

A THEOLOGY OF ATONEMENT FROM AN
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to contextual, African Christian theology. It is an investigation into the need for and how to develop a relevant theology of the way the death of Christ deals with the problem of sin, evil, and other associated tyrants in the African worldview.

The contention of the essay is that the doctrine of atonement that is most meaningful to the African socio-cultural milieu is the classic, ransom view. It is based on the biblical metaphor of redemption - the death of Christ and his resurrection understood as a sacrifice for sin and victory over evil spirits.

The work examined and critiqued the biblical, theological and African cultural perspectives on the doctrine of atonement. These perspectives represent the three major sources for the formulation of Christian theology: Scripture, church tradition, culture.

Certain implications from the presentation and critique, especially from the classic view of atonement, were used to develop a theology of atonement from an African Christian perspective. The implications concern structure, sin, sacrifice, and salvation with respect to atonement.

The theology of atonement is formulated under: God, the cause of the atonement; sin, the necessity for the atonement; salvation, the purpose of the atonement, and universal appeal, the extent of the atonement.

The recommendations made concern the need for the use of the ideas of the thesis to further formulate theologies that will aid the preaching of authentic salvation message, support authentic Christian living and promote authentic Christian mission, especially in the African context.

In chapter four, a theology of atonement was formulated with: God as the cause of atonement; sin as the necessity for atonement; salvation as the purpose of atonement; and, universal appeal as the extent of atonement.

B. CONCLUSIONS

The following are the major conclusions drawn from the research.

The work of God in Jesus Christ by which He dealt with the problem and consequence of sin to bring sinners unto right relationship with Himself is a complex one. It has various dimensions that cannot be easily described with a single word or metaphor. "Redemption" is one of the most comprehensive biblical metaphors to describe the atonement.

A critique of the Satisfaction, Moral Influence and Ransom theories also show that, in spite of the problems and inadequacies in some respects that are evident in the other two theories, the Ransom, Classic theory is the most relevant to formulate a theology of atonement in an African Christian context.

The theology of atonement formulated reckons seriously with the African worldview as it presents Jesus as conqueror of sin, law, evil, and death. This theology is practically significant because of its relevance to the existential needs of an African, who through conversion and discipleship, on the basis of the blood and sacrifice of Christ, can confront

and overcome evil spirits and forces like witches, sorcerers to experience fullness of salvation and wholness of life.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a contextual, Christological enquiry with soteriological implication, this thesis can be used to fully develop a relevant soteriology from an African Christian perspective. While some scholars have tried to develop African theology of salvation, there is a dire need for one that will emphasize the biblical idea of redemption and be based on the Ransom theology of atonement. This is to be done from the viewpoint of sacrifice as contained in the shed and blood of Christ which gives us victory over sin and evil. This will make for a more authentic salvation theology and experience in Africa.

Another area of fertile research work is to formulate a relevant practical theology. Two areas readily come to mind. The first one is a fully developed theology of worship from an African Christian perspective, that is, one that will be based on the sacrificial death of Christ and the consequent victory which calls for worship as a celebration of new life through God in Christ.

The second area is pastoral care, counselling and psychotherapy from the viewpoint of atonement. What has been done thus far from Western perspective does not take cognizance of

the African worldview and is therefore grossly inadequate to minister and promote authentic Christian living. This call is especially urgent among evangelicals in view of the present challenge posed by the practice of exorcism and deliverance in both African Independent Churches and the fastly growing pentecostal/charismatic churches throughout Africa.

And finally, this writer joins others to recommend and call for the continuation and further development of an authentic theology of mission from African social, cultural and political perspective. There is so much to be done in African missiology to further empower the church to preach the Good News and make disciples of all nations in Africa and beyond.