

Hickean Soul Making Theodicy and the Theology of prayer in Mountain of Fire Ministry in Nigeria.

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Introduction

Suffering and evil has been subject to critical scholarship from centuries of human existence. The existence of evil and suffering in human history has raised many question about the existence of God and the purpose of evil and suffering in this world. Many logical and religious answers has been supplied throughout centuries to justified the presence and purpose of evil in this present world. The reality of evil and suffering in this world has been treated theologically and philosophical as logical and religious field called theodicy an attempt to justify God nature in the face of evil many theodicies had been postulated and many water of teaching has gone under the bridge of life to this regard.

From the traditional state of things, there are different theodicies on the existence of evil and the reality of an all powerful, all loving, and all knowing God who created the world. Different premises and argument have been suggested in philosophy on evil and the classical theistic God who is all loving, all knowing and all powerful but yet there is evil in the world he created. Different school of thoughts have espoused in this subject of evil such as Augustinian free will defence, Ireaneus theodicy, process theodicy and the 19th century theodicy of john hick, soul making theodicy which was an attempt to justify and state the purpose of evil in the world God created. This research piece is a study of Hickean soul

making theodicy and the theology of prayer in Mountain of Fire Ministry in Nigeria. This work adopts an conceptual and analytical methodology the reason for this combine methodology is to find a nexus between Hickean propose purpose of evil and the MFM rationality of purpose of prayer and the purpose of evil in this present world.

Background of John Hick

John Harwood Hick was born in January 1922 to Mark and Aileen Hick in Scarborough, England.⁵³⁸ The Hick family history involves a Scarborough shipping trade that can be traced back at least as far as the mid-eighteenth century. Hick was a middle child, whose older brother Pentland became an entrepreneur and younger sister Shirley had a successful career in social work. among this hick grew up in middle class family. At age seventeen he began to read books of philosophers like Kant which later shape his philosophical life. though Hick comes from a family that is relatively religious and academic. His uncle from his mother side Benjamin Cocker, who taught philosophy at the University of Michigan in the late nineteenth century, and Hick's great uncle, Edward Wales Hirst, who taught Christian Ethics at Manchester University and elsewhere. Hirst encouraged Hick to pursue academic philosophy and continued to correspond with him after he decided instead to study law.

While still working at Hick & Hands, Hick began commuting twice a week to University College, Hull, to attend law lectures. This was shortly before the outbreak of World War II and the bombing of Britain, and by his second term Hick had moved to a hostel closer to campus in order to study full-time.⁵³⁹ At age eighteen Hick has started his law career in university college of Hull where he learn about the historical Jesus of faith. With

⁵³⁸ Soul Making theodicy of John Hick, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hick/#SH3a> internet encyclopedia of philosophy, accessed on 16th march, 2018

⁵³⁹ Ibid,

time he spent time in mosque, church and other religious places which later shape his pluralistic ideology. It was as a result of his philosophical exposure that Hick provide a rational response to the problem of evil and the purpose of evil in the world created by God.

Hick's Soul Making Theodicy

Hick was a influential philosopher of religion who has written many ground breaking books in regard religious pluralism, religious epistemology and the problem of evil and most especially he is reknow for his book '*evil and the god of love*'. Hick devised what has come to be known as the "soul-making theodicy" – in essence, Hick argues that one of the reasons God allows so much apparently pointless suffering in the world is because it is an essential aspect of advancing our moral and spiritual education.

In *Evil and the God of Love*, Professor Hick provides perhaps the most comprehensive and insightful philosophical examination of theodicy in contemporary time.⁵⁴⁰ Soul making theodicy is one of the prominent response to the problem of evil in the recent time which build up on the Iraeneus theodicy which sees man creation as in process. In Hick's thought there is nothing like pointless suffering in this world are suffering are to a point which is what he call *soul-making*. According to Hick there is no waste suffering in Christian thinking but he sees man as a raw material in the hands of God. Man is God's "raw material" and through the process of "mastering temptation" and making responsible choices man will grow into "the infinite likeness of God".⁵⁴¹ He opined that Humans must "undergo spiritual growth that will ultimately fit

⁵⁴⁰ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 118–122

⁵⁴¹John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), 254

them in communion with God.”⁵⁴² He believes that there is a need for moral agents which bring man into the desire communication with God his creation. And this moral agents come with a cost which is the definition of evil.

Christian theists are left to provide compelling reasons why evil exists in the world. Why would the all loving creator allow evil to persist and allow for human suffering? Two prominent Christian traditions take up the daunting task of explaining God’s reasons and purposes for all the evil in the world: the Augustinian tradition and the Irenaean tradition. The Augustinian tradition recollects that God gave humans freedoms. One such freedom is moral freedom. However, Hick contends with the Christian’s traditional view that man is created perfect but later fell into sin as in the case of Adam and Eve. Hick contends, is widely implausible, and conflicts with our intellectual sensitivities. Mark Scott explains Hick’s rejection thusly:

According to the [traditional] narrative, Adam and Eve violated the divine command and their “original” sin tarnished creation and transmitted it biologically to humanity, like a spiritual contagion, infecting every person from birth. That mythical narrative, however, has been replaced by the scientific narrative of evolution, which does not trace evil back to a singular event or a primordial couple, but to the ongoing struggle of life, forcing Christians to reexamine traditional doctrines of creation and original sin.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴² Tooley. “The Problem of Evil,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy , Summer 2013 Edition, Edward N. Zalta ed. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/evil/>. Accessed on 18-march, 2018

⁵⁴³ Mark Scott. “Soul-making Theodicy: No Pain, No Gain.” In *Pathways in Theodicy: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 98.

But on the other hand he argues that man creation was not concluded in the creation account but it is still in process. With this he appeals to Irenaeus interpretation of the Genesis account of the creation account of man.

Instead of regarding man as having been created by God in a finished state, as a finitely perfect being fulfilling the divine intention for our human level of existence, and then falling disastrously away from this, [Irenaeus' perspective] sees man as still in the process of creation... and so man, created as a personal being in the image of God, is only the raw material for a further and more difficult stage of God's creative work.⁵⁴⁴

In other word, man is not created perfect by God, but is deliberately created immature by God so that they can earn their spiritual and moral maturity. The question is how human will earn this maturity since according to Hick this creation because an epistemic distance between man and God and man cannot be spiritual mature or moral upright without appropriate knowledge of God. The only solution to this that the means of man being mature is that he will learn maturity through suffering and evil.

Hick wants us to view the world as a “vale of soul-making.”⁵⁴⁵Hick argues from the Irenaeian tradition that soul making is an important part of a two stage creation process: one in which we develop morally, the Bios, and the point at which we reach the likeness of God, the zoe.⁵⁴⁶ The bios is a spiritual process on Earth: “the movement from the image to the likeness [of God].” The expectation is that we develop to the moral likeness of God, thus we reach the Zoe. The Zoe

⁵⁴⁴John Hick. *Evil and the God of Love*, 289-290.

⁵⁴⁵ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 295

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, 254.

cannot be reached by divine fiat; moral freedom is required to reach the Zoe.⁵⁴⁷ To Hick a personal life of soul making is the actual life of freedom.

The environment he has created for man is one in which we may become moral beings. “Man is in the process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create. However, this is not taking place...by natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom.”⁵⁴⁸ Hick’s argument is not only suggesting that soul making is how we come to be reconciled with God but that it is a necessity for our moral development. Further, God desires for his human creation “...to know and love him...” without divine coercion.⁵⁴⁹

The basic question is why is evil important to the process of developing this kind of maturity. Hicks posit that evil is necessary to freedom, which is necessary to obtain God’s consciousness. It is the experience of evil that helps us develop into the person God intended us to become. Hick thinks that a world where evil is impossible will deprive man from developing his soul spiritually towards God. We only come to learn God through our suffering, challenges, pain and hardship.

This type of world is one in which evil is inextricably connected to the design of soul-making, and the process of soul-making is unfinished by its nature. We will not complete the process of soulmaking on earth: however, “Hick’s theodicy appeals to an eschatological resolution where the soul-making

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 232.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 350

⁵⁴⁹ Hick, *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*: “An Irenaean Theodicy,” Stephen T. Davis Ed., (Louisvill; Westminster/John Knox Press, KY, 1981, 2001), 38.

process begun on earth will reach completion in the afterlife.”⁵⁵⁰

Mountain of Fire Miracle Ministries theology of prayer

MFM was founded by Daniel K. Olukoya. Olukoya was born in Ondo town on 15 July 1956 to Mr and Mrs Amos Olukoya, who were members of Christ Apostolic Church.⁵⁵¹ Omotoye documents it that Olukoya studied Microbiology at the University of Lagos. At the University of Reading, in the United Kingdom, Olukoya got his PhD in Molecular Genetics in 1984⁵⁵² MFM started as an interdenominational prayer group on a Wednesday in Dr Olukoya’s living room at No. 3, Edmund Crescent, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The prayer group metamorphosed to a full-fledged church on 24 April 1994, when they had their first Sunday service. The church claims that the name ‘Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries’ was revealed to Olukoya during a prayer session.⁵⁵³

MFM centralizes on prayer which was a key emphasis in the church teachings the benefit of prayer and the importance of prayer to Christians. Ojo observes that MFM prayers emphasis is on deliverance from evil powers categorises in the rubric of churches referred to as ‘Deliverance churches’⁵⁵⁴ Some of the features of deliverance churches include

⁵⁵⁰ Scott, Mark “*Suffering and Soul-Making: Rethinking John Hick’s Theodicy*,” *The Journal of Religion*, Concordia University, Montreal, 320.

⁵⁵¹ E.O. Ajani, ‘Leadership roles in the Transnationalisation of Nigerian Pentecostal Churches: The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in the Netherlands and Ghana’, (PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit. 2013), 80

⁵⁵² Omotoye, R.W. Pentecostalism and the Yoruba world view: The case of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Nigeria’, *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 2, 188.
<https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/cgp/v01i02/51147> accessed on 17th 2018

⁵⁵³ ‘Our History’: <http://mountainoffire.org/index.php/2012-10-20-09-36-37/overview>, viewed 17 March 15, 2018

⁵⁵⁴ M.A. Ojo, *Of saints and sinners: Pentecostalism and the paradox of social transformation in modern Nigeria*, Inaugural Lecture Series 227, Obafemi Awolowo University Press, Ile-Ife. 2010, 30

consideration of African cultural roots as being responsible for the problems in the lives of believers; association of evil with some traditional names; and emphasis on the need to break ancestral or generational curses⁵⁵⁵ Which are prominent way of dealing with evil in prayer. Majority of Olukoya prayers are on the presence and reality of evil in Africa and on African just has other minister in African uphold the reality of evil. Ayegboyin posits that ‘most deliverance ministers in Africa, including the MFM, explain that evil may gain access to some lives through amulets, charms, incisions, tattoos and swallowed concoctions which parents give to or etch on their children’⁵⁵⁶

MFM prayers on evil are informed by the African cosmological understanding. In African’s understanding of the cosmos system evil plays a prominent role in marring people destiny and such evil should be prevented if one will take appropriate measure, ritual is a prominent way to avert evil. The African understanding of this has a great play on the theological understanding of MFM. However, the type of prayers prayed by MFM has actually won an acclaim for this ‘kill-and-go’orientation to Christian life commonly called dangerous prayer. It would appear that when a woman has got it up to her throat with her mother-in-law or even husband, or a man has got it up to his throat with his –demonized! wife or landlord, then the place to go is Mountain of Fire and Miracles and the demand to make is a terminal affliction against the enemy.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, 26

⁵⁵⁶ D. Ayegboyin, “...But deliver us from evil...”: The riposte of the MFM and its implications for the “reverse in mission”, *Orita Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 2005, 37.

⁵⁵⁷ Ugwueye, L. E. and Uzuegbunam, E. N. An Appraisal of the Use of Psalm 35 as ‘Dangerous Prayer’ in Mountain of Fire and Miracle (MFM) Church in *african research review An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 7 (1), Serial No. 28, January, 2013:14-33*

Without doubt MFM is a prayer centre that centre on prayers on deliverance in retrospect to evil. Some of the prayer are; The agenda of the enemy and some forms of wickedness will not cease unless you kill them. You can't beg the enemy; the only language he understands is violence. The only thing he respects is power. For your David to manifest, your Goliath must die. It was the death of Goliath that brought David to prominence⁵⁵⁸ Let the stronghold of every spirit of Korah, Dan and Abiram militating against me be smashed to pieces in Jesus' name. Let every spirit of Balaam hired to curse me fall after the order of Balaam in the name of Jesus. Let every spirit of Sanballat and Tobiah planning evil against me receives the stones of fire in the name of Jesus. Let every spirit of Egypt fall after the order of Pharaoh, in the name of Jesus. Let every spirit of Herod be disgraced in the name of Jesus⁵⁵⁹ this and many more are the prayer of MFM. One striking things are this are all set on the basis of reality of evil in the present world.

Nexus between Hickean Soul Making Theodicy and MFM Prayers

Hick believes that all sufferings and evil are of prima goal which is to draw man to God's consciousness. This means that human beings must recognize their ultimate reliance and dependence on God which Hick called '*conscious relationship with God*'⁵⁶⁰ there is a level of affinity that man desire to have with God and this urge brings man closer to God who has created an epistemic distance between man and himself a process by which man will be in the likeness of God. The causal agent for this is evil which always draw man into this conscious relationship with God.

⁵⁵⁸ D.K, Olukoya, *Power against marine spirits*, Lagos; The Battle Cry Christian Ministries, 1999, 12

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, 34

⁵⁶⁰ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 220

Epistemic distance Hick believes is necessary because man is not create in the perfection but only in the image of God and the likeness of God will only be reach by man by a process of understanding God nature and the world and the soul making ability of evil and suffering as a process by which man come closer to this likeness and the knowledge of God. So evil plays a prominent role in bring man to God and to maturity in the plan of God for man to be like God. However, Hick believes that all evil and suffering are to goal to make the soul of man develop an intimate relationship with God and evil is a raw material in God's creation plan to bring man to himself. He opined that Humans must "undergo spiritual growth that will ultimately fit them in communion with God."⁵⁶¹

Howbeit, there is a nexus between Hickean soul making theodicy and what is seen in the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries and their understanding of prayer and the presence of evil in the present world. While MFM believe in the traditional view on the presence of evil in their doctrine but in the theological view of prayer and evil it thus work in hand with the Hickean understanding of evil. Since the inception of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries the gospel message of this church is such one that market on the existence of evil with a religious response to it as something that must be contends with in order to become that which God want man to become him life. MFM theological outlook on the evil suit and compliment Hickean soul-making theory has evil is responsible agent that brings man into intimate relationship with God.

Moreover, MFM concept of prayer is not only a mean of communion with God alone but also a tool of combating with evil and suffering in this part of the world. With such a belief that if one will avert evil or will break out of the suffering and

⁵⁶¹ Tooley. "The Problem of Evil," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy , Summer 2013 Edition, Edward N. Zalta ed. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/evil/>. Accessed on 18-march, 2018

pain inflict on human by higher forces or ancestral curses and regional forces, or the Joint Task Force of ones household one need a concrete prayer branded in fire is a nexus between Hick purpose of Evil and MFM pragmatic approach to evil and prayer. MFM believes man need God because of the presence of evil in this world which makes man to seek for God through prayers which they believe so strongly. Outrightly and practically, the MFM theological approach to prayer clearly depicts that evil is a mean by which many are draw and brought to God. It is no doubt many of their members are on this basis of solace and refuge from evil and suffering in the world. This eventually creates God's consciousness into many of their member and seriousness for prayer.

In sum, Hickean theory of evil is well illustratable in the theology of prayer of the MFM denomination. The MFM concetrates on evil in their prayer, and members are drawned to pray to God because of the evil that happens to them and as a way to prevent the occurrence of evil. This shows that Hick theory has a level of applicability and pratical validity. However, the questions remains- what could be the genuiness of such prayers that are offered to God only with the view of preventing evil and soving it? This is the questions that must be tackled by researchers on the MFM emerging theology of prayer in Nigeria.

VI. Conclusion

The problem of evil and suffering in this present world has attracts many religious and philosophical treatment of the subject matter. This piece centres on one of the proffered solutions to the purpose of evil in the world by John Hick and the reality of Mountain of Fire Miracle Ministries theology of prayer in relations to the problem of evil. This research view MFM pragmatic understanding of prayer in relation to evil and suffering in this world as a means of bring the best in man against every evil which is a form of soul making theology of evil in respect to prayer.

This research opine that many traditional mainline churches reject Hickean soul making theodicy and adopt the traditional view of Augustinian theodicy but in their approach to prayer they remain adherent to the Hickean rational solution to the problem of evil. For instance many are brought to God because of occurrence of evil in the present world or even in their lives. Ancestral curses have played a prominent role in bring many to the saving knowledge of Christ. And the fear for nature evil and moral evil in this present world has been a major emphasis of many Pentecostal churches in creating awareness for man to come to God.

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