
The Cross of Christ
by John R. W. Stott
Inter-Varsity Press, 1966
pp. 383.

Given the absolute centrality of the cross in the Christian faith, it is both surprising and disturbing that so little has been written on the subject at a popular level. John Stott notes the existence of this gap in the introduction to his book and goes a long way towards filling it. He sets himself three goals: to be true to Scripture, to share the fruits of his reading, and to relate the doctrine to the contemporary world.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one, "Approaching the Cross," serves as something of an introduction, establishing the centrality of the cross in the thinking of the New Testament writers and its character as a deliberate act of the Father and the Son, and examining its meaning from the information given in the Gospels. In part two, "The Heart of the Cross", Stott expounds the Biblical doctrine of the atonement, explaining it in terms of satisfaction and substitution necessitated by the problem of sin and consequent condemnation. Part three, "The Achievement of the Cross", considers the application of the cross to men and women: it saves them; it reveals God's glory, love, and justice to them; and it liberates them from the power of Satan. And finally part four, "Living under the Cross", shows how the cross should affect our daily living in practice.

The value of the book is indisputable. Most important is its solid Biblical exposition of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement which Stott vigorously defends against numerous critics from Abelard to C. H. Dodd. Biblical terms such as propitiation and justification are clearly explained, and difficult points are clarified such as the distinction between substitution and representation. There are good brief expositions of Job, Revelation, and especially Galatians, as well as a valuable discussion of why some parables such as the Prodigal Son seem superficially to rule out the necessity of the atonement. In the African context chapter 9, "The Conquest of Evil," is particularly valuable, showing the implications of the cross for the power of Satan and how the Christian is affected. The whole final section reminds us that sound doctrine must be accompanied by sound living; our faith must issue in appropriate fruit. It is a call we should take very much to heart.

Nevertheless, there are significant points which invite criticism or at least require further clarification. One example is Stott's consideration of the need for atonement which he seems to see as an absolute rather than a "consequent" necessity. That is to say, he implies not only that there was no other way to save men than the method actually adopted, but also that there was nothing else God could do but save them — he was constrained somehow to do so. Thus Stott refers to an "internal necessity" which meant that "God must 'satisfy' himself." He goes on: "the only way for God's holy love to be satisfied is for his holiness to be directed in judgement upon his appointed substitute, in order that his love may be

directed towards us in forgiveness" (p. 158). Later on he continues "there was no other way by which God's holy love could be satisfied and rebellious human beings could be saved" (p. 161). This however goes beyond the teaching of Scripture. It is no doubt true to say that the only means to save men was the method of substitutionary atonement, but God was not obliged to save at all. There is no "internal necessity." The decision to save was an act of sovereign grace and love, free and unconstrained. Men do not have to be saved to "satisfy" this love for they are not, as Stott suggests, "the sole objects of his holy love." That love is surely pre-eminently expressed in the relationships that exist among the persons of the Trinity and does not *require* an external expression. Indeed, if one argues that salvation is a necessary act of God in order that his love may find fulfilment, one must presumably argue that creation is equally a necessary act, and the sovereign creator is as dependent on his creation as the creation is on him.

Further, Stott fails to clarify the degree to which man is spiritually incapacitated by sin. On the one hand he refers to man as a slave to sin, needing to be liberated by Christ (p. 95), and he rejects the view that sinners cooperate with grace. Thus he says of the Catholic position: "They (Catholics) add that human beings have not lost their free will and are therefore able to co-operate with grace and contribute to salvation" and goes on later to say: "There is no cooperation between God and us, only a choice between two mutually exclusive ways, his and ours" (p. 187). It is therefore surprising when later on he approvingly cites Vanstone noting that "God's love is seen 'waiting in the end, helpless before that which it loves' for in giving his son to die for sinners God made himself vulnerable to the possibility that they would snub him and turn away" (p. 216). There is, to say the least, a lack of clarity here, for Vanstone clearly implies man must cooperate with grace: indeed, far from sovereign, he leaves grace impotent before the sovereign decision of men. The impression left is of a feeble God, unable to bring His purposes to conclusion, a far cry from Him "who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will."

The question of man's spiritual and moral capacity is also raised, though in a different form, when Stott discusses the "problem of forgiveness." He refers to the Biblical recognition that "man's responsibility is diminished" (p. 95), by the world, the flesh and the devil. But is this in fact a Biblical recognition? The exegetical evidence quoted in support by no means proves the case. Would it not be better to argue that, while sin completely paralyzes man spiritually and morally (Eph 2:1-3, Rom 8:3-8), it leaves him nevertheless fully responsible for his actions? Slavery to sin does not diminish guilt or consequent condemnation. If it did one might even argue that the more steeped a man is in sin, the less responsible he is, a somewhat perverse conclusion.

Occasionally Stott raised provocative issues which are then dismissed with very inadequate discussion. One such issue is the extent of the atonement alluded to in passing when a reference is made to the implication of the words "for many" in Mark 10:45. The author's position is made clear by a quotation from Jeremiah, but there is no discussion of the point at issue nor even a recognition that large questions are involved that need further examination. An exposition of the atonement should surely consider for whom Christ died. Similarly in the context of

a discussion of the penal nature of human death, Stott says, "To be sure, the fossil record indicates that predation and death existed in the animal kingdom before the creation of man" (p. 65). What is not discussed, however, is whether the Biblical testimony accords with the ambiguous record of fossil remains, to which Stott gives an absolute "to be sure" authority. Plainly a book on the Cross is no place to discuss questions of evolution and creation, but if such an observation needs to be intruded into the text, it should at the very least be qualified. From an evangelical viewpoint other positions are possible and even preferable on this question.

These last points raise in fact the question whether too much is attempted in the book; certainly at many points one would appreciate a fuller discussion. On the other hand, Stott succeeds in giving a remarkably full and broad picture of the glory of the cross and its significance, doctrinal, spiritual, and moral, while at the same time avoiding excessive length which would considerably restrict readership. He holds a balance between the need for both depth and breadth.

In conclusion, the book is well written and clearly set out, chapters being divided under sub-headings to help guide the reader through the argument. There are full indexes and an ample bibliography (from which however John Owen's works on the cross are curiously absent). The price is reasonable. The book will certainly be widely useful and appreciated; pastors, theological students, Christian workers of all kinds, and the "thoughtful reader" Stott has in mind would all benefit greatly from it. It is therefore highly recommended although not without reservations.

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Biblical Preaching
by Haddon W. Robinson
(Baker Book House, 1980)
pp. 230; hard cover

Is preaching out of date? Have other mediums of communication proven more effective for the Church? Should preaching be abandoned altogether in lieu of other methods in reaching people with the message of the Bible? Haddon Robinson, author of *Biblical Preaching*, says no, unequivocally.

Despite widespread devaluation of preaching (especially in the West), Robinson contends that anyone who takes the Bible seriously dares not dismiss the vital importance of preaching, even today.

Biblical Preaching is about expository preaching which Robinson defines as "the communication of a biblical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in

its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers." From this concise definition the author creatively carves out ten sensible steps for effective preaching from the choosing of the text to "preaching so people will listen."

While the emphasis on expository preaching is nothing new to the discipline, Robinson's methodology for taking the preacher from text to delivery is extremely innovative. From choice of text, through the exegetical process of determining its meaning, he carefully shows the student of homiletics how to arrive at the central thought, or the "Big Idea."

"The Big Idea" concept yoked to expository preaching is Robinson's genius in this book. While other homileticians have stressed the importance of focusing on one central thought from the text in sermon building, this author has put real substance to the "science" part of preaching. He stresses that it is the formation of the "idea," in the sermon which constitutes its cornerstone. The "idea," insists Robinson, is a combination of two basic things: the subject and its complement or the subject and the answer to the question, "What am I saying about the subject?"

The determination of subject and complement of a given text then give way to an exciting homiletical journey in the development of the sermon from the historical, grammatical, and literary study, through the outlining process and written manuscript, to the delivery itself. Along this journey Dr. Robinson transforms what might usually be a dull rehearsal of predictable procedures into a paragraph by paragraph discovery of how the "Big Idea" concept can infuse those procedures with new insights to yield a higher degree of effectiveness in the pulpit.

Having taught homiletics to Africans in two theological institutions over the past decade, I have struggled with those students to find a book of "how to" instructions for sermon building which would best prepare them for effective preaching. While it is still too early to formulate any conclusive results, I have recently tested this methodology with two classes at Scott Theological College (Machakos, Kenya) and have been extremely encouraged with their positive assessment and approval as well as their marked progress in sermon preparation and delivery.

Biblical Preaching is organized, clear, and balanced on the theory and practice of preaching, and impressively documented with forty three sources. With its emphasis on both expository preaching and the development of the "Big Idea" from a given text, I heartily recommend this book as both a valuable resource and constructive text for students of homiletics in Africa.

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God and Man in African Religion
 A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria
 by Dr. Emezie Ikenga Metuh
 (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1981
 pp. 181, Ksh. 90.00

African Theology is no stranger to African Christianity. In the mid-twentieth century Idowu, Sawyer, Dickson, and Mbiti invented this brand of theology. Dr. Metuh, lecturer in religious studies at the University of Jos, Nigeria, now joins their school of thought by trying "to study African traditional religion as a theological system rather than as a set of anthropological facts." (p. x)

The book is an apology to defend the authenticity of ATR as the system which regulates the relationship between man and God in Africa.

Metuh's authority on this subject is worth noting. He himself is an Igbo, and his grandfather was a priest of Ala, an earth deity. He writes, therefore, from first hand information as an observer and participant.

To systematize ATR the author has taken his own tribe, the Igbo of Nigeria, as a case study. He attempts to answer five questions in nine chapters and two appendices. The five questions are:

- 1) Is the concept of the supreme being in Africa one of a living God or a cosmic man?
- 2) Is Chukwu a withdrawn god, or is he imminent in the world?
- 3) Are the norms of human conduct referred to god as their source and final arbiter?
- 4) How does god determine man's hopes and aspirations in the after life?
- 5) Is the concept of the supreme being found among the Igbo due to Christian missionary influence?

Chapters one to three attempt to answer the first question. First he discusses the doctrine of God and Creation. By the evidence of three cosmogonic myths, he asserts that God the Creator is the African God. He equates the African myths with the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2. Thus Metuh understands the Bible as a collection of human apprehensions of the deity. He implies that revelation is only through nature and that the Bible is not a verbal revelation of God.

In chapter two the author is to be commended for his clarification of the

term "Chi". As an Igbo he presents a comprehensive definition of the word which is tied to the Igbo names of God (Chikwu and Chineke). In this discussion Metuh portrays skill in Igbo etymology. He explains that Africans worshipped the sun, mountains, and other natural phenomena as imageries used in naming God. "It therefore might be wrong to conclude that because the same word is used for God and the sun that the group using it are sun worshippers, or that the sun or the sky is the Supreme Being." (pp. 30)

A discussion of the attributes of God concludes Metuh's theology on the deity. The Igbo believe in one moral, omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent, creator god who rules, sustains, guards, and caters to the needs of the world. The attempt to justify the unity of God in a religion where multiple deities are worshipped deserves attention. His argument is that there cannot be two uncreated creators. But the question is – Can't God create beings and give them the rights and powers of gods? And the answer is logically, yes. Therefore if the African deities are given the right to be worshipped (as God Is), then they are gods. Hence Africa believes in more than one god; however, only one god is the creator of all other gods. Nevertheless they are gods.

Chapters four to six endeavour to answer the second question. Interestingly he begins with the African world view. He presents four aspects in the Igbo world view, namely, the multiplicity of spiritual beings, where he quotes the Ifa divination verse which speaks of "the one thousand four hundred and four divinities". He presents the Igbo world as one. In this one world lives the spiritual and material; the invisible and visible of European philosophy and theology is not an African concept. The hierarchy of beings, God being at the top of the ontological order and man at the bottom, is a prominent concept in African world view promoting the doctrine of cursing and blessing in ATR. The fourth aspect involves the interaction of the beings. Metuh informs us that the beings are "linked together by a network of relationships guided by fixed laws, 'omenala'" (p. 56). To deviate from these laws is an abomination which upsets the whole set up.

Again Metuh's short sighted apologetics falls short of a law of theologizing, the law of 'non – contradiction'. In chapter five he says that God is viewed as transcendent in ATR while at the same time immanent in creation through the spirits. He attempts to clarify by saying that though the deities receive worship and have divine attributes, ATR is not polytheistic. However, his attempt is short of success in that it is incoherent to worship and revere a being as god without calling it god.

Metuh's expertise in Igbo etymology is again revealed in his correction to Bible translators who translated the word 'Ekwensu' as devil. He points out that the religious dualism of a good God versus an evil devil is not found in ATR. He remarkably explains that ekwensu in Igbo is not a devil but an evil spirit of a man who died poor and without a family. The word would have been better translated from the Greek or English. In the Kikamba Bible (Kenyan tribe) the translation of devil is "ndevili" and satan is "satani".

The African concept of man, according to Metuh, is made up of four constituent

principles: the soul which links man with the other life forces in the universe; the destiny soul, the emanation of the creator; the ancestral spirit, which links man with his family; the real person, the unique individual created by God.

In the view presented above, the body of man is of nominal importance and cannot be separated from the soul. The body is a mere appearance of the spiritual being created by God prior to its existence on earth. In his discussion Metuh fails to bring out the idea that God, who created the spirit, created the body as well. For instance the Akamba name for God (Ngai mwaatuangi – God the cleaver) infers that God shaped natural phenomena including the body of man.

Metuh's strong point is his criticism of Christian condemnation of African medicines. He mentions that Christians have "indiscriminately condemned most African medicines as evil and diabolical magic" (p. 98).

While agreeing with him that not all African medicine is evil and diabolic magic, sometimes African doctors use vain rituals simply because they want to be paid. This they do conscious of the fact that they are neither able to diagnose nor to treat the ailment.

His theodicy is simple; God "is given credit for all the good ... and the presence of evil is blamed on the irresponsible behaviour of a Vulture" (p. 105). The full myth is found in chapter one, pp. 14–15. His argument that physical evils are punishments for moral evils is not balanced. Some sicknesses in ATR were not caused by moral evil, and therefore they were easily treated with the use of herbs and other medicines from the specialists, e.g. stomach upsets, wounds, etc.

The author defends God's immanence by citing prayers and invocations offered directly to Chukwu. Look at this prayer offered to God in the English version:

Oh God of the Universe,
 come and take food
 take kola nuts
 Come and take drinks. (p. 131)

The question is – Was this kind of invocation not done abstractly? Is the mere mention of the name Chukwu proof that God is immanent in Igbo thought forms? Is it not evident that the spirits and deities are realities in ATR interacting with man, but the supreme being is an abstract idea?

Metuh's eschatology follows Mbiti's concept of time. He interpretes the African concept as cyclic not lineal (p. 153). Life, therefore, is conceived as a "cyclic process of birth, death and rebirth. What is, was, and will be. The centre of concern is the eternal now" (p. 137).

While the above view carries some truth, some examples in ATR show that

Africans had a lineal concept of time in some cases (though not vividly accurate). For instance the Kikuyu of Kenya trace their origin to Gikuyu and Mumbi as their first parents. Can't this be called a lineal concept of time? The Akamba refer to famines in the history of the tribe. Isn't this lineal history? While the eternal now has no age dimension, yet we know that Africans counted seasons to calculate age which is lineal concept.

Metuh's general conclusion that only ATR is life affirming as opposed to Asian religions and Christianity, which can be said to be life denying (p. 153), is unscrupulous and based on the biased discussion of his doctrine of salvation.

Christianity not only affirms that Jesus came to give man abundant life (John 10:10), but also is set to destroy death, the greatest enemy of life (I Corinthians 15:54-56).

In appendix I Metuh answers his fifth question. He strongly feels that the concept of the Supreme Being found among the Igbo is not due to Christian missionary influence. Metuh believes that God revealed himself to the African through nature.

Obviously there are good reasons to deny that what the African knows about God was imported either from the Jews, Muslims, or Christians. We may say, however, that through trade and intercultural relations in the past the concept of God in Africa was enriched by other cultures.

Dr. Metuh is a clear writer. His work is organized and his thesis documented. He presents to the world of scholars a researched piece of literature. Theological colleges on this continent should have the book in their libraries as a resource for research done on African theology. As the debate on contextualization continues, the book remains to be challenged by an evangelical theology written in an African style.

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