THE BIBLE AND AFRICAN CULTURE AS

SOURCES IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

BY

PAUL HARRY MOYO

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PRETORIA

ABSTRACT

The problem of relating African Christian culture to the message of the Bible has troubled theologians who reflect on African Christianity for a long time. Today, Africa is at a crossroad. It is torn between following what African culture says, on the one hand, and what the Bible says, on the other hand. The strong influence of Western culture (the channel through which Africa received the gospel) adds to this crisis. A solution to the crisis, which African Christians are facing when making moral decisions, can only be found in taking both the Bible as the Supreme Court of appeal and the African cultural values seriously. Forcing African Christians to choose between the Bible and African culture will just lead to more crises. To address this crisis, this study sets out with an introduction that defines the problem, plan, method of dealing with the problem, a review of related literature, the scope and the importance of the study.

Chapter two looks at the relationship between Scripture and non-biblical sources in Western Protestant theology. The study finds that although the mainline Protestant theologians spoke about *sola Scriptura,* they did not mean by this slogan that Scripture should be the only source material for theology. They rather wanted to acknowledge the fact that Scripture should be the most important source material for moral decision making. In other words, they did not understand the *sola Scriptura* battle cry in an absolute and exclusivistic way. They allowed other sources to play a role. This slogan was, however, interpreted in an exclusivistic way by the leaders of the Radical Reformation. Some of the missionaries who brought the Word of God to Africa also tended to interpret and apply the *sola Scriptura* slogan in an absolute and exclusivistic way.

The third chapter looks at the Bible and African culture as sources in African Christian ethical decision making. The study finds that the African theologians reacted against the exclusivistic tendencies of the missionaries in a number of ways. Some, who were on the radical side, put African culture above Scripture. The majority of the African theologians, on the other hand, while accepting the primacy of Scriptures as an important source, stressed the fact that African culture should be taken as important source material for moral decision making in Africa. The problems of polygamy and AIDS are discussed in this chapter to show the crises that arise when African culture is not taken seriously.

In the fourth chapter the study looks at the use of African culture in Christian ethical decision making. It argues that there are a number of salient elements of African culture, which should be taken into account when making moral decisions in African Christian ethics. We conclude that any neglect of the African cultural input will lead to less authentic moral decisions.

The last chapter summarises and concludes what has been discussed, explicates the findings of the study and gives guidelines on what should be the way forward for African Christian ethical decision making. It concludes that ethical decision making in an African context can only be authentic if, among other things, African cultural values are taken seriously. Factors like reason, natural law, context and tradition or culture, should be allowed to play a role in African Christian ethical decision making. We need to use the whole of God's reality when making moral decisions. The study ends by identifying certain unresolved issues, which may need further study.

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