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Resolving Eschatological Anxiety among Christians in the 21st Century: A Dynamic Balance Envisaged!

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Abstract:

Eschatological debate among Christians in the 21st Century, based on doctrinal teachings as a way of salvation have caused rifts between believers. This calls for an urgent need to bridge the rift through hermeneutical approaches to those who subscribe to Calvin teachings and them who are inclined to Moulmann doctrines. This paper was guided by both the research objective and question. Objective was to explore anxiety caused by the apparently contradicting perspectives; to present the various perspectives as taught by John Calvin and Jürgen Moltmann as a problem to the diversified doctrinal understanding and to provide a dynamic balance between the two major perspectives for a harmonious understanding. The paper answered question that; what was the anxiety caused by contradictory doctrinal perspectives? The research found out that Moltmann's theology of universal salvation was the position in which the nature of eschatology was built on. This being the process at which he referred to as the onset, the kingdom of God was setting in and the point at which the eternal life begins. Based on such argument, preaching the gospel of universal salvation could easily be criticized for encouraging antinomianism and don not care the common denominator as a sure believe in the way of salvation. This way would help embrace double predestination towards antinomianism. Therefore, there was a need to hold them at tension by using the principle of dynamic balance in which eventual redemption is grounded in the work of Christ at the Cross. In the dynamic balance, Christ the creator of the universe is the savior of the same universe. In eternity, those who will respond to the gospel are called the elect and those who will reject are called reprobates. The finding of this research came up with the following recommendations to mitigate the state of anxiety and possible antinomianism among the Christians in the 21st century; a common ground that all scriptures are inspired and true, with understanding that all doctrines that seem to contradict one another causing tension to Christians can be subjected to a principle of dynamic balance. This study treats the dynamic balance as a principle in resolving eschatological anxiety among Christians in the 21st century. Again, to prevent hermeneutical suicidal, there should be a way of striking a balance when doctrinal debates emerges in theological studies which is the aim of this research work.

Keywords: Eschatology, dynamic, balance salvation, hermeneutic

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Eschatological debate among Christians in the 21st Century, based on doctrinal teachings as a way of salvation have caused rifts between believers. This calls for an urgent need to bridge the rift through hermeneutical approaches to those who subscribe to Calvin teachings and them who are inclined to Moulmann doctrines. Depicting from the scriptures and theological perspectives about the end of things (Eschatology). It has come to the theologians and believers that there are scriptures in the Bible that talks of various aspects and three possible fates of the sinner and the universe. First, is that sinners and the material world will be annihilated by fire in Hell. Second, that the sinners will eventually be forgiven and the entire world will be recreated into new heavens and new earth (universalism) and the third version is that sinners will be tormented forever in hell fire (particularism). These three perspectives have Biblical bases and are stressed in equal measure by different Church traditions.

The various interpretations of scriptures on end times, causing anxiety and confusion among Christians formed the basis for this study. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that the study examined various theological scholars who have been confronted with similar questions and have given varied perspectives depending on the type of hermeneutics they have employed in reading scriptures that speak of the fate of the sinner, such scholars are Jurgen Moltman and John Calvin. Based on this study, Jürgen Moltmann who represents the Universality views and John Calvin who represents Particularistic views Jürgen were used (2012:56).

The searcher was motivated to choose both Moltmann and Calvin because of their differing perspectives. Calvin, on one hand, has influenced the Church and theologians for centuries. Moltmann on the other hand, is quite contemporary to the 20th century and likely to influence 21st –Postmodern Christians.

This research presents the base for the Calvin's soterio logical particularity and Moltmann's eschatological universalism, bringing on board the empirical showcases demonstrating the arguments of both Calvin and Moltmann in relation to contemporary theological hermeneutics and reflections. Controversies experienced in the value given to each doctrine leaves contemporary Christians in a dilemma and extreme anxiety that should be addressed with an understanding that all polemics attached to each doctrine have a biblical scriptural support believed to be inspired. Due to the underlying rifts that have emerged in Christian circles concerning eschatology, there is a great need for something to be done to prevent the explosion of the same in the contemporary Christian society.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to establish a dynamic balanced in theology that is accommodative to the scriptures and that offers pastoral solace to the anxious faithful Christians through hermeneutical approach.

1.3. Research Questions

The study answered the following question: What was the anxiety caused by contradictory doctrinal perspectives?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Empirical Review

2.1.1. Particular Salvation in the Eschatology

The particular salvation in John Calvin's eschatology which is rooted in his doctrine of double predestination (Calvin, 1998:123).

In the doctrine of particular salvation, Calvin teaches that from eternity God purposed to create some human beings who would eventually be sent to hell and others to salvation (Lang, 2008:87). This doctrine thus advocates for particularism. For us to address Calvin's eschatology effectively, we shall discuss his doctrine of salvation via election. Calvin's five pillars (Total Unconditional Limited Irresistible Perseverance) abbreviated as TULIP are viewed as an exclusive approach to a creation that God put in place.

In the theology of Calvin, God is infinitely distinct, Eternal Creator and his goodness, wisdom, and power are abundant to the creatures. Triune is the agent of creation and the act of creation is 'from nothing' as well as in and with time. This is a resolute beginning, forming creaturely goodness and order for the Creator's glory and fatherly care portrayed in Creation. Calvin's understanding of humanity is that it is created in the image of God and his likeness. That is in an act of divine love, humans are made in God's image. This means that humans were endowed with integrity of nature, 'soundness in all parts', right understanding, bounded affection, tempered sense for which they directed praise to God. It means that human beings, unique among all God's creatures, participate in the powers of God; wisdom, justice and goodness and so reflect God's glory (Insti 1.15).

Calvin taught that God's will is to be our resting place. He cautions those trying to go beyond the limit of their understanding. When men hear of election, they immediately want to ask, "Why would God choose some, and not others?" To this Calvin replied: "When they inquire into predestination, let them remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter in (an) inextricable labyrinth.

The Fall and Theology of Inherited Sin in the Theology of Calvin

In Genesis 3:7 Calvin's comment on stresses the noetic effects of the fall through the sense of evil as a result of Adam and Eve eating the fruit which opened their eyes. The act therefore is not fleshly, but the destruction done to the will and mind of the person that are the major effects of the fall. (Comm. Genesis 158-159),

2.1.2. Calvin on Sin and Atonement

According to Calvin, by willful perversity and sin, humanity corrupted the image of God in which they had been created; through which they would come to the knowledge of God their creator. (Zachman, 1996: 64-68). However, in Christ, humanity beheld the image of God made visible so that it can make reliable judgments about what it is even as we are transformed by it and conformed to it (Ephesians. 4:23-24, 2nd Corinthians 3:28 and Colossian. 3:10).

Calvin's approach to the doctrine of sin and atonement is ontological. This approach is seen in his centrally organized work as he tries to establish and maintain God's glory. For Calvin showing this vision of the glory of God, he uses humanity as a foil. The faculties of human beings and works are all corrupted, therefore, inadequate for salvation (Miles, 1981:304). God's knowledge and that of the self is thus of utmost importance in achieving the consciousness of God's glory. It is from this evidence that we built a drive for the teaching of Calvin on total depravity. Pitkin (1999:349) alludes that Calvin moves the focus of the total depravity debate to his own paramount concern: God's knowledge and self.

The saving work of Christ according to Calvin is in accordance to his three offices that is, prophet, priest and king (Inst. 2.15.1). Being the seer, He was anointed by the Spirit to be the bearer and witness of the Father's grace . . . the anointing He was given was not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for the entire body that the Spirit's power might be present in the continuing proclamation of the Gospel (Inst. 2.15. 2). Being the ruler, he will be the eternal

defender and protector of his Church, (Inst. 2.15.3). Being the priest, penitence must mediate in order that Jesus as a priest may acquire the favour of God for us and appease his wrath. Consequently, the sacrifice had to be brought forward in order for Christ to perform this office (Inst. 2.15.6). We were reconciled to God through Christ.

Calvin poses a serious concern to a person, that what if a person learns, that he was separated from God through sin, he is a beneficiary of wrath, subject to eternal curse of death, disqualified from all hope of redemption, outside every blessing of God, living under the bondage of transgression, predestined for a horrible destruction and already involved in it; it is in this state Christ came in as the advocate for the man, He took upon himself and bore the punishment that, from Lord's righteous judgment, threatened every sinner; that he eradicated with his blood all the evils which had rendered the sinners detestable to God; that by his penitence he made contentment and sacrifice duly to God the Father; him being an intercessor he has appeased the wrath of God; therefore on this basis rests the peace of God with human beings; that by this bond his magnanimity is upheld toward them. Will the person not then be even more stimulated by all these things which so vividly describe the magnitude of the catastrophe from which he has been saved? (Inst. 2.16.2).

Therefore, Calvin's doctrine of salvation as rooted in his understanding of creation, responding to objective two on the apparent contradicting perspectives; that before the foundations of the earth, God by divine providence elected some to eternal salvation and others to eternal damnation without privilege and therefore damned. We notice apparent contradictions especially in his doctrine of election when it stands in opposition to explicit Biblical teachings that exhort humanity to believe in Christ in whom election is supposed to have taken place. From the argument of the gospel offering salvation to all, his stand on the election does not hold the link with predestination thus a contradiction.

2.1.3 Universal Salvation and Eschatological Understanding

The varying views on the universal salvation and eschatological understanding as put forward by Calvin and Moltmann that in one way or the other have proved to be a problem in the Christian understanding.

2.2. Moltmann Argument

He has argued that every Christian believer is confronted with questions regarding the nature of God and how He will deal with their sinful nature or precisely how He will deal with sinners. In the previous chapter, Calvin's perspective was analysed and observed that according to Calvin the sinners were eternally predestined to damnation and have no option but to accept that portion of creation. However, it was also noted that Calvin did not give certain biblical teachings their due position in his exegesis. This is what has led the study to consider another perspective on God's dealings with His creation appears to be opposed to Calvin's stand with hope of finding solutions where he failed to offer us one.

2.3. The Future of Creation as Considered by Moltmann

2.4.1. Based on Love of God and Redemption

God as the creator does not leave the fallen man but derives a way to bring him back to his initial glory. This is realized in the process of redemption which has a universal approach for instance in Ephesians 1:7 "we have redemption in the Lord" carrying a picture of all regardless of who they are or what they do. This chapter has dealt with the varying views of the identified authors (Moltmann and Calvin).

Moltmann, just like Calvin, roots his discussion of eschatology and the fate of the entire creation in the purpose of creation and unlike Calvin; he introduces the character of God. He zeros in on the faithfulness and love of God. He opines that the heavenly love is for the entire creation and therefore, the Lord's future is for all things. For him, the divine affection is for the entire creation. Therefore, the Lord's future is for all things. The Trinity's realm embraces all, not just metaphorically speaking: 'the correlative relations of the Trinity are wide open such that the entire world can find an expanse, and vindication, and its own glorification.' Embrace covers everything, not just metaphorically speaking: 'the mutual relationships of the Trinity are so wide open that in them the entire universe can find a wide space, and redemption, and its own glorification'. The Lord 'presses towards' congregation of all things in order for love to find its fulfilment, eventually to take the entire creation far from the reach of transgression and death. God's motive therefore, includes each of His creation since He is devoted to all that the Divine has created (Moltmann, 1991:57).

Since the creator of all creation is still the one who redeems it, Moltmann is of the view that the two occurrences definitely have the same breath: 'the Reconciler is definitely the Creator, and consequently, the eschatological prospect of reunion should mean the reunion of the entire creation, and should unfold eschatology of all things. For purpose of this reason, therefore, the 'resolution to create then means a resolution to save' (Moltmann, 1968:370).

According to Moltmann, then, the intent and readiness to take up the entire undertaking that would finalize creation was already there. He adds that the manner in which the Lord remains steadfast to the creation is 'righteousness.' As the Almighty is virtuous, hope is ubiquitous and all things are entitled to life. Consequently, God would 'impugn himself' if He didn't carry the entire creation to the ending (Moltmann, 1968:377).

Moltmann tells of an eschatology that not only involves the future of creation, in a new existence, but he also anticipates a new future where the Creator and creation together find something new; a 'closer fellowship' (Moltmann, 1999:80). This 'commiseration of all things' to which he alludes to is not basically for creation but rather encompasses God, and undeniably centers on Lord. The interconnection between creation and Trinity is that: 'Lord comes to his glory and through that, creation gets to its consummation. Creation gets to its consummation in that, Lord comes to his glorification' (Moltmann, 1999:82).

Moltmann is of the view that the openness of God is one of the foundations of redemption for creation. In reflection the Trinity's eternal perichoretic relations, he expresses redemption's dependence on the openness of the Trinity 'for the reception and integration of the entire creation' (Moltmann, 1976:121). This openness implies that 'the entire universe can find salvation, a wide space as well as its own glorification' (Moltmann, 1976:124). In conclusion, Moltmann doctrine is influenced by the nature of God and more specifically His loving attribute. God who is the creator cannot destroy that which He created and said it is good. Since He is all in all at the end times the entire creation and everything in it will be saved. God will dwell in the world and the world will dwell in Him.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a research design geared in arriving at a neutral ground. This methodology of the study was coined by the researcher and is referred to a 'dynamic balance'. The research was aimed at a common or harmonized ground to amalgamating the Moltmann and Calvin's views on the universalism and particularity. Thus, this study argues that both the texts that advocate for particularism and those that argue for universal salvation should not each be understood in isolation as crude and vague but both should be seen as true.

In order to have a clear understanding on the views raised by both Calvin and Moltmann, the research was founded on texts that have been used to arrive at variant traditions and endeavors to develop a balance theology. To achieve this task, this part of the chapter discussed various theoretical concepts on the dynamic balance and goes ahead to apply it in finding a balanced theology that is true to the scriptures and Church traditions and that is also rational.

3.1. Dynamic Balance

This research uses Dynamic Balance as theological hermeneutics to rationalize between two seemingly opposed doctrines that result from various hermeneutics. Dynamic Balance is an engineering principle which explains the ability of an object to balance while in motion or switching between positions. It is concerned with the effects of forces on the motion of a body.

In our application of this principle, we are arguing that theological hermeneutics have developed over a period of time as the scripture move from one region to another and as it encounters various worldviews. We have in the past had Biblical criticism as approved hermeneutics and today hermeneutics that have developed in Africa after colonialisms demand that we now read scriptures with post-colonial lenses. This therefore, by necessity demands that we find a dynamic balance between opposed doctrines that are likely to come up as a result of these new movements; this is what this methodology considers to be motion of ideas that are switching between places and time.

3.2. Justification of Dynamic Balance

If we hold that all biblical scripture is inspired and suitable for teaching, it is logical to argue that it is wrong to dismiss some texts of the Scripture whenever they seem to depart from what we already hold to as truth. For example, in this dissertation, we notice that there are those who hold onto texts that teach either explicitly or implicitly particular salvation while others emphasize those texts that teach universal salvation at the expense of those that gainsay it. The Dynamic Balance argues that we could hold in tension such texts and find a way of understanding apparent contradictory texts.

3.3. A Dynamic Balance between Universalism and Particularism

There are positive elements in Calvin and Moltmann's doctrine of eschatology; there are weaknesses too. In the dynamic balance it shall show how Calvin's fallacies could be filled up by Moltmann's strengths and vice versa. I.e. dynamic balance is realized when the strengths are juxtaposed against the weakness. The study began with highlighting the inconsistencies in Calvin's particular salvation (Gutessen, 2008:78).

In conclusion to resolve theological debate based on a dynamic balance will be of vital.

4. Discussion of Findings

Derived from Chapter three of the study, the dynamic balance was found to be a sure principle in resolving and calming eschatological the anxiety among Christians. This being a key principle under the theological hermeneutics to rationalize between two seemingly opposed doctrines that result from various doctrinal teachings will be a benchmark in theological studies. Dynamic Balance is an engineering principle which explains the ability of an object to balance while in motion or switching between positions. It is concerned with the effects of forces on the motion of a body.

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salvation while others emphasize those texts that teach universal salvation at the expense of those that gainsay it. The Dynamic Balance argues that we could hold in tension such texts and find a way of understanding apparent contradictory texts.

One would argue that such methodology then should be a theological method and not a mechanical method. This dissertation argues that other theologians have borrowed and employed philosophical principle or engineering principles in their theologizing. For example, Jesse MNK Mugambi developed a theology of Reconstruction using an engineering principle. Kiboi in his book *Assurance of Salvation: A Cumulative Case Argument* employs a philosophical principle used by lawyers in reconciling disparities in Objective-Subjective views of assurance.

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4.2.1. Inconsistencies in Calvin's Particular Salvation

Kiboi in his article "Inter-Religious Conflicts in 21st Century: Dialectical-Scepticism as a Panacea" (Kiboi, 2017) argues that dubious hermeneutics leads to dubious doctrines. He goes further to illustrate this point in which he notes that Calvin using his literal hermeneutics was skewed on the doctrine of election. Whereas Calvin understanding election to mean eternal election of a few favored persons for salvation, Kiboi argues that election is for specific duty. To illustrate this, he quotes Isaiah 45:13 in which God elects king Cyrus of Persia over five hundred years earlier simply to save His people although not for any personal reward. It says, "I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness, I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free but not for price or reward..." From this perspective, he argues that in the same manner, if Calvin was not skewed in his doctrine of election, he should have understood election to mean election to duty.

In his book *Assurance of Salvation: A Cumulative Case Argument*, Kiboi criticizes Calvin for teaching an election in which Jesus Christ is not involved (Kiboi, 2018:83). Kiboi's criticism is based on the fact that Calvin in his exegesis of John 3:16 (...that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life) he teaches that the condition thereof is for the elect and does not include the faith by the reprobates. He also excludes reprobates from meaningful participation in the effects sacraments of commanded by the Lord (cf. Mark 16:16 whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned). This text is clearly a conditional text that includes everyone as long as they believe. Likewise, regarding the efficacy of the Eucharist, Calvin teaches that reprobates cannot partake the body and blood of the Son of God since it wasn't meant for them. In this manner Calvin taught that the death of Christ was only meant for the elect and not reprobates.

Calvin roots the origin of the fall in the ontological eternal background. In this way, human participation is excluded. Even though human participation is excluded in the predestinating of the fate of some of the humankind, they are held responsible for the fall. This is a hermeneutical problem that needs to be liberated. Alongside this perspective, Calvin taught that "both the elect and the reprobate receive God's gifts of reconciliation and illumination of the mind, but of a different quality. For the reprobate it is a confused one and for the elect clear illumination is granted for salvation." (Kiboi, 2018:73). If it was true that such a thing happens, this would defeat the whole essence of God granting such graces. This dynamic balance gives us a new understanding of election and reprobation and a new perspective of the nature of the end.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

In conclusion the study found that according to Calvin, God in His sovereignty purposed to create two types of humanity; one that was predestined to salvation and another to eternal damnation. Calvin in his doctrine of creation anticipates eschatology in which the reprobates are damned and the elect are saved.

It was also observed that according to Calvin, humanity do not have a role in the salvation; their good works do not alter God's eternal purpose and decree. Secondly, in God's elective activity, sadly Jesus' work at the Cross does not alter destiny of the reprobates. They will still go to hell even if they heard the gospel and worked hard for salvation, for they do not possess ability to respond to it positively but negatively.

According to Calvin, the gospel to the reprobates serves as a justification for their punishment in hell while unto the elect it serves as a joy to salvation. The elect is saved to demonstrate God's love to them who are saved; the reprobates are damned in hell to also serve as a demonstration of God's love unto the elect still. This position poses a challenge to the purpose of proclamation of the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28) Great Commission. Why would the followers of Christ be commanded to go all over the world to proclaim the gospel and baptizing those who respond to it when some of them are eternally predestined to damnation? What is the purpose of Christ's death on the Cross if already in God's eternal decree the elect shall be saved anyway and anyhow?

On the other hand, the study found out that there was an opposite view to that of Calvin –Moltmann's eschatology. In Moltmann's universal salvation it was noticed that he taught that all creation shall be reconciled back into their Creator. In this doctrine of universal salvation Moltmann argued according to Scriptures God in Jesus Christ was reconciling the

entire universe back to Himself. He also argued, what was the purpose of Christ's death if not for salvation of all humankind?

However, his universal salvation as observed too undermined the purpose of the proclamation of the gospel. What was the need of proclaiming the gospel to the entire world, if all shall eventually be reconciled back to God? Nonetheless, it should be noted that Moltmann's teaching is in line with scripture that teaches that until all humanity shall bow to Christ and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord the end of the world shall not come. If this is held as true, then the work of Christ at the Cross is effectual to all humankind. This perspective rules out Calvin's doctrine of election and reprobation. Moltmann roots his doctrine of universal salvation in the doctrine of creation. At creation God does not destine some to election or reprobation but creates all humanity equally but upon the fall He, in time, sends a savior to reconcile all back to Himself. Since it is God will and wish that all are saved and find space in Him as their creator, He will work until all knees and all tongues confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is need to either hold them as progressive revelations or hold them in tension –dynamic balance.

5.2. Recommendations

The study recommended that there is a dare need to preaching the gospel of universal salvation. Without harmony, people will not see the need of responding to the gospel because of the varying views. Therefore, the study recommends a common view point for all! The study recommends the principle of common denominator refereed to us a dynamic balance in which eventual redemption is grounded in the work of Christ at the Cross. In the dynamic balance, Christ the creator of the universe is the savior of the same universe.

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