

Chapter 6

Phenomenological Approach to African Theology

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the phenomenological approaches to African theology. Over the years, there have been several attempts to think about theology to be a Western venture, thus resulting in such claims as “there is nothing like African theology.” This work seeks to investigate whether there truly is an African theology. It further analyzes the study of theology in an African context with respect to ethno-theology, inculturation theology, and Black or liberation theology. Using hermeneutical-phenomenological methodology, which seeks to interpret African theology with a view to bringing out its essence and of course reasons for its existence, findings show that employing phenomenological approaches like epoche or bracketing, eidetic reduction, and comparative approaches, African theology takes its primary data from the Bible, African tradition, and history. The chapter concludes that there is African theology with respect to African culture, nature, and experience.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, African theology has developed from a lower region to a higher region in terms of groundwork, sources, methodology and approaches. The development has been made possible by the efforts and contributions of Christian theologians, scholars and philosophers who affected several African countries with their theories, ideologies, and teachings.

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The impacts of the older mission churches and independent churches are also considered. African theology has been transcribed through a good deal of writings by the scholars of many fields with African interest, namely, theology, religion, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and other related disciplines. Even church leaders from among Roman Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals have also exerted tremendous influence on the subject though most of them are devotional rather than strongly theological in nature. Parratt (2004) contends that the contributions of all of them count. Through their writings, the theological challenge which needs to be examined by the mainstream theologians was identified.

African theology as a concept is faced with many challenges, some of them are, the nonexistence of African theology and the naming issue. Some scholars believe that theology though born out of a certain culture is not limited to that culture. Such people are ready to think that theology is a universal or as proposed, “Western” venture. Others who accept the fact of existence of African theology prefer the title, “African Christian Theology” to “African Theology”. Their opinion is that it enjoys the currency of African culture as portrayed in some of their titles such as Imasogie’s *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (1993) and Parratt’s *Reader in African Christian Theology* (2004). Their position is, there is a theological conception behind every religion therefore to be specific, theological occupation of any religion should be so identified with that religion (Imasogie, 1993). This position is postulated without tracing the origin of the term and the reason behind the usage of the term. Phenomenology seeks to describe the origin and reason behind the usage to ascertain its essence to the actual users.

In the 21st century, there has been a flood of ideas on how to deal with African theology and in particular the sources and methodology. Generally, it has been assumed that there are two major theological currents that have emerged in Africa in the last two decades: Indigenization of Christianity, as well as Liberation Theology in Africa. The emergence of these theological currents brought a drastic change in the theological and ecclesiastical landscapes of Africa (Mbiti, 1986).

For Bediako (2006:43), “theology in Africa has gone beyond what the missionary [supposedly and] originally intended”. There is now a need for Africans to own their theological discourse. Thus, there is a need for African theologians to take seriously their African heritage and allow it to freely interact with Christian faith which may result in prioritization. This requires the African theological priorities to be set within the broader context of political, educational, and religious factors in Africa.

There is an eminent move towards approaches to African theology in African scholarship. A great number of African scholars contend for the method or approach in order to find a proper and ideal way of exploring and assessing between the connections of African theology though, in relation with African culture and worldview and the biblical principle and faith. Since there is no unified approach

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