

Preface

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY COULD BE readily defined as “theology that has Christian presuppositions.” To put this definition simply, one could also say that “Christian theology consists of Christian teachings about God or other concerns related to this central subject.” In this understanding, Christian theology has its source in the Bible and thus the Bible becomes the “textbook” of “Christian theology” since it is the “only” authoritative document accepted by Christians for faith and practice. Despite the use of “only” in the preceding definition to describe the Bible as the source of Christian theology, in the course of its history various external categories such as scientific traditions, philosophical traditions, ecclesiastical traditions, and Western academic traditions played a defining role in our conception and description of the nature, task, and goal of Christian theology. These traditions often provided the worldview or mental lenses from which the study of the Bible had taken place. Consequently, Christian theology is not naively the study of the Bible “only” or alone but the interactions and engagement of the Bible with these human traditions. To this end, the present work is also the study of the Bible in close dialogue with African traditions. In this sense, Christian theology is primarily tailored to speak or engage the different traditions that have now become synonymous with the African people. In fact, for Christian theology to remain relevant to a given people, such dialogue or interaction becomes inevitable because as a human enterprise it must by its nature engage the human context of its reflection in order to remain relevant. In this perspective, Christian theology cannot afford to isolate itself from daily human existential challenges. Any theology that ignores the human context and its myriad problems has isolated God from the human context, and thus it is a theology only fit for “angels” and not human beings. Consequently, theology of necessity must be theocentric as well as anthropocentric. In its anthropocentric dimension, it must seek to engage the different facets

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of human life. In Africa, Christian theology must engage the worldviews of the African people especially in terms of the beliefs, values and traditional orientations of the African people. On the theocentric dimension, Christian theology must also seek to be faithful to the Scriptures in its postulations, and not be merely an echo of contemporary ideological ramblings. In this particular understanding, first and foremost, Christian theology must seek to understand the defining issues on the pages of the Bible and the attending conflicts and tensions in the practice and description of these issues. Secondly, it must also relate these theological issues to contemporary life, hence it must never remain as a mere theological reflection on the pages of the Bible, but it must be able to transport itself to contemporary life. Unfortunately Christian theology becomes “incompetent” or “ill-equipped” to carry out such a contemporary function within the African context because in the history of its transmission it has been fashioned and shaped to address the needs and aspirations of the Western church and the imposing heritage of the enlightenment period. The African context must “reprocess” or reconstruct “Christian theology” in order to engage African questions which often are ignored by “standard” works on Christian theology.

From these highlighted concerns, this book discusses “standard” topics in “Christian theology” in light of African similar or dissimilar forms. It begins by underscoring the place of Christian theology on the African continent, the nature of African traditions, and Christian faith. Similarly, it discusses the place of the written word in the African context, particularly in the oral inclination of African society. In addition, it stresses the nature of divine revelation in Christian theology. This preliminary reflection on divine revelation entails the discussion on what I termed “kindergarten issues” in theology, which pertains to the definition, problem, and limitation of theology. It also discusses general and special revelation, the limitations of general, special revelation, the “Scandal of Particularity,” the problem of religious experiences in the mediation of divine revelation, the consistency of the Judeo-Christian revelation, divine ontology, divine attributes in the context of suffering and theological issues surrounding divine revelation and eschatology. It also highlights biblical teachings on angels, the human person, Christ, the church, and the future life. As much as possible, these theological-biblical categories are highlighted in view of the biblical revelation, but also in sensitivity to the religious, social-cultural, and political concerns of the African context. Significantly, it is anticipated that this theological work will be a contribution to the ongoing quest for an African systematic Christian theology.