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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: Crisis in Exegesis or Ignorance?

An AJET Editorial

The biblical theology within the ~~universal church of God in the~~ African continent seems to be undergoing a crisis in the ~~exegesis of~~ scripture which results in ignorance and/or misinterpretation of the word.

The book of Hosea rightly cautions that “my people are dying because of lack of knowledge” (4:6). What kind of knowledge is this when on every corner of the streets of African major cities we hear the preaching and declaration of God’s word? Again on the country side, many preachers loudly speak the word very early in the morning waking up those who may want to enjoy a few moments of sleep. It seems one crisis experienced in biblical and theological education precipitates another and so goes the rhythm. Just as a market is flooded with a variety of goods and services, so there are a variety of crises that biblical preachers must consider if they need to reach the world and transform it for God’s glory. These crises include: the crisis of exegesis; hermeneutics; homiletics; and single and multiple meaning of a text.

The reason for this is that some of the preachers in theological education are called by God, others have called themselves (fame, funds and no/little training) and still others are called by the devil himself. All these seem to compete and the result of their callings is the discrepancies we observe in church ministries: lack of knowledge, hence shallow understanding and a misdirection of the congregants; misinterpretation of scripture, done only to suit personal persuasions; and a dichotomy between the word and the life of the preacher and the community of believers.

In the lead article, Dr. Stephanie L. Black, discusses the struggle to connect the ‘academic and ‘Spiritual’ (the Word and Spirit) aspects of Biblical interpretation by African theological students, a tension that she points out that St. Augustine of Hippo wrote extensively about. According to St. Augustine, the biblical interpreter should understand God’s blend of spiritual and human means in communicating truth; cultivate a humble

Christ-like character; have a working knowledge of the whole Bible; and respect the 'rule of faith.'

In the second article the author, Moses N. Ng'ang'a, uses a case study of Molo constituency, Kenya to discuss the implications of Acts 17:24-28 for resolving tribal conflicts. He points out five major factors that promote a negative ethnicity: political, economic, moral, cultural and industrial; stating that the first two have had an increased animosity which has resulted into violence in the area. He calls on the church "to take up the challenge of engaging this problem for she has a key to resolving this problem albeit in the coming generation of Kenyans who have not drunk the venom of ethnic hatred" (p.37). There is need to study the Bible in order to arrive at theology that will address such situations, for example, people need to understand the sovereignty of God; unity of the human race; and God's purpose in ethnic diversity. He emphatically concludes that, "The answer to this [problem] lies not in the separation of warring communities but rather in true and genuine healing based on the theology of Acts 17:24-28," which "every church needs to understand, teach and act upon" (p. 43).

Exceptionally relevant, practical and substantive is the third article on *Theological Education and Character*. Dr. Keith Ferdinando rightly cautions in the opening sentence that, "Theological educators of all people should be aware of the critical importance of character in the preparation of those who will lead the people of God" (p.45). Focusing on four biblical passages, he reflects briefly on what Jesus intended, what the truth of the word should produce, what ministry requires and what teaching demands in theological education. The article seeks to strongly suggest that the *why* character should be perhaps *the* central concern, for any serious programme of theological education.

Quite timely and interesting is the next article on ancestor Christology. It is based on a grassroots level survey research of the traditional theology of TEKAN and TCNN that characterize the mainline Nigerian Christianity, the author, Dr. Timothy Palmer, documents reflections on the idea of Jesus Christ being our ancestor as has been proposed by a number of significant African theologians in the last three decades. He enumerates these theologians' concepts of an ancestral Christ, many of whom come from the Catholic background, Dr. Palmer asks: 'how does the concept of Christ as ancestor resonate with the ordinary African Christian?' (p.67).