

## Foreword

I FIRST MET DR. Matthew Michael at the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) in 2006 as a doctoral student. I was amazed at his brilliance as a young scholar whom I immediately considered to be my colleague rather than as my student. Dr. Michael is well endowed and gifted theologically and has the potentials of soon becoming a foremost and a distinguished evangelical theologian in Africa. As I read his new book, *Christian Theology and African Traditions*, I observed that Dr. Michael is seeking to “reveal the defining nature of African Christianity and the attending importance of its theological thinking.” Furthermore, he is seeking “to understand Christian theology particularly in the context of the African worldviews and religious traditions since these categories gave African Christianity its unique regional stamp.” Based upon the foregoing, Dr. Michael is emphasizing “the onus of Christian theology to engage as well as interact with the formidable cultural determinants that appear to make Christian theology at home with the African people.”

This book is his emerging and maturing theological reflections on a crucial subject, *the interactions, the engagement, and the dialogue between Christian Theology and African Traditions*. The primary goal of his theological project is the transformation of the African mind and its worldviews and traditions. Christian theology must engage, or be in dialogue with the African traditions as a prerequisite to transforming Africa. The major flaw of Western Missionary Christianization of Africa was its serious failure to engage or dialogue with the African traditions. The book in its entirety is a systematic examination of how Christianization, engagement, or dialogue can take place within Africa. In his methodology, Dr. Michael took the familiar classical Christian doctrines by re-interpreting their Western Christian experience and doctrinal interpretations in the light of the Holy Scripture for modern African understanding. With this new understanding and approach to Christian theology as drawn from the

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Western Christian experience and its interpretations, and also from the Holy Scripture, Dr. Michael uses that as a means of engaging or dialoguing with the African traditions. His interpretations and explanations of the important Western classical Christian doctrines in the light of the Holy Scripture become the means by which he engages or dialogues with similar African traditions. The whole theological schema uses both the Christian evangelical presuppositions and the Holy Scripture as the foundations of engaging the Western classical Christian doctrines and their interpretations, on the one hand, and the African traditions, on the other. With this theological methodology, Dr. Michael brings freshness, innovation and creativity to the current theological discourse in Africa. His method proposes that we go beyond the Western classical Christian experience and interpretations of Christian dogma as found in the likes of Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, the Western missionary Christianization of Africa, and the pioneering African theologians in the likes of John S. Mbiti or E. Bolaji Idowu. The religious and cultural dimensions of Africa's traditions affect all aspects of African life, Christian presence and witness in Africa. A meaningful and effective Christianity cannot flourish well within the African context without a serious theological and practical engagement with the African traditions.

No doubt this new book by Dr. Michael is a concrete response to the growing need for a serious Christian engagement with the African traditions which had been neglected by the missionary Christianity. Prof. Paul Bowers posed a very serious challenge to African theologians in this regard in his series of Lectures at the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS), 2008, "Christian Intellectual Responsibilities in Modern Africa." In these lectures, Prof. Bowers posed the challenge of engaging the African mind as the most needed theological task for modern Africa. In a similar vein, Prof. Yusufu Turaki has developed a 2 volume Manuscript on "A Systematic Examination of the Interactions between Christianity and African Traditional Religion" (2008). It proposes an "appropriate way for African Christianity to understand and address Africa's traditional religious heritage." In methodology, Dr. Michael took after that of Professor Samuel W. Kunhiyop's in his book, *African Christian Ethics* (2009). In this book, Prof. Kunhiyop re-interpreted Western traditions of morality and ethics in the light of the Holy Scripture and then used that understanding to engage the African moral and ethical traditions. Certainly, Dr. Michael's *Christian Theology and African Traditions* is within the sphere of these new approaches to the study of Christianity in Africa. This new

book will definitely arouse great interest in Christian Systematic Theology and Christian Studies which needs to be studied side by side with African Traditions.

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