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THE RELEVANCE OF LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY
TO YORUBA CHRISTIANS

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ABSTRACT

This study entitled, "The Relevance of Liberation Christology to Yoruba Christians", is an attempt to construct a liberation christology suitable for the Yoruba context. This is a theology through which the problem of oppression facing the Yoruba person can be solved; a balanced theology by which the liberating work of Christ can be effective in the life of a Yoruba Christian.

In achieving the above end, I have divided this essay into five chapters. These are: Introduction; An Overview of Liberation Christology; Christianity in Yorubaland; The Relevance of Liberation Christology in Yoruba Context; and Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.

After discussing the biblical perspective on liberation and tracing the historical development of liberation theology, a survey of some liberation theologians and their theological positions was carried out. The person and work of Jesus Christ the Liberator were discussed. Further, the major concerns and methodology of liberation christology were x-rayed.

In dealing with the issue of Christianity in Yorubaland, the history of Christianity in Yorubaland was first traced. Next, life in Yorubaland was examined in the religious, socio-political and economic contexts. Finally, the issues of Western Missionaries' approach, local theologies, biblical interpretation and religious syncretism were highlighted as they affect Christianity in Yorubaland.

Study Questionnaire was used to gather facts from Yoruba Christians on their understanding of the gospel, especially the liberating work of Jesus

Christ. From the data collected, it was discovered that many Yoruba Christians do not completely understand Christ as the One who liberates. The implication is that these people have not been totally liberated from oppression as well as bondage to sin (and so do not have genuine salvation). Therefore a liberation christology is required which is appropriate to the Yoruba context. Such a theology sees Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer, the Mediator or Intermediary, the Liberator, and the Healer who has power over every evil.

Conclusion

In view of the findings in this study, certain inferences can be drawn. The salient ones are presented below.

Whereas God intends that humanity (Yoruba people included) should be free from all forms of oppression, a large number of Yoruba Christians do not have this freedom due to lack of thorough understanding of the gospel. The Word (Christ) has not become flesh in the Yoruba context. Different local theologies have been built, many of which are defective. Thus many of these people lack genuine salvation. Due to bondage to fear, there are cases today of nominal Christians who continue to practise traditional divination (Githige 3). This is common in Yoruba land.

John S. Mbiti has said that Independent Churches are attempts by Africans to indigenize Christianity and to interpret it and apply it in ways that may render it both practicable and meaningful to them (253). But it sometimes involves the

mixing of Christianity with other religious traditions or systems of belief and practice. This idea has prevented Christ from being the centre of the Christian faith. Many Churches are characterized by synthesis of both African traditional religion and Christianity with the use of Old Testament to validate some aspects of African traditional religion like polygamy (Barret 273). For instance there is the Orunmila Church, a religious group which, according to Adetoro, tries to join the teachings and practices of Christianity with the Yoruba oracle i.e. Ifa (73).

The lives of many Yoruba believers lack total commitment to God and selfless service to humanity. There are many churches in Yorubaland where people rush to mostly because they are promised miracles, wealth, healings, victory over the enemies or removal of bad destiny and ancestral curses (Abogunrin 27).

Recommendations

The Yoruba believer should come to the proper understanding of Christ and be sure of his standing in Him. God who is the true and living God cannot be known in truth apart from His final and full disclosure of Himself. "This revelation has been made in the incarnation of Jesus Christ" (Smith 28).

There should be a new appreciation of the efficacy of Christ's power over sin and evil spiritual forces with which the Yoruba worldview is charged. The Church should demonstrate that Christ is "not only the all-sufficient Saviour from the power of sin but also the all-sufficient Conqueror of demons and Deliverer from all fears" (Imasogie 80). The church needs to place "a new emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit and the present mediatory efficacy of the Living Christ" (Imasogie 81).

The Church should speak the truth and stand for it. It should lead men

towards godliness and oppose every injustice, impoverishment and deprivation from which people suffer. The church should focus on real discipling through balanced theology and based on sound biblical teachings rather than on miracles, signs and wonders for prosperity. "Miracles are real and valid. Yet there is the need for the Church to correct the excesses and magical acts in the name of Jesus, called miracles today" (Abogunrin 27).

The Christian message should be contextualized. To communicate the gospel effectively, the language, custom and tradition as well as the belief system and worldview of the Yoruba culture should be taken into consideration. Wilbur O'Donovan has suggested that to overcome the problem of a Western theology and to avoid the problem of syncretism, one should find out what the Bible says on the subject, the actual African beliefs and practices related to the subject, and how the truth of the Bible on the subject can be expressed in a way clearly related to the people's culture (6).

Local theology is needed to ensure contextualization of the gospel but any local theology developed must spring from the Bible as its basis. Contextual hermeneutics should be adopted which is sensitive to the Yoruba context. The Bible should be seen as a whole and the Christ event should form the basis of interpretation. One should avoid relativizing the Scriptures by making the Bible the ultimate truth rather than the situation to which it has to respond. Again, the context should not be absolutized but be subject to the Scriptures.

It is hoped that if these recommendations are taken seriously by theologians in Yorubaland, the Yoruba Christian will come to appreciate Christ as the universal Saviour, the "very God of very God" in whom and through whom the whole universe

came into being and has meaning. The Yoruba will also come to realize that there is no area of human experience that lies outside of the knowledge and power of Christ (Imasogie 85). With that understanding, the Yoruba Christian will have no urge to look elsewhere for security when faced with what he/she interpretes as a metaphysical problem inasmuch as Christ is seen to be all-sufficient for his/her need.