

‘Why Listen to the Africans?’: Biblical and Scientific Arguments for an African Cosmological and Epistemological Advantage

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ABSTRACT

While African theologians have much to offer the global church, their voices often seem to go unheard. This article seeks to provide yet another reason why the West should listen, and why African theologians should engage more often with issues of relevance to the Western church. Western cosmology and epistemology, bases for any Western theological enterprise, are dualist. Such thought forms are not native to the Bible, the incarnation or, more particularly for this article, even to modern Western science. In contrast, African cosmology and epistemology are generally ‘holist’ or ‘unitary’, having many resonances with the biblical view. With such a holist background, African theologians have yet another advantage in offering the global church fresh and significant theological insights.

Introduction

Having made the (now common) observation that the centre of the Christian world is moving from West to South, Timothy Tennant urges his fellow Western Christians to allow their African colleagues “to teach us and help us to bring renewal and revitalization back to the Western church.”¹ To what extent, we may ask, have Western Christians taken heed of this plea? In Tennant’s view, the insights of African theologians are “largely ignored by Western theologians.”² A more recent paper entitled, “Learning from African Theologians and their Hermeneutics,” concludes by asking, “What can we as Western theologians learn from African theology?”³ To paraphrase the answer: other than one important insight on method (noted below), not much. However, Western theologians cannot be held entirely responsible. Much of the reflection occurring within African theology is concerned with a desire to “Africanise” Christianity, developing an

1 Timothy Tennant, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 106; see also Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002), 47.

2 Tennant, *Theology*, 112.

3 Hans Georg Wüch, ‘Learning from African Theologians and Their Hermeneutics: Some Reflections from a German Evangelical Theologian’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 8.