoke the Lord by offering provocative sacrifices unto the Lord, and they abandoned his ways. The Lord had to caution them to remember what he did to their ancestors, who sinned and were punished for their sins.

God has been the only one to be worshipped, and his name was to be adored as he does not share his glory with anybody. As such, one can say that the depiction of the divinity of Jesus by the early Christians is a later development, which did not

feature during the ministry days of Jesus; this is worthy of being given a second thought. Showing its relationship with the Jewish religion, Anthony Harvey stated that “It was not until the new religion had spread well beyond the confines of its parent Judaism possible to break the constraint and describe Jesus as divine” (*Constraint of History*). This sets a premise for our enquiry into the “considered divine” and the divinity of Jesus as evidently attributed devotional thoughts by the early Christians.

To delve into these issues, such a journey cannot be taken without the erudite support of Hurtado. With this enquiry of devotion to Jesus, Hurtado believes that the devotion to Jesus surfaced “phenomenally early in circles of his followers and cannot be restricted to a secondary stage of religious development or explained as the product of extraneous forces” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 2). Secondly, that “devotion to Jesus was exhibited in an unparalleled intensity and diversity of expression, for which we have no true analogy in the religious environment of the time” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 2). Also, he stated that “this intense devotion to Jesus, which includes reverencing him as divine, was offered and articulated characteristically within a firm stance of exclusivist monotheism, particularly in the circles of early Christians that anticipated and helped to establish what became mainstream (and subsequently, familiar) Christianity” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 2).

Hurtado sees “‘Devotion’ as the portmanteau word for the beliefs and related religious actions that constituted the expressions of religious reverence of early Christians” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 3). He sees such a devotion to be designated to Jesus Christ in the aspects of worship characteristics of the early Christian groups, a total inclusion of Jesus in their devotional life, both in honorific claims and in devotional practices, as he functioned in their ethical ideals and demands, in both interpersonal and wider social spheres (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 3-4). Other aspects of devotions can be seen in the areas of material and visual culture of early Christian manuscripts, in the case of the Nomina Sacra, sacred abbreviations of key terms that seem to point to God and Jesus (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 2; Tambiyi, “Devotional moods” 49-63). All these formed the devotion to Jesus which can be seen as “the significance and role of the figure of Jesus Christ in both the religious life and thought of those forms of Christianity observable to us within the first two centuries” (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 4). Also, the early Christians had so much respect for Jesus as God, even though he was being considered a mere man by his opponents in real life (Smith 6; McKnight 176; Tambiyi, “The Jesus of the Jesus’ Opponents” 95-111). Despite that, Hurtado still believes that “the key distinguishing feature of the

early Christian circles was the prominent place of Jesus Christ in their religious thought and practice” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 1) and that led them to treat him as a divine figure.

Hurtado questioned how this process of veneration seems to have historically happened, which, to him, does not have a historical tradition (*Lord Jesus Christ* 5), but in *One God, One Lord*, he provided such historical reasons and traced it to originate from the early Jewish Christians, who had traditions of veneration of patriarchs, angels and kings and priests. Within such understanding, it was easier for the early Christians to adopt such reverence for Jesus. Though it was uncommon for unbelievers at that time to understand such a level of veneration, Hurtado believes that answers can be found in the New Testament as Jesus himself revealed his messiahship and his divinity. He wrote that:

The early Christian claims about Jesus may be difficult for non-believers to accept for various reasons, but the explanation of how and why early Christians promoted such high views of Jesus as are attested in the New Testament and other early Christian writings is thought to be simple: the truth of Jesus' messiahship and divinity was revealed by Jesus himself, and so naturally was taken up from the beginning in Christian beliefs and religious practice (*Lord Jesus Christ* 5).

When it comes to the veneration of Jesus, there is a group of scholars in the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century called the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (school of history-of-religions) who devoted their concerns and studied how Jesus came to be central in early Christianity and the devotion to Jesus as it has developed before the statements about the Christ and Trinity in the subsequent centuries (Kiimmel 206-324; Ludemen and Schroder, *Religionsgeschichtliche*; Colpe, *Religionsgeschichtliche*; Smith, *Drudgery*; Rudolph 9-19). This school of thought believed that the issues surrounding Jesus' veneration were a product of a historical process and demanded a review of all historical sources of early Christianity within the wider Roman era, with competence in the languages and texts of the ancient world (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 6). The entire essence for the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* was stressed that the “emergence of devotion to Christ as a divine figure was essentially a simple and really rather unremarkable process of syncretism” with clear implications that such devotions originated from the “influence of "pagan" religion of the Roman era upon ‘Hellenistic’ Christians supposedly more susceptible to such influence than were “Palestinian” Jewish Christians” (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 6).

Part of the responses to this *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* came from Hurtado in his book, *Lord Jesus Christ*, where he wrote to “offer a full-scale analysis of the origin, development, and diversification of devotion to Christ in the crucial first two centuries of the Christian movement (ca. 30-170 C.E.)” (2). Hurtado stated that although the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* claimed that the question of devotion to Jesus should be viewed from a precritical historical standpoint rooted in the early Christian sources, this led them to take a simplistic view, in contrast to the one they opposed. To him, “both the naive view and the familiar history-of-religions view are wrong in portraying early devotion to Jesus as basically simple, unremarkable, and not difficult to understand” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 6; for criticism of Bousset, see Hurtado, “Critique” 158-71; Hurtado, “Christology” 15-27; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 13). And he contended that “Christ-devotion is an utterly remarkable phenomenon, and that it is also the result of a complex of historical forces and factors” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 7). He added that:

Presented as one particular example of the deification of heroes and the emergence of new gods rampant in the Roman world, early Christ-devotion was to be understood simply as resulting from the impact of this "pagan" religious environment upon an originally purer Christian movement in which ideas of Jesus' divinity could not have appeared (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 6).

Even with this, Hurtado agreed that the devotion to Christ can be viewed as a historical phenomenon, as the quest seems to manifest itself in the eyes of history and can be investigated just as any historical figure, event, or movement is understood (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 7). He believed that several factors determining the devotional process of Jesus: it began early and was already exhibiting signs of routinization by the time of the letter of Paul; it was not confined to ideologies but spread widely across the Christian movement, though with variations in its expressions. It contains comparisons with other Roman-era groups and movements, though there is no Roman-era example to be cited with such a high tradition of monotheism with a devotional pattern as compared to those accorded to Jesus, and lastly, devotion to Jesus was central in the early Christian group with enormous importance for the emergence and historical development of Christianity (*Lord Jesus Christ* 13).

Hurtado's thoughts on the study of early ancient Christians' devotion to Jesus have been considered the *new Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, where Martin Hengel described the work within such lines. Such understanding has been taken and

developed by Fossum (638-46) and expanded in the thoughts of Newman, Davila, and Lewis. While there are interesting works that discussed the early Christian devotion (Todt, *Menschensohn*; Cullmann, *Christologie*; Kramer, *Christos*; Hahn, *Christologische*; Pokorny, *Christologie*; Fredriksen 158; Jonge, *Christology*; Richard, "The Worship"; Matera, *Christology*; Black 310-30; Casey, "Devotion"; Lindars, *Jesus*; Owen and Shepherd 18-122), it is obvious that Hurtado is a gigantic bridge to cross as far as the study and thoughts on the devotion of Jesus are concerned in our modern time. While we consider other works, Hurtado's works become relevant in trying to find out the exact and deliberate descriptions of the devotion to Jesus by the early Christians.

JESUS-WORSHIP AND MONOTHEISTIC TENDENCIES IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Within African Christianity, there is a need for African Christians to understand that Christianity began as a movement that was rooted in Jewish monotheism during the Roman period. Monotheism became the fundamental characteristic that defined the existence and development of such a new movement, later known as Christianity. Within this understanding, Hurtado believes that any reasonable study of the devotion of Jesus must be situated in this context of religious monotheism, because Jewish monotheism had shaped Christian understanding and development to what can be said to be orthodox Christianity (*Lord Jesus Christ* 29). But whether such a contention fits into the entire framework of Jewish religious life, the Holy Scriptures ensured a strict adherence only to the worship of Yahweh as the only one true God, in the midst of other gods that were worshipped by the heathens of those generations.

Within such an effort, the Christian life is identified with the monotheistic lifestyle, which was practiced by the Jews. Even in the days of Antiochus IV (second century B.C.E), who tried to impose a way of life, the traditional Jewish people resisted such an effort, and it initiated a more devout lifestyle and made them more sensitive to external challenges that may befall them and the worship of their God (Hengel 255-309). The aim was to expose the Jewish people to a Hellenistic lifestyle, which means embracing a new language, intellectual censors, sports, dress codes, eating habits, and the worship of foreign gods; though the previous ones were adopted, the last one was prohibited among the Jews, because of their unified monotheistic view of God. Despite such effort, while many Jews resisted such an

attempt, there were a few Jews who yielded to the temptation, as Lester L. Grabbe states, “only a handful of examples of Jews who abandoned their Judaism” (170). To the majority, who believed in the God of Israel, such abandonments were never options for a rooted people who have been serving and have seen the wondrous deliverance of God throughout the years with their ancestors. Such rejection was extended even to the “divine agents” of the God of Israel (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 31).

African Christians should know that in 1 Corinthians, Paul insisted on the "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:5-6). Also, in I Corinthians 10:14-22, Paul urged his converts to avoid the "worship of idols" (*eidololatria*) and insisted on the worship of only “One true God of Israel and the one Kyrios Jesus Christ” (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 48). This inclusion has shown that Jesus was venerated among the early Christians within such a context of monotheism. But was that what Jesus would have permitted?

The Book of Revelation is also another book that contains references to such a monotheistic view of Jesus from a Christian Jew. This was in respect to the church at Pergamum and Thyatira, which were tolerating people having ordeals with idols and food sacrificed to idols (2:14-15, 20). The book also emphasized the denial to worship even the finest angel or the beast (13:5-8, 11-12; 14:9-11), a position clearly captured by Bauckham and Stuckenbruck (75-102). These two references, according to Hurtado, serve as the “key components for a strong affirmation of exclusivist monotheism in belief and practice, and an inclusion of Christ along with God as the rightful recipient of cultic devotion” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 49).

These passages have shed light on such an exclusivist monotheistic position and practice with a clear indication of faith in the devotional pattern of Jesus, a created variant of the Jewish form of monotheism. But monotheism is the central factor to be reckoned with. Whether Jesus is seen as another God, it is obvious that such a perception did not exist among the first-century Christians in relation to the traditions and norms of Jewish monotheism. Hurtado seems to clarify the issues when he wrote: “The Jesus-devotion attested in the New Testament writings, for example, operates in such a context. That is, Jesus is not revered as another deity of any independent origin or significance; instead, his divine significance is characteristically expressed in terms of his relationship to the one God” (*Lord Jesus Christ* 52).

This portrayal of veneration is clearly seen in the New Testament as an act of God unto Jesus as his Son. Since Jesus did not fight for a position from God nor did he struggle for such a position, God gave him a name that is above any other name. So, God is the one who insists that Jesus be seen as the Lord (Phil. 2:9-11) (Perkins 425-442), a position John also emphasized when he insisted that rejecting the Son is rejecting the Father (1 John 2:22-23; 5:9-12). This does not mean a place of reverence was given to Jesus as a second god, it means a place of subordination of Jesus with the Father as seen in the early Christian documents reflecting a high concept of Christology in Pauline literature (Col. 1:15-20), the Gospel of John, and Revelation as evidently stated in the works of Anderson (266-67), Loader, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, Evans (28), and Barrett (19-36). With this, Hurtado called it a “binitarian” monotheism with two distinguishing figures (God and Jesus) with an adequate relationship to each other, not as the ditheism of two gods, but with clear and indicated devotional practice with similar concerns (*Lord Jesus Christ* 52-3). Jesus, in this monotheistic context, plays the role of God’s principal agent, with revelatory and redemptive actions as a consistent portrayal of God’s authority and will, serving the purposes and glory of God. With this, it is appropriate to say that “any theory of the origins and development of Jesus-devotion must, therefore, grant a significant role to this monotheistic concern” (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 52-3).

Paul makes it clear that “...there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:5-6). The exaltation of Jesus seems to portray an equal position with God but unequal in terms of roles, which the Jews clearly could not fathom. As Hurtado asserts, “The Christian conception of the exaltation of Christ shows a concern for the uniqueness and supremacy of the one God, just as we found in the Jewish evidence dealing with chief agents” (*One God, One Lord* 103).

Within the African context, religious tendencies have blinded the minds and eyes of many Christians. Nigerian Christians have become vulnerable to religious beliefs at the expense of evangelical spirituality. The concept of religio-religions is coined out of the concern for Nigerians practicing a sagged religion with sagged religious beliefs. It is obvious that Nigerians live within their religious consciousness; hence, a religiously pluralistic society. This concept fits into what Gwamna called “false spirituality” (18-22; Tambiyi, “Dax’s *Dear God*” 118-120). It is clear that there are manifestations of religions in the public spheres of Nigerians

depicted in the aspects of religious symbols, religious advertisements and bill boards, religious affiliations determining appointments into public offices, religiosity in the entertainment industry, opening and closing events and offices with prayers, pilgrimages on both sides, religious inscriptions and imageries in houses, cars and on doors and our fabrics, major church and mosque activities on the streets, blocking of major roads during worships on Sundays and Fridays etc.

With all these, it becomes difficult not to recognise the expected spiritual states of both Christians and Muslims in their veneration of their spiritual leaders. However, such a religiosity has been criticized for lacking the courage to become a spiritually inclined religion that God wants. Jesus has been venerated, and so is the Prophet Muhammad in Islam. People prefer titles and big names and always want to be recognised during gatherings. The place of “in secret” as Jesus taught has lost its ground to hypocrisy. Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23:1ff about the Pharisees and teachers of the law becomes obvious in our time. The Pharisees and teachers of the law did not just become a problem in their own lives, but also became stumbling blocks to many people in their time. Despite Nigeria becoming decidedly religious, so many unethical behaviours have crept into the church and the mosque, and people no longer see them as sinning against God. There are cases of embezzlement, corruption, materialism, adultery and fornication, and the commercialisation of religion. Also, Odunmuyiwa added,

Apart from cases of embezzlement of church, mosque, or shrines’ money which are common to all religious institutions and denominations, leaders also lobby for high positions in their various establishments through foul means such as -application of magical spells on their colleagues, taking such people’s lives through poisoning or by maligning others through character assassination and perpetuating a lot of acts of man’s inhumanity to man. (13)

If the veneration of Jesus is perceived and exalted within African Christians, then Africans should know the exact personality or deity to worship. Such portraits of Jesus as a Whiteman should be given reconsideration by many African Christians, who use the pictures of these British and American actors, such as Jeffrey Hunter, Brian Deacon, and Robert Powell, among others, as Jesus in their homes, churches, cars, schools, and offices. Unless relying on such an exalted Jesus will make African societal problems vanish, otherwise, our veneration of Jesus can be questioned on the grounds of mere religiosity, sagged religion, and sagged religious beliefs.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from scholars of the early Judaeo-Christian period that Jesus was not worshiped and exalted; hence, the Jesus-worship pedestrian is a later development of the early church. The early Christians operated under a strict monotheistic tendency rooted in Jewish practices, even as it was refined as the new movement, Christianity, began to develop. Such a worship attempt was considered by Dunn to be 'Jesus-olatry,' a term closely related to idolatry, and that 'the first Christians did not worship Jesus as such.' Christians in Africa need to rally around such early enquiries rather than relying on their recent concentrated religious contexts in search of the monotheistic worship of God. Of course, Jesus is considered God by a considerable number of Christians in Africa and the world at large. Even though some argued that Jesus did not make such clear indications in the Synoptic Gospels, there are glimpses of comments in the Gospel of John that can be closely reevaluated to reflect such divine assertions, and in the Epistles, when Christianity had already developed. With this, one believes that whether Jesus should be worshipped or not would depend on the variables adopted in the Jesus-worship pedestrian. This is where critical studies would help advance the knowledge of those who are willing to understand the exact place of Jesus in the overall monotheistic agenda of God. Otherwise, our veneration of Jesus can be questioned on the grounds of mere religiosity, sagged religion, and sagged religious beliefs.

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