

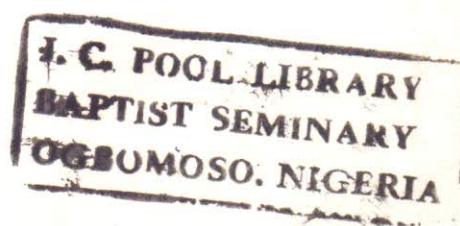
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A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF THE PERSONAL NATURE OF GOD FROM
AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study peeps into an interesting subject matter, that is, the personal nature of God. The writer believes that there is still a lot more to be known about the personal nature of God. Theologians have for many years attempted to probe the nature of God, to which the study draws fresh attention. The aim is to encourage people to know him better and worship him with great zeal.

The study also discusses the African understanding of the personal nature of God and points out the implications of such an understanding for developing a relevant Christian theology for Africa. The study gives some suggestions and makes some recommendations on how to develop a relevant Christian theology for Africa.

The study is limited to only one aspect of God; that is, his personal nature. Chapter One defines some words which are capable of being interpreted in different ways. Chapter Two discusses the names, attributes, images and revelation of God. Chapter Three discusses the personal characteristics of God in the scriptures. Chapter Four presents the contemporary understanding of God. Chapter Five discusses the African understanding of Him. Chapter Six contains the summary and a few suggestions.

and esoteric. The theology should not be in conflict with science and science itself should not be in conflict with it.

It will be important to take the African worldview into consideration when African Christian theologians are in the process of developing a relevant theology. In particular, they should take into account the positive values of the African worldview. Failure to take such values into account in the past has been the reason why Christianity has been seen as a foreign religion by many Africans.

B. Conclusion

God being so loving, great and mighty, all men ought to relate very well to him. There is no better way of living and thinking than relating very well to him. All men owe it to themselves to profess faith in him. Once they profess faith in him, they ought to take him seriously.

Again, being so loving, great and mighty, certain things are his dues.

First, he is to be worshipped. To believe in the existence of such a God is to devote our entire lives in worship, thanksgiving and praise. We need to bless him, rejoice in his faithfulness, glory in his grace, exult in his boundless power, magnify him for his majesty, and recognize in him the ultimate reality.

Secondly, he is to be served. The only proper response to such a God is to serve him. Worship is part of this service, which extends to all areas of life. Negatively, service of God implies renouncing all right to ourselves and giving up our will entirely to his will (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:7f.; James 4:8; 1 Pet. 2:1f.). Positively, it means recognizing that we exist by God's will for God's sake, and therefore deliberately setting ourselves to live to his glory and honour in every area of our lives.

Thirdly, he is to be proclaimed. Part of our response to such a God is our making him known in a world in which he is widely ignored or rejected. The world is filled with idols

or false objects of worship. These may be human leaders, political ideologies, social classes or groups, human thought systems, even demonic agencies. We are all called to challenge these usurpers and to confront these false gods in the name of the true and living God. This involves spreading the knowledge of God throughout the world, both geographically and culturally, by our prayers, the investment of our resources, and our personal witness.

Fourthly, he is to be feared. Hosea 3:5 speaks of our coming to the Lord with fear. When one reads that verse, one senses the dread, the uneasiness and the anxiety we are supposed to feel when we, as sinful creatures, approach a holy God. Our dread of the Lord might drive us away from him (Ex. 20:18-20), but his goodness continues to draw us to him.

It is hoped that if a relevant Christian theology is developed for Africa, African Christians will come to appreciate Christ as the Universal Saviour. Africans will also come to realise that there is no area of human experience that lies outside of the knowledge and power of Christ. With this sort of understanding, Africans will not have any urge to look elsewhere for security when faced with a metaphysical problem in as much as Christ is seen to be all-sufficient for their every need.

The new theology that will emerge will constitute an African contribution to Christian theology as a whole. In addition, the new theology will be timely for those countries of the world which at the moment are smarting under the pangs of the hollowness and artificiality which have resulted from widespread secularization and industrialization.

C. Recommendations

There is the need for the Western Christians and missionaries to seek actively to understand the African worldview. Religiously, understanding African worldview will be of great significance to the Western churches, Understanding African worldview would certainly enhance a

more objective understanding of the African thought in the re-expression of the Christian message in Africa. Furthermore, it will enable the Western Christian apologist to identify the real psychological and spiritual problems of the African and then to address those issues realistically.

There is the need for a new hermeneutic that takes cognizance of the elements in the African worldview and the resultant religious expressions. It is often observed that the average African Christian reverts to the traditional African religious practices in times of existential crisis. The reason has been traced to the fact that the Christian theology in Africa fails to take certain crucial data in his context into account. This discovery calls for the aforementioned new hermeneutic.

In formulating and presenting guidelines for the new hermeneutics, there is the need for the African Christian theologians to take care to avoid the mistakes of the orthodox and liberal theologians. Their failure stems from their refusal to recognize that modern man has, indeed, acquired a new mode of self-understanding and approach to reality. On the other hand, the liberal theologian accepts the claim of the modern man so uncritically that he feels impelled to reduce the Christian faith to a version which can be communicated within the presuppositional scheme of modern man. Consequently, what he does communicate falls short of the Christian faith. This leaves modern man in the lurch, unable to meet his deeper spiritual needs. The African Christian theologians who are to develop a relevant Christian theology for Africa will need to take pains to ensure that the new theology does not lead us to such and error.

There is the need for all African Christians to help in the task of developing a relevant Christian theology for Africa. For example, they will need to support the theologians, encouraging their research and avoiding hasty condemnation. The task of developing the new theology is too

precious, urgent and important to be left in the hands of theologians alone. Thus, the involvement of Christian men and women of all walks and stations of life is called for.

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