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Abstract- This paper started with Paul's idea on the meaning of the cross. The author tries to look at the teaching of Paul on the meaning of the cross and briefly looking at the modern view of the event on the cross. He also X-ray the contribution of African culture in throwing high on the context of Africa on the matter of the cross and the understanding of African culture in atonement. In this paper the author also exposed the belief of African's on the matter regarding death as a positive and fulfillment of life. The shedding of the blood of Christ may be seen as throwing high and strengthening the community, through their ancestor. On the whole as Paul's understanding of the cross expressed in the context of his Jewish background, so the gospel must be expressed in terms of the culture of Africans.

I. Introduction

IN Christendom, race and cultural background not with standing, they still believed that the death of Christ on the cross is very significant and the most central. The generality of Christians from whatever cultural background must react to this central belief. Despite this belief, it has argued that the cross been such a radical events, all are still talking of culture not only loses its significance, but also it amounts to setting man's pride over and against the gospel. According to this line of argument, the cross underlines thee seriousness of sin which permeates human life and thought. This cannot be the last sword, however, for so long as it is only flesh and blood which will stand beneath the cross, the question of meaning and significance, in relation to human or cultural identities, arises. Indeed the fathers and founders of the church viewed that the cross has been seen fro different perspectives in accordance with prevailing circumstances.

What is important here is that there should be an genuine battle with this event on the cross. The New Testament plainly invites people to undertake this, thus, it is appropriate, in dealing here with theological experimentation that an attempt should be made to look at the cross from the African perspective. To do so, however, it is necessary first to examine the New Testament materials on the subject, and then, given the history of the church in African, to raise the question of relevance of the theological understanding of the cross which the church in Africa has inherited.

II. Paul's Idea on the Event of the Cross

Serious argument is very important with the event on the cross. The New Testament spoke extensively about it. It is the duty of the researcher to first deal with Paul's idea on the event of the cross and also deal with African cultural belief and context of the cross. It is also important to look into the New Testament materials on the matter on the cross. Therefore, come about the relation on the theological understanding of the cross which the church in Africa is also belief in. before speaking on Africa concept of theology of the cross we must firstly, examine the teaching of Paul in the New Testament materials on the cross. Paul's letter contain the greatest concentration of biblical references to the matters of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. In Paul's preaching and his analysis on the matter oc cross, he said that "for the word of the cross is filly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". For Paul, God was in the crucifixion carrying out His plans for the ultimate benefit of human race[1]. The Corinthians situation which forms the background to this declaration has been admirably described by killing.

The Corinthians, he says:

Regard the wretchedly earthly Jesus as belonging to the past and preter to invoke the exalted Lord and victory over the powers of fate. From the fact of possession of the spirit and from their 'superior' knowledge they deduced a self assured freedom which permits tem to indulge in all kinds of self- glorification, arrogance, inheritableness self-opinionatedness, violence, even drinking bouts and intercourses with sacred prostitutes….Paul refers these extravagant liberationist, resurrection, fantasts who want to anticipate heaven on earth, to the crucified.

Paul said in Philippians 'that' 'And being found in human form he humble Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. There must be a very good intention from Paul for emphasizing Christ's death on the cross[2]. He was ready to preach undiluted message on the cross simply because the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and subordination to the gentile's. it is an aberration to preach to the Jews that

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salvation must come from the cross because their belief is that longed man is an accursed by God. Paul has his reason from using the language he used in describing the importance of the cross. The language mostly used by Paul on the matter of the cross is sacrificial Language3. Paul also noted that Jesus Christ is the Passover victim. Since we cannot save ourselves s Jesus Christ dead for us on the cross so that we can serve. This cross in question is a power one, the power that help when we are powerless, things that we could not have been able to do was done through this unfailing power of the cross[4]. Through this power on the cross Christ reconciled us with God Himself. The power is a sacrificial one in which he took responsibility for evil, accepted us as we are, and accepted in Himself the consequences of evil and sin, because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross men recognize the inadequacy of their attempts to justify themselves.

Therefore, it is clear that Paul felt strongly about the Cross. He categorically states that the cross accomplished our salvation. He is not about to keep himself are a distance from the Cross simple because it excites ridicule and bewilderment in certain quarter because of its associations. To the Corinthians he states his preoccupation in words which adequately sum up this brief survey of Paul's convictions regarding the cross: For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified[5].

In view of this becomes somewhat unimaginable at first, to discover that Paul uses quite forceful language about the Resurrection also. Paul would bewildered by such views as have been expressed in our tie, that no significance should he attached to the references to the Resurrection. It is generally felt that the New Testament evidence for the Resurrection should he taken seriously, and to do so is become aware of the urgency of Paul's language which leaves no room for doubt that he considered the Resurrection to be a crucial element of faith in Christ: "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain'. From this and other passages it becomes evident that the Resurrection meant a great deal to Paul: Paul appears to he as much Resurrection-conscious as he is Cross- conscious.

Though some of the passages which refer to the Resurrection do so only in the course of Paul's dealing with matters of controversy, the references are no less significant if for no other reason than Paul considered it necessary to use the Resurrection fact in that way. Thus see have 1 Corinthians 6:14: "And God raised the Lord and will also raise up by his power'. In this section of 1 Corinthians Paul is dealing with the issue of prostitution and he makes the point that prostitution is wrong- how could one practice immorality when we are members of the Christ who has been raised? Our human personality may have been shaped by its physical existence on earth, but we are to the restores to life. Similarly[6]. Paul words in 1 Corinthians 15:14, to which we referred above, came up in connection with a controversy: apparently the view was held by some that there would not be a Resurrection of the dead. This verse occurs in 15:12 19 where Paul points out the impossible and ridiculous conclusions which logically follow from a denial that there is any resurrection of the dead. If Paul argues, the dead are incapable of being restored to life. Then Christ was not raised: after all Christ was a human being. If the dead are not raised, the Resurrection of Jesus cannot have occurred: this could negate what is already known about the life of Christ. Even if one allow that some of these passages do not set out to reduce the Resurrection to salivation primarily salvation and that the Resurrection comes in as Paul address himself to particular issues, it still is quite clear that Paul set much store by the fact of the Resurrection.

When one has allowed all that, it still is a fact that the tone of the references to the Cross and the Resurrection cannot be said to indicate that Paul sets up the Resurrection in such a way as to diminish the importance of the Cross. On the contrary, the Cross remains for Paul the great challenge. It would not do to put the Cross in the shadow of the to see in Paul's letters a distinction between the Cross and the Resurrection as the relate to the Christian's life, even if sometimes he speaks of the two in such a way as they relate to suggest that they constitute one reality. The variety of imagery Paul uses serves to underline his conviction that the Cross was the event that worked bur salvation bringing us unto a new life with Christ. The Resurrection, the event which brought living people into physical contact with Christ, becomes the visible symbols of the newness of life which the Cross accomplished for humanity. The language of the cross is such as to suggest that, for Paul, far from its being merely a 'transit station' on the way to the Resurrection, it is the foundation of the story of man's salvation. As Kung has put it the Cross puts in question a false conception of the Resurrection.

III. African Thought

In these days there are signs of death becoming commercialized in the urban centers in Africa, but to a very large extent death is celebrated in the traditional ways event in the lager towns and cities. The following are some of the significant ideas in the celebration of death.

Death is caused by evil. The African understanding of causation is of relevance here: nothing happens which will not have been purposefully caused. Death invariably receives something more than a physical explanation. To he sure, physical explanations are understood, but the African would go beyond the physical to seek a theological explanation. Thus the death of a centenarian may raise questions of the died

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at that particular time, and not earlier, or later: and a religious explanation stands ready at hand: some agency or other with evil designs might have caused the death. In the event of sickness or death there is resort to ritual specialist to try and find out the real cause of change in the person's physical state, even where such a change might have been physical caused, such as snake-bite. The spirit world not being separate from the physical world, according to the African conception, all that brings suffering and depreciation is ultimate traceable to other than physical causes. "The religious beliefs of the people are used to offer the explanation and African turn to their relationship God, fellow members of the community ancestors and spirits.

Death does not end life. The occurrence of death is not considered to- mark the cessation of life. The dead are believed to be going on a journey, one which is described in physical terms as crossing a river in a boat, and which invokes having the wherewithal to pay one's way: since he might become thirsty on the way, he would need water. Then, once on the other side, in the land of the dead, he lives a physical existence which is patterned after his earthly existence. He may become a revered ancestor, called upon as a member of the living group in various situations. Some of the death- ceremonies might appear to imply a denial of the dead being alive: thus in some widowhood ceremonies ritual activity is undertaken to sever the relationship between the widow and the dead husband. However, it is because the dead are believed to alive that it becomes necessary to perform such rites, which have as one their aims to prepare the widow for possible remarriage. To use Idowu's terminology, the dead remain the 'living dead revered and communed with .indeed it might[9] said that in African though death leads into life. The Yoruba Nigeria for example, carry out special rites on the eight day following the death: on the day known as the day of rising' one of the ceremonies performed signifies that death had gone back and life forward.

Death does not server the bond between the living (aid the dead. In most African societies there is a great concern for giving the dead proper burial so that they arrive safely in the land of the dead. Death rituals may take weeks, or months, or even years especially where there is the customer of a second burial, as among the Igbo of Nigeria. This second burial takes place some time after the initial rites, and its purpose is to ensure that every proper procedure has been followed to ensure the arrival of the dead in the other world. A s the belief goes. Ho ever and paradoxically installing the dead properly on the other side ensures that they remain members of the living as well. In other words, the rites have the effects strengthening the bond between the living and the dead especially as the latter are recognized as a source of reference for an ethnically acceptable life. Death is an occasion for seeking ignored life. Since death makes people into spirits and thus members of the spirit world, the dead are believed to be in a position to grant boons. As these messages are illustrative of the African concern for life they are concerned with health, children, and generally those things which would strengthen the effectiveness of the petitioners as contributor to the maintenance of society's equilibrium. Where reincarnation beliefs a held, prayers may be said petitioning the spirits to ensure that where the dead person returns to the existence he would more successful in life. In any case, death becomes an occasions for seeking greater life.

Death does not negate natural self- expression. Death does imply loss, but it does not end man's self-expression. Loss may have occurred, but there is on-going life, and this is symbolized in various ways. In the last century one Methodist missionary serving in Nigeria commented, in a report to his superiors in London on the woman's propensity for dancing in public. Often I have been grieved while joining with them imitating their example, perhaps the very day in which a near relation, father Brother, Sister, has been called into the eternal world. The dancing is a powerful affirmation of life, from the African point of view. One of Nottingham's observations is apt here:

Without death the eliminator, there cold be continuing life but even when this positive affirmation is obscure, in any societies the termination of the death rituals, which furnish occasion for the gathering of a group of otherwise scattered individuals in marked by discreet feasting circumspect conviviality.[10]

This affirmation of life is widespread in Africa as part of death rites: it has effect of saying very eloquently that life must go on.

Death affects the whole community. In Africa societies death affects a much wider social group than the deceased's immediate family. The ritual in connection with death serves to reaffirm the sense of solidarity of the larger group, and to place the latter's support at the disposal of the bereaved. Relatives. Friends neightbours and even those who only knew others who had known the deceased- all these could flock around taking part in wakes, visiting the bereaved and at the appropriate moment making donations to them. Throughout the period of the rites there will be a concourse of people coming and going. There is identification with the family of the deceased. Quite often the number of people present at a funeral is not in direct proportion to the social importance of the deceased when he was alive. Death whether of the high or the low, brings about a great deal of community interaction. In the light of this understanding of death in Africa, and also considering the New Testament understanding of tile significance of Christ's death, how would the Church in Africa see the Cross if it felt free, as it should, the re-examine the received theology from the West? It is evident, to begin with, that it would not speak in muted

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tones but in glorious affirmation of the Cross as that which is the basis of the Christian hope. The South African theologian, Gabriel Setiloane, has anticipated this in his 'Liturgical statement' entitled I am an African in which he writes:

"And yet for us when He was on the cross
This Jesus of Naszareth, with holed hands and
Open side, like a beast at a sacrifice:
When he is stripped naked like us
Browned and sweating water and blood in the heat of the sun,
Yet silent
That we cannot resist Him"[11].

The context of this statement is of course, south Africa where Africans suffer humiliation and die both in their homes and in prison, but it is a picture that could be viewed against the background of many an African country outside South Africa. The Cross demonstrates human degradation and evil, but it is also demonstrates triumph However, a more detailed answer is need to the question of why African cannot resist the Christ on the Cross. Instead of going through the six characteristic ideas arising from the celebration of death in Africa. We shall note three ways in which African life and thought could be recalled to great advantage having in mind teaching of the New Testament on the significance of the Cross[12].

1. The African believes that death binds up relationships in society, revitalizing the living and underscoring their sense of community.

Paul's language about Cross clearly adumbrates this kind of understanding. He writes:

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the bread. Consider the people of Israel are not those who eat the sacrifices partakers in the altar"[13] what Paul is saying here is that eating and drinking at the Lord's Table if sharing in the death of Christ and also sharing in life one with the other. The reference to Israelite sacrifice here is instructive. It is evident in I Corinthians 10.18 that Paul had in mind the peace-offering, the most significant characteristic of which was the communal meal which took place as part of its ritual: the worshipper would invite kinsmen to a mea. Made from the flesh of the victim. This sacred meal had the dual effect of uniting with God those who participated in the eating and strengthening the bond binding them together as a community. It is evident that the kind of language Paul is using here relates his ideas very closely to African experience and the goal of life.

It has just been pointed out that one of the implications of the communal meal in Israelite sacrifice (as in sacrifice in African traditional religion) was that the worshipper and kinsmen had fellowship with God. Now the Cross is the supreme sacrifice in which Christ is both the initiator and the victim, so that in a singular sense by His death on the Cross Christ is linked to us. One very important piece of Old Testament legislation on sacrifice may be recalled: the victim for sacrifice was to be without blemish. Christ was the perfects victim; by his death he merits, to use an African image, to be looked upon as Ancestor, the greatest of ancestors. Who never ceases to be one of the 'living dead' because there always will be people alive who knew Him. Whose live were irreversibly affected by His life and work. He becomes the one with whom the African Christian lives intimately (as well as with the other living dead), on whom he calls and to whom he offers prayer. The physical cross like the staffs and stools looked upon as material representations symbolizing the presence of the ancestors, becomes the symbol of Christ's being the ever-living[14].

IV. Conclusion

Paul's position is not without its dangers must be acknowledged: thus, because of his attachment to his background, Paul seems to have an uncertain attitude to other peoples traditions, when his attitude to his own traditions would have meant for him the corollary of his having respect for others attachment to their own traditions.

This however, is not to question the wisdom of his relying on his Jewish traditions as a way of reaching to what God in Christ has done for him.

In adopting a critical attitude to certain Western formulations of the significance of the death of Christ, it is not being suggested that the Church, that is, to interpret the Scriptures to suit its circumstances. What has been pointed out here, among other things, is that while certain Western formulations of the significance of the Cross may correctly reflect Western social circumstances, they may not be in full accord with biblical teaching. Hern is a danger which must not be taken lightly in expressing the gospel in a given cultural situation.

Thus it can hardly be argued that the cross readers of no account all cultural assertion. Indeed, as we have observed elsewhere, the radical nature of the Cross serves to underline the extent to which God would go to identify himself with mankind in the totality of human circumstances.

Notes

1. 1 Corinthians 1:18.
2. Philippians 2:8.
3. A.J. Blasi, Moral (1968), Conflict and Christian Religion, New York. Peter Lenwzer, Published Company P. 158.
4. A.J. Blasi, Moral Conflict and Christian Religion P. 159.

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5. G.M. Jantzen, (1988), Mystic and Theology of the Cross, New York, Paul Stant Press. P.28.
6. J. Parratt, A (1987), Reader in African Christian Theology, London. Latimen trend and company Ltd p. 85.
7. S. Luncarh, (1977), Jesus and the unlimited power of resurrection, Accra. Aulox Publishing Company, P. 160
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9. E. Bolaji Idowu (1973), African traditional Religion A definition, London. SCM Press Ltd) p. 135.
10. Gracutz Juhavah, (1977] Death and Affirmation of the Cross, Indian. Indana Press P. 172.
11. G. Setiloame, (1972), Liturgy of African Culture in Worship, Luthausa. Lesotho Press, P. 22
12. J. Parrat, [1987] A reader in African Christian Theology. P. 95.
13. I Corinthians 10:16-18.
14. G.M. Jantzen, (1987), Mystic and Theology of the Cross, New York. Paul Stant Press. P. 289.

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