

A THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF SYMBOLS OF
WORSHIP IN THE MAINLINE AND AFRICAN INSTITUTED CHURCHES

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MATRIC NO: 11/0203

A thesis in the Department of THEOLOGY
Faculty of Theological Studies, Submitted to The Nigerian Baptist Theological
Seminary, Ogbomoso, In Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements
For the award of the degree of MASTER OF THEOLOGY

In Systematic Theology

2013-0737

JUNE, 2013

ABSTRACT

This work attempted to identify the problem in the use of symbol of worship in the contexts of theology of worship as recorded in the Bible. The problem is neglect and misuse of the symbols in the mainline and African Instituted Churches. This work studies the establishment, features and practices of the churches as it relates to worship.

The study adopted a combination of historical, descriptive, interview and phenomenological methods. Information and data were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were combination of personal interviews and participant observation while the secondary sources include interaction with relevant books and journals. Some articles from the internet were also used.

The findings confirmed that there are those who place more attention on the symbols than what it symbolize, while some do not even attach any meaning to the symbols. It was also confirmed that African Instituted Churches draw their doctrines and beliefs from African culture and that some symbols are still relevant in the place of Christian worship today.

The study was concluded by making some recommendations which are to ensure that symbols of worship should be used based on their theological soundness and the church leaders should be well grounded in Christian doctrine and teaching in line with symbols of worship as it relates to Christ's teaching. There is also need to realize that any symbol of worship is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. There is God beyond the symbols. This study therefore serve as awareness for the church to honour God and discover him more than those channels he chose to reveal himself to man.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY

Symbols of worship with specific focus on the Mainline and African Instituted Churches has been the task of this thesis. This is done with view to bringing Christians to a proper understanding of the symbols and their proper use. Chapter one gave the foundation of the study by creating an awareness that the compromise of the Church with the world has brought about the misuse and lack of proper placement of symbols in Christian circles.

Some number of relevant literatures reveals that symbols push forward the divine realities that words are not enough to describe. The interpreter must be familiar with the symbolic objects in order to grasp the message of such symbols. It was also postulated that symbols of worship are not peculiar to Christianity alone. It is traceable to the Africans ways of worshipping their gods and that it is common in African to use symbols as means of worship. Chapter three of this work takes a detailed look at the understanding of the Mainline and the African Instituted churches on some symbols of worship with a brief comparism. This understanding became the platform for the theological appraisal raised in chapter four that symbols are not God but must not be neglected or misused. Symbols are a means of revelation of what God is and can do and what the future holds for the church.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Symbols of worship are very relevant to African churches because everything is symbolic in Africa. The names and days of the week have their symbolic interpretation. Symbols of worship are pertinent to the Christian church. The attitudes

of the contemporary Christian toward the sacred objects of worship need a serious attention because they have often been misrepresented and misunderstood. This has opened the door for all manners of abuse, and has led to some misconceptions about Christianity. Church leaders must rise up to the challenge of their theological responsibilities by adequately teaching and exposing church members to biblical truths in all aspect of the church.

There is the need to identify proper biblical symbols and engage in appropriate usage to avoid syncretic elements and influences. It is a call to use these sacred objects or symbols to the glory of God and to establish His kingdom on earth. Every preacher must learn to concretize his or her message through appropriate, dignifying and soul-lifting symbols or imageries that will facilitate understanding. The symbols of worship must enhance vivid understanding of the gospel message and at same time facilitate easy comprehension by the worshipers. Africa Christianity therefore, can be improved by the use of symbols, and the concept of salvation can be fully represented in symbols if worship and liturgies are meaningfully represented by symbol with African relevance.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this researcher and the end to improve the use of symbols of worship to be more effective, the following recommendations are made.

First, the researcher recommend that symbols of worship should be used in churches based on their theological ground rather than personal or certain individual interest. It should be used as it is relate to God and all his attributes. Second, the minister or the church leaders should strive to interpret the word of God as it relate to the symbols in a contextual way without compromising the reality of the gospel. Third, members should realize that symbols are not the ends themselves but means to

an end. Symbols are not God but God can be understood or grasped through them. Hence, worshipping symbols should be avoided; God can be worshipped without symbols. Fourth, pastors should not use symbol to distract the attention of the parishioners from worshipping the true God. Let your appearance be moderate and not to scare people with your appearance during worship. Know that it is a privilege to be ordained or call to His service. Lastly, symbols should not be paraded and be marketed as any other materials in the world let us maintain its sacredness.