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NEEDED: TASK THEOLOGIAN

An AJET Editorial

AJET is deeply concerned about the development of theologians in Africa. But what kind of theologians are most needed?

The classic definition of theology given by B.B. Warfield states: "Theology is the science of God and his relationship to man and the world." Systematic Theology is devoted to "a unified formulation of truth" derived from divine revelation which is then applied to human life.

This kind of theology, represented by systematic theologies from the west, and sometimes called "Dogmatic Theology," is usually very abstract and seemingly unrelated to life. Pick up most systematic theologies, and you find highly refined, abstract logic designed to provide "a scientific" and "unified formulation" of biblical truth. Theology is neatly arranged in logical categories, but without any application to life. Theological debates rage over dichotomy or trichotomy, the number and organization of the angels, supralapsarianism or infralapsarianism. How does all this impact the common man anywhere in the world?

While there will always be a need for systematic theologians, we need to develop another kind of theologian. Instead of mere professional scholars surrounded by books and isolated from the common Christian in the local church and village, we need *task theologians*. The need for task theologians around the world, and especially in Africa, is very great.

A *task theologian* is out in the battle field, working in the trenches and engaged in spiritual warfare as he is building the church of Jesus Christ. He is fully engaged in evangelism and discipling, bringing believers to maturity in Christ. He teaches them the biblical truth as it applies to them in their context. A *task theologian* is one who knows biblical teaching and can relate it and apply it to the believers whom he is grounding in the faith.

The apostle Paul is a model of the *task theologian* which is needed. Paul was immersed with biblical understanding of the Old Testament which he learned at the feet of Gamaliel. Furthermore, he knew Jesus Christ in a living and dynamic way and was taught by the Holy Spirit. In his missionary endeavours to plant churches where Christ had not been preached, he grounded the converts in biblical truth. Read any of his letters to these churches. They are

filled with theology. But that theology is practically related to the particular needs and problems which they faced.

The Christological passages of Paul, for example, are embedded in practical concerns. Paul's teaching of the incarnation of Christ in Philippians 2:4-11 provides a model of humility for the Philippians, who were deeply divided. The supremacy of Christ as found in Colossians 3:15-20 was written to correct the incipient Gnosticism present in Colosse. Everywhere you turn you find profound theology designed to affect the practical lives of Christians. In fact, theology forms the basis for all practical exhortations for Christian conduct.

Biblical, practical and relevant systematic theologies are greatly needed. *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* by Wilbur O'Donovan (The Paternoster Press, 1996) is an excellent example of a systematic theology which is practical and relevant for use by the common *task theologian* in Africa. Such a systematic theology is the fruit of a life time of study, teaching and interaction with the African churches in order to help them grow into maturity in Christ.

But what is sorely needed are *task theologians* who are in the battle front, evangelising, teaching, planting churches and bringing those churches into maturity, theologians who are also able to study the Scriptures and teach biblical truth in a relevant way. Thank God, there are many *task theologians* in Africa but we need to be equipping and preparing many more if the church in Africa is to become well grounded in the truth.

What are the requirements of a *task theologian*? They are two in number. First, he must know God, love His Word and be able to think and study the Scriptures for himself. In order for him to read the Bible for all its worth, he should be trained in the art of biblical interpretation. Ideally, this means that he must be trained to study the text in the original languages of Scripture and use the tools of exegesis. His Bible should be well worn, and he should have access to basic reference books for exegesis and theological study.

Second, he must know his people - their world view, their temptations and weaknesses, their problems and needs. He must love his sheep to such an extent that he is willing to sacrifice in order to help them grow into spiritual maturity in Christ.

In order to train *task theologians* for our churches, we need *task theologians par excellence* in our theological colleges - men and women who are experts in their knowledge of the Word and with hands-on knowledge of the needs in the churches. This is the greatest need in the evangelical churches in Africa today.