
Biblical and African Wisdom in the Contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Churches.

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to expose biblical and African Wisdom and to consider the Nigerian perspective of Wisdom in contemporary Pentecostal Churches. In the light of the above, historical and descriptive type of research was adopted in this enterprise. In the finding, it was discovered that biblical and African Wisdom are indispensable tools in the contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Churches. And it is in operation, to an extent, there is a shift of emphasis from what was obtainable in the Bible times. The wisdom gift from God was intended to profit every member of the body of Christ. But today, the reverse is the case in some of our contemporary Pentecostal Churches.

Keywords: *Biblical, African, Wisdom, Cotemporary, Pentecostal, Churches.*

Introduction

The significant place of wisdom in the development of human society in the bible times highlights the fact that it is a relevant issue in our contemporary Nigeria Pentecostal Churches. If wisdom had a place in the Bible time, does it still have a place in our contemporary time? If yes, how relevant is it for us today? What is the relationship between biblical and African Wisdom? If attention is given to the importance attached to wisdom in Bible times, our church in African culture, particularly the Pentecostal will fulfil their mission to the world as God intended and serve as agents of socialization to better the society.

The big problem before us is the definition of the term. Some people hold the views that secular education guarantees the churches needed spiritual wisdom. On the other hand, some hold the views that wisdom is a gift from God, unattainable by any human effort. But what is our stand? Do we take side with those who strongly believe the secular education guarantees churches needed spiritual wisdom or take side with those who see wisdom as gift of God? We cannot agree with any without painstakingly researching into the notion of wisdom in the Bible and see how it relates to African wisdom. This will invariably form the basis for a comparative study of their operations in the Contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Churches.

Definition of Terms

Wisdom: The term wisdom is from the Greek work Oovia (Sophia). The Hebrew word for wisdom is hokhmah. Wisdom has been defined to be ‘the use of the best means for attaining the best ends’. The Encyclopaedia of the Bible, defines wisdom as a capacity of the mind which involves both knowledge and the ability to direct the mind, toward a full understanding of human life and toward its moral fulfilment. Thus, wisdom is a special capacity necessary for full human living. The Encyclopaedia of Religion defines wisdom as a practical matter, namely “insight” into certain connections existing in human life and in the world and put into the service of instruction and education (Eliade, 1995).

According to Brown (1987), Wisdom (Sophia) denotes for example, specialist knowledge in a particular field, such as in handicraft or in art, but equally in economic shrewdness and the art of government. Basically, wisdom is the art of being successful of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results. It is ultimately rooted and grounded in God. If wisdom is to be developed in human being, the starting point must be God.

Pentecostal Churches

The term 'Pentecostal' comes from Pentecost, which comes from the Greek word Pentecostos meaning fifty. The Pentecost was seven weeks or fifty days after the Passover and it was called the "feast of weeks". The Pentecost was one of the three occasions in the year in which all male Israelites were to appear before the Lord (Deut. 16:16). In the New Testament, the Pentecost was the day the Holy Spirit descended on the Disciples of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. The term 'Pentecostal' when used to describe a church or a group of churches refers to a religious movement whose members share a common belief in the possibility of receiving the same experience and gifts as did the first Christians on the day of Pentecost. It emphasises the corporate element in worship often marked by great spontaneity and speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing and exorcism (Emmanuel, 2002).

Pentecostalism belongs to that stream within Christianity, which places a personal experience of the Holy Ghost high among the marks of a Christian. The most important figure within that stream in previous centuries was John Wesley. The Pentecostal Churches form a large group. The movement drew inspiration from many overseas groups, notably the American Pentecostalism.

Aims

The aim is to examine biblical wisdom and African concept of wisdom as they relate to the Contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Churches Hebrew Wisdom.

Hebrew Wisdom

The Hebraic concept of wisdom is strikingly different from the Greek concept. The Hebrew wisdom, though it sought to develop both the reason and the intellect as did the Greeks, could start only with God, namely the acknowledgement that God existed, created and was important in human life, lay behind all the development of Hebrew wisdom. Furthermore, wisdom in Hebrew times was used to describe mental capacities and skill, which had a moral components, the capacity to understand and to do good. Thus, when Moses delegated some of his authority to newly appointed Judges, he chose "wise, understanding and experience men" (Deut. 1:13). Israelite wisdom was modified by its relation to faith in Yahweh, which gives it a character of its own (Geoffery, 1965)

Wisdom is an attribute of the promised messiah (Isaiah 11:2). In its fullest sense, belongs to God and it includes complete knowledge. True wisdom thus stems from the Lord and is applied to daily living. He created wisdom and He alone saw it, counted and poured it on all His works.

Wisdom in Jewish Apocalyptic

Many wisdom passages may be found in Jewish apocalyptic. Hence, in the stories of Daniel 1 -, He is portrayed as in contrast with the Babylonian $\alpha\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ (wise men). In general expressions, the commands of wisdom refer to the whole relationship with God. In the same vein, apocalyptic teaches that the whole of the divine relationship is observing or keeping the law and not just fulfilling a summary of the commandments. A common feature of the apocalyptic is that keeping the law is the criterion of the justification *justi* (Justification of the Just).

The New Testament continues from the Old Testament background of wisdom, but adds some variations of its own. The use of wisdom in the gospels in general is tied to the traditional Old Testament and Jewish concept, where wisdom is man's approach to life, arising out of his life in the covenant bestowed by God, and so must be regarded as the gift of God.

Wisdom in African Concept

Philosophy of one kind or another is behind the thinking and acting of every people, and a study of traditional religions brings us into those areas of African life, where through word and action, we may be able to discern the philosophy behind them. African wisdom may be found in the traditional religion, proverbs, oral tradition, ethics and morals of the society concerned. African wisdom simply concerns the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African people think, act or speak in different situations in life. An average African is a religious being. Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being: religion is in their whole system of being.

Wisdom commands great respect in African societies. In so doing, people admit that man's wisdom, however great, are limited, incomplete and acquired. On the other hand, God's wisdom is absolute, unlimited and intrinsically part of His eternal nature and being. To the Zuru and Banyarwanda, God is known as the 'The Wise One'. It is a common saying among the Yoruba that 'Only God is Wise (Mbiti, 1969). From God's wisdom, man derives his wisdom. "African peoples record their great ideas and services reflections in proverbs". These words, now beginning to be written down, contain and convey African wisdom and theology. A proverb in African tradition is not only a didactical saying. It is a store house of native wisdom and philosophy (Muzorewa, 1985).

African wisdom which most times is entrenched in African proverbs is being used by the elders, especially during festivity when they gathered. Here are some examples of African proverbs, what an elderly man sees while sitting, a child cannot see it while standing, meaning the elder ones are more experienced than the young ones. No matter how big a tree is, it must dance to the tune of the wind, meaning nobody is above his parents. The foot print of a tiger and that of a cat are not the same, meaning all men are not equal.

A hunter who is prepared to kill an elephant should be prepared to carry it, meaning someone who is seeking for trouble should be ready for its consequences. It is the bitter leaf you eat that makes you to enjoy pumpkin leaf, meaning suffer before pleasure (Obanor). It is easy to give monkey palm-wine but it is difficult to recover the cup, meaning it is easy to make promises but difficult to fulfil it. The mangrove tree dwells in the river but that does not make it a crocodile, meaning no matter where you live, home is home. The chameleon is not afraid of any colour because he is a master of all colours, meaning confidence is power. The leaf that stays long in a native soap will definitely turn to be a soap, meaning a stranger who stays long in another man's land will definitely know much about their traditions or culture. That a man hangs calabash on his neck does not mean he is drunk, meaning, do not judge people by their appearance.

The Relationship between Biblical and African Wisdom

The close resemblance between certain African wisdom and biblical wisdom has been acknowledged for a long time. The first major study doing this is the one by Nare (1986), where proverbs 25 - 29 is read in the light of proverbial material from the Mossi culture of Burkina Faso. There is a great similarity between Hebrew and African wisdom. Like the African ones, Hebrew wisdom would have to be explained as indigenous wisdom. Here, are some similarities highlighted.

The purpose in a man's mind is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out (Prov. 20:5).

Man is like a pepper, till you have chewed it, you do not know how hot it is (Hausa). He who conceals hatred has lying lips and he who litters slander is a fool (Prov. 10:18) good words are food, bad words poison (Malagasy).

It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious women (Prov. 21:9).

To marry is to put a snake in one's handbag (Bantu).

The glory of young men is their strength, but the beauty of old men is their grey hair (Prov. 20:29).

The young bird does not crow until it hears the old ones (bechuanta) (Golka, 1999).

Where there are no oxen, there is no grain; but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox (Prov. 14:4).

The one who loses the cattle is like on who herds them (Lovedu).

The sluggard says 'there is a lion outside' I shall be alien in the streets! (Prov. 22:13).

The poor is disliked even by his neighbour, but the rich has many friends (Prov. 14:20).

A good name cannot be eaten, it is money that counts (Fante).

Wise men layup knowledge, but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near (Prov. 10:14).

We begin by being foolish, and we become wise by experience (Masai).

From the above illustrations, it can rightly be said that there are relationships between the Hebrew wisdom and African wisdom.

The True Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:2 – 16)

I would like to briefly touch some key areas in 1 Corinthians where Paul discussed wisdom. The Corinthians revered wisdom in the typical Greek fashion. They were zealous for every kind of learning. They set too high a value on the typical Greek admiration for rhetoric and philosophical studies. They had also cleverly emphasized the importance of wisdom. In a bold and forceful language, Paul contrasted the wisdom of God which seems folly to the sophisticated Corinthians, with the worldly wisdom that they so admired and that was so ineffective. To the seekers signs and wisdom, Paul now presented the ultimate contraction.

The worldly wisdom in which the Corinthians prided themselves is the very antithesis of the true wisdom of God demonstrated on the cross of Jesus. Here, we see the total alienation of thought between mere intellectual wisdom and wisdom of God which seems irrational to the Sophisticated Corinthian Christians (Abogunrin, 1991). The cross, in fact, is folly to wisdom humanly conceived, but it is God's folly, folly that is at the same time His wisdom and power. For Paul, no human wisdom can avail before God. Some have thought the wise man means the Greek sophist, the scholar, the Jewish scribe, while the Philosopher of this age means both (Fee, 1987).

Paul left not the slightest doubt that God has rejected all that rest on merely human wisdom. Had the way to God been through human wisdom, Christianity would here opened the way of salvation only to the intellectual gifted. The cross is not something to which one may add human wisdom and thereby makes it superior, rather the cross stands in absolute, uncompromising contradiction to human wisdom. The power in the cross opens the way of salvation only for the humblest to know God and to overcome evil and that is a wisdom

superior by far to anything the philosophers could produce. On the level of the search for wisdom, Christ proved to be the true wisdom.

A Brief Survey of the Origin of Pentecostalism

In the New Testament, the Pentecost was the day the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of Jesus Christ after his ascension. The term Pentecostal when used to describe a church or a group of churches refers to a religious movement whose members or adherents share a common belief in the possibility of receiving the same experience and gifts as did the first Christians on the day of Pentecost. Pentecostals emphasize the corporate element in worship marked by great spontaneity and lay special stress on speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing and exorcism. For the Pentecostal movement, the Pentecost experience in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1 – 4) shall be repeated in the life of all Christians. This is strongly emphasized by Ernest S. Williams, a Pentecostal systematic theologian, who declares that, “to be Pentecostal is to identify oneself with the experience that came to Christ’s followers on the day of Pentecost, that is, to be filled with the Holy Spirit on that occasion (Obaje, 1986).

The definite claim of the Pentecostal movement is for Christians to have a Spirit baptism accompanied by the speaking in tongues. In a nutshell, this movement stresses, that after conversion, there is something more for the believer, namely, baptism in the Holy Spirit in which the “totality of the Spirit is received”. The Pentecostals have added to the history of Christian spirituality their own distinctive doctrine of tongues as the initial evidence of the reception of the Holy Spirit (Obi, 2001).

The beginning of the twentieth century Pentecostal movement occurred in the United States. In 1900, the Revd. Charles F. Parham decided to set up a Bible School as a way of undertaking an intense prayerful study of the Bible. He was a Methodist minister. For him, the Pentecostal power of the New Testament was lacking in his Church and in the lives of the members. He obtained a building for his study in Topeka, Kansas. He made it open to anyone that was interested.

This ‘Pentecostal fire’ blazed from Kansas to other cities of America. The event that the Pentecostals look back as the actual origin of their movement took place in Los Angeles in 1900. A coloured Holiness preacher, William Seymour, a student of Revd Parham was the architect of this development. He received the baptism of the Holy Spirit while on preaching assignment. The Pentecostal revival began in earnest in Baptist congregation where he was a guest speaker (Okwor, 1995). William Seymour figured largely in the development of Pentecostalism. He was a descendent of African slaves who had been brought to America. He went to 312b Azusa Street, Los Angeles, where he taught salvation, baptism of the Holy Spirit. The place became “a Pentecostal Mecca” (Dollar, 1978). Every continent was touched by the revival at Azusa. God used William Seymour to send the expositions of Pentecostal revival around the world. It is no gainsaying that practically all the Pentecostal groups in existence including the ones in Nigeria can trace their lineage to the Azusa mission. Several of the outstanding leaders of Pentecostal groups of years to come owned their beginning in spiritual thing to the Azusa street meeting.

The Contemporary Nigeria Pentecostal Churches

Some of the Contemporary Nigeria Pentecostal Churches include the Foursquare Gospel Church, Deeper Life Bible Church, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Church of God Mission International Incorporated, Assemblies of God Church, Living Faith Church, Dunamis International Gospel Center, Truth and life Bible Church and others.

The Foursquare Gospel Church in Nigeria is an offshoot of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel founded by Aimee Semple Macpherson in July, 1922, Los

Angeles. Rev. H. J. Curtis and his wife got the Foursquare started in Nigeria in 1955 (Adeogun, 1999). They were the pioneering Foursquare Missionaries.

Deeper Life Bible Church is one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in Nigeria which started in 1973. The General Superintendent is Pastor William F. Kumyi. The church emphasizes Apostolic doctrine, holiness, restitution, Holy Ghost baptism and repentance.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God. It is one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in Nigeria predominantly in Yoruba land. The church was founded in 1952 by Past Joshua Akindayomi. He was a great religious leader and a front – line prophet at the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim before founding the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Prior to his death, he handed over to Pastor Enoch Adejase Adeboye who is now the General Overseer.

Assemblies of God Church is also a Pentecostal church, which came into Nigeria in 1947 through the effort of the white missionaries at Umuahia in Abia State. Church of God Mission International is a Pentecostal Church that started in the early 70s with the late Archbishop Benson A. Idahosa as the founder. It has its Headquarters in Benin – City. It is presently being headed by Archbishop Margaret Idahose.

Biblical and African wisdom are in usage in Pentecostal churches today. The operation of it helps to establish peace in the individual, church and the society at large. It comes by inspiration from God. God gives it to people to tackle any issue that comes their way. It is not gotten from intellectualism. It makes secrets to be revealed and truth established in the lives of people. Wisdom enables the congregation to live a disciplined life and grow in spiritual matters. The gift is handy in the administration of the church. There are many occasions which arise in the work of the church in its tackling of new problems, where special revelations of wisdom are needed. The gift is needed from time to time to guide in church matters as it was in the early church (Acts 6:1 – 16; 15:24 - 29).

Conclusion

Knowing full well that this work focuses on biblical and African wisdom and the Contemporary Nigeria Pentecostal Churches, it became necessary to critically expose biblical wisdom in the Old and New Testament in general. We saw to be wise is to obey the Torah. This wisdom was evident in their ordered lives and attracted God's protection for the people. This was why anyone who honoured not Yahweh was regarded as a fool because the person who honoured not Yahweh could not order his or her life well. What use was such life that had no bearing, aim, goal and purpose?

In the New Testament, Paul contrasted the wisdom of the world with the message of the cross. God has turned the wisdom of the world into foolishness, a wisdom that leaves God of account and is man – centred, which the philosophers prided. Paul asserted that God acted by means of His own wisdom and that He made Christ to become wisdom for us. He transformed wisdom from a philosophical rhetorical term to historical stereological one. Wisdom in the New Testament repeats most of the Old Testament usages supplemented by the relation, which Christ bears to the divine wisdom being an attribute of God.

Wisdom is still in operation in the contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Churches, to an extent, there is a shift of emphasis from what was obtainable in the Bible. There is therefore the need for the Contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Churches to the Bible and shun pride, jealousy and any devilish act that can lead to wrong wages.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made:

- The Contemporary Nigeria Pentecostal Churches should do a thorough study on wisdom. This will enable them to have the understanding of its operation.

- They should earnestly seek the gift, despite the age of computer and wide spread of knowledge.
- Wrong usage of it should be discouraged.
- Wisdom as an indispensable tool for man's existence should be applied by all.
- Wisdom should be operated by the body of Christ and for the benefit of the church in particular and the society at large.

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