

Contextualizing Hickean Soul-Making Theodicy in Mountain of Fire and Prayer Ministries (MFM) Theology of Prayer

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Abstract: *Theodicy means justifying God in the face of evil; many Christian thinkers have rejected as impious any attempt to fathom God's purposes or to judge God's actions by human standards. John Hick was an influential philosopher of religion in the mid 20th century. Hick did groundbreaking works in religious epistemology, philosophical theology, and religious pluralism.¹ Soul making theodicy is a work of Irenaean, advanced by Hick. The existence of evil is lucid, not only in theory but in the practical. There are diverse occurrences of evil in the universe; John Hick presents his concept as that which reveals the usefulness of evil, meanwhile evil is not palatable; MFM members in Nigeria out rightly sees it something that is not in God's plan. This research explores John Hicks' Soul-Making Theodicy and Mountain of Fire and Miracle ministries prayer pattern.*

Keywords: Evil, God, John Hick, Prayer.

John Hick's Biography

As a young law student, Hick underwent a strong religious experience that led him to accept evangelical Christianity and to change his career direction to theology and philosophy. This experience would prove not only life-altering but also important for his subsequent philosophical views. Early in his career, Hick argued that Christian faith is based not on propositional evidence but on religious experience. He thus defended Christian faith against the evidentialist criticisms of the then dominant logical positivists.²

During this stage Hick also developed his Irenaean "soul-making" theodicy in which he argued that God allows evil and suffering in the world in order to develop humans into virtuous creatures capable of following his will. In the late 1960s, Hick had another set of experiences that dramatically affected his life and work.³ While working on civil rights issues in Birmingham, he found himself working and worshiping alongside people of other faiths. During this time he began to believe that sincere adherents of other faiths experience the Transcendent just as Christians do, though with variances due to cultural, historical, and doctrinal factors.⁴

John Hick's Works

These experiences led him to develop his pluralistic hypothesis, which, relying heavily on Kant's phenomenal/noumenal distinction, states that adherents of the major religious faiths experience the ineffable Real through their varying culturally shaped lenses. Hick's pluralistic considerations then led him to adjust his theological positions, and he subsequently developed interpretations of Christian doctrines, such as the incarnation, atonement, and trinity, not as metaphysical claims but as metaphorical or mythological ones. However, despite Hick's changes theologically, many of his underlying philosophical positions remained largely intact over the course of his long career.⁵

Hick's most influential works include *Faith and Knowledge*, *Evil and the God of Love*, *Death and Eternal Life*, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (ed.), and *An Interpretation of Religion*. Other of his significant works includes; *Arguments for the Existence of God*, *God Has Many Names*, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science*, and his widely used textbook, *Philosophy of Religion*.

John Hick's Life

¹David Birnbaum, *God and Evil* (Illinois: Ktav Publishing House, 2003), 87.

²Marilyn Adams, *John Hicks: Evils and the Goodness of God* (Cornell University Press, 1999), 65.

³Ibid., Birnbaum, *God and Evil*, 90.

⁴J. Matthew, *Reading the universe story theologically: the contribution of a biblical narrative imagination* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2010), 98.

⁵Ibid., Marilyn Adams, *John Hicks: Evils and the Goodness of God*, 67.

John Harwood Hick was born in January 1922 to Mark and Aileen Hick in Scarborough, England. 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. Hick grew up in a working middle-class family in Scarborough, where as a shy boy he had an unfavorable time at the nearby preparatory school, Lisvane.⁶

After briefly studying at home with a private tutor, Hick spent two more favorable years (1937-38) at a Quaker boarding school, Bootham, in York. After Bootham, Hick returned to Scarborough to work as an articled clerk for his father's small law firm, Hick & Hands.

Soul-making Theodicy

One of Hick's most important contributions to philosophical theology is his "soul-making" theodicy, first presented in his work, *Evil and the God of Love*.⁷ He spends much of this work interacting with what he calls the traditional Augustinian type of theodicy, in which finitely perfect human beings at a remote time in history fell from perfection by using their free will to turn away from God an act of rebellion that precipitated evil and suffering in the world. Hick finds this response to be inadequate due to its basis in a narrowly literal reading of the account of the fall found in Genesis chapter three.

Hick argued that it is very difficult to take the story of Adam and Eve's fall literally in light of the scientific evidence for evolution. Moreover, he finds the traditional view incapable of making sense of "finitely perfect creatures who fall out of the full glory and blessedness of God's Kingdom".⁸ For if such a creature lived "face to face with infinite plenitude of being, limitlessly dynamic life and power, and unfathomable goodness and love, there seems to be an absurdity in the idea of his seeing rebellion as a possibility."

However, if instead such a creature "does not exist in such closeness to God, but rather in a human (or angelic) world in which the divine reality is not unambiguously manifest to him," then it seems that the circumstances are "weighted against the creature," and sinning "is now rather more than a bare possibility." According to Hick's understanding of the traditional Augustinian view, then, "The creature's fall is either impossible, or else so very possible as to be excusable." Rather than utilizing a traditional free-will defense that includes the concept of a literal fall, Hick takes an evolutionary approach to speak of humanity's developing moral education.

According to this theory, humans were not created in a perfected state in an idyllic environment but are rather in a continuous process of creation or development from morally immature creatures to morally perfected ones. God thus created the world with all its potential evil and suffering to serve as a "vale of soul-making." Hick states that "it is an ethically reasonable judgment.... that human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort has a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process."

He argues further, men are not to be thought of on the analogy of animal pets, whose life is to be made as agreeable as possible, but rather on the analogy of human children, who are to grow to adulthood in an environment whose primary and overriding purpose is not immediate pleasure but the realizing of the most valuable potentialities of human personality. According to Hick, the story of the human fall is a mythological way of describing the present human situation. Humans are given a certain level of autonomy from their creator in virtue of being created at an "epistemic distance" from God. It is possible for humans to know God, but they can only do so by freely exercising a faith-response, which for Hick consists "in an uncompelled interpretive activity whereby we experience the world as mediating the divine presence."⁹

Brief Discourse on Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries

Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFM)¹⁰ is a full gospel ministry devoted to the Revival of Apostolic Signs, Holy Ghost fireworks and the unlimited demonstration of the power of God to deliver to the uttermost. Absolute holiness within and without as the greatest spiritual insecticide and a pre-requisite for Heaven is taught openly. MFM is a do-it-yourself Gospel ministry where your hands are trained to wage war and your fingers to do battle. At MFM, aggressive prayer is considered as an aid to spiritual focus and a check against being overwhelmed by the flesh. At MFM Prayer City, prayer goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, non-stop. Soon after completing his Ph.D. in the United Kingdom, and while working at the Nigerian Institute of

⁶Jan Assman, *John Hick: Soul Making Theodicy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 167.

⁷David Cheetham, *John Hick: A critical introduction and reflection* (Manchester: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 34.

⁸ Jan Assman, *John Hick: Soul Making Theodicy*, 168.

⁹ Ibid, David Cheetham, *John Hick: A critical introduction and reflection*, 35.

¹⁰ Note that MFM will constantly represent Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries in the subsequent discussions.

Medical Research, Dr. Daniel Kolawole Olukoya (DKO) summoned a prayer meeting. This was on a Wednesday in 1989. 24 brethren showed up at the meeting. The venue of that meeting was in the living room of DKO.¹¹

After that meeting, the voice of providence kept calling for subsequent meetings. At these meetings, the power of God came down and verifiable miracles began to happen in the lives of the attending brethren. The power of God began to evangelize the prayer meetings and a spiritual explosion began with people coming from far and wide to seek the face of God. With more and more people attending the prayer meetings, a larger location was required. The prayer meetings moved to 60 Old Yaba Road, Yaba, Lagos. Here, the teeming crowd of believers grew in even more amazing proportion necessitating yet relocation. The prayer group was offered and purchased an abandoned slum located at 13 Olasimbo Street, Onike, Yaba.

Even at the new location, believers and those seeking help kept coming leading to a very large congregation. This situation posed a challenge of crowd, growth and expansion management to the leadership of the church. Thus, under the direction of the Lord, MFM evolved a strategy of a network of branches in every state capital, local government headquarters, senatorial district and locality. Till this day and across the world, MFM branches spring up as one of the fastest growing churches of this generation. International church branches first started in London before spreading to the United States, Canada, and the rest of Europe, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.¹²

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles church has its roots in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) founded by one Apostle Joseph Babalola and others in the early 1930s. The CAC is one of the foremost indigenous churches in Nigeria founded by some indigenous Christians in south west of Nigeria desirous of the true apostolic faith experienced in primitive Christianity. They were not contented with the spirituality or piety of the mainline churches that were perceived to be devoid of power to meet the exigencies of their times.

Olukoya, the founder of MFM acknowledged the deficiencies of the mission churches then as he said that the European missionaries were not acquainted with the spiritual terrain of the Nigerian environment and so they made a lot of mistakes. The missionaries did not understand the spiritual problems of the people; hence they could not address them.¹³ According to him, the missionaries made a lot of difference in the areas of social ministry by building churches, schools, hospitals etc, but they presented to the Africans Christianity that is bereft of power to rid the people of evil experiences that was a common feature in African societies.

Hiccan Soul-Making Theodicy and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries Theology of Prayer: A Cross Examination

Prayer is a significant and universal aspect of religion, whether of primitive peoples or of modern mystics, that expresses the broad range of religious feelings and attitudes that command human relations with the sacred or holy.¹⁴ Described by some scholars as religion's primary mode of expression, prayer is said to be to religion what rational thought is to philosophy; it is the very expression of living religion. Prayer distinguishes the phenomenon of religion from those phenomena that approach it or resemble it, such as religious and aesthetic feelings.¹⁵

Prayer is conversation with God; the intercourse of the soul with God, not in contemplation or meditation, but in direct address to him. Prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant. Blascke believes that the initial approach for the presentation of the Gospel to animists should first be the „other part“ of the Gospel; the power of Jesus“ that can provide answers to their dilemma of dealing with evil spiritual powers. In African societies and Traditional religions, the belief in the ubiquity of evil forces is rife. In Yoruba cosmology for example, they are known collectively as *ajagun* (warriors against human beings). They include *iku* (death), *era* (disease), *ofo* (loss), *egba* (paralysis), *oran* (trouble), *epe* (curse), *ewon* (bondage/ imprisonment), and *ese* (accident or and other evil thing that affects human beings).

The essence of religion for the African is the provision of relief, safety and protection from this array of evil agents. AIC and Pentecostal churches that share in this belief about the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil have grown over the years in Nigeria. This is because their belief in cosmic struggle resonates with the worldview of the people and that of African Traditional Religion.¹⁶

This solution to this struggle lies in regular prayer sessions and exorcism. Ayegboyin avers that the AICs overemphasis on evil has virtually changed the church from divine truth to power religion. They take seriously matters relating to spirit possession, powers and occult forces that impact negatively on humans. These churches, often referred to as deliverance churches make it their

¹¹Daniel and Shade Olukoya, <http://www.mountainoffire.org/about> (Accessed on 17th April, 2018).

¹²Nicholas Bunnin, *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (Michigan: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 42.

¹³J. Mbiti, *The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology* in K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres (eds.), *African Theology En Route*, Maryknoll (New York: Orbis Books, Dec. 1981), 132.

¹⁴Elmer Towns, *The Eight Laws of Leadership: Prayer as an Important Instrument* (Church Growth Institute, 1992), 17.

¹⁵ Herbert. Lockett, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (London: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 61.

¹⁶Shina Eleonore, *Philosophy of African Religion: the big questions* (Wiley-Blackwell: Hillary Books, 1997), 187.

sole aim to rid the African society of evil powers, and their prayers are often targeted at the devil with all its agents as the sources of evil, misfortunes, poverty, diseases and vicissitudes of life that people suffer.

A onetime missionary to Africa assesses mainline churches' failure to meet the heart and spirit needs of Africans as „a failure to recognize the reality of the spiritual world" and therefore, a lack of expectation or even acceptance of a ready recourse to spiritual power. "The research describes the current trend of a drift from the mainline churches to new generation churches in Africa on account of seeking for power to meet existential needs this way: Large numbers of so called independent churches and new religious movements are coming into existence.

As long ago as 1968, David Barret identified as many as 6,000 such movements in Africa alone... These have spread with surprising rapidity in many countries of the Third World. These millenarian teachings and their tenets concerning demonic illness and faith healing are often attractive to Christians who are dissatisfied with the attitude of the mainline, mission-related churches, Catholic included, towards healing and exorcism. The MFM Church has a large followership of people who before now belonged to the mainline churches and other denominations that do not dwell on spiritual warfare. The church's emphasis is on holiness and Pentecostal power as experienced in the New Testament, with a particular stress on exorcism has attracted many into its fold.

One attractive feature of the MFM church is the regular monthly „Power Must Change Hands programme. It holds on every first Saturday of each month in the sprawling prayer city along the Ibadan –Lagos Express road devoted to prayer, fasting and healing. This programme is akin to the pool of Bethesda experience in John 5, where the sick and impotent gather awaiting the turning of the pool by the angel of God. People gather at this a lot of Pentecostal churches, but definitely, the MFM is different.¹⁷

The church started as an offshoot of the Christ Apostolic Church, one of the foremost indigenous churches in Nigeria. The MFM church however is often categorized as a Pentecostal church because of its emphasis on Holy Spirit, power, divine healing and exorcism. The church shares similar doctrinal beliefs with the CAC and same ministry emphasis on prayer-healing. Besides the late Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola who was one of the founding fathers of the CAC church is highly revered by Daniel Olukoya as his mentor. Many of his publications are dedicated to Babalola, whose demonstration of the power of God over evil forces was overwhelming.

The area of interests and similarity had always been in the aspect of healing through the power of Jesus Christ, and confronting and silencing demons, witches and other evil spirits. The difference between these churches however lies in methods employed in healing and casting out evil spirits. The CAC depends on prayers, use of holy or sanctified water for healing of the physically and mentally ill people, the MFM church believe in the practice of exorcism that includes severance of „covenant relationship" with dead spirits, ancestral spirits, idols and local deities, witchcraft etc. These are the major sources of illness and diseases and other cases of misfortunes such as barrenness, ill luck, disasters, and setbacks in life endeavors.

The MFM believes that exorcism was an integral part of Jesus ministry and venue from all over the nation to pray as led by the man of God, Dr. Daniel Olukoya, for deliverance from all their ailments and difficulties. Many who attend this programme though are not members of the MFM church. 15 Daniel thanks MFM for Prayers", The Nation on Sunday. June 15, 2008, 58. 16 D.K. Olukoya, Prayer Warfare Against 70 Mad Spirits, Lagos: Battle Cry Ministries Publication, 2004, 10. 17 D.K. Olukoya, Prayer Warfare Against 70 Mad Spirits, 10. go as far as suggesting that Jesus dealings with the demon possessed is key to understanding the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

The theology of healing in the MFM is predicated on sin being the root cause of all diseases. At the beginning everything God created was good. But sin came, and along with it, sickness and diseases. This is why physical healing is closely associated with spiritual deliverance and forgiveness of sin."28 Jesus Christ brought relief and deliverance for the infirmed through forgiveness of sin by destroying the works of Satan. Jesus Christ has power over sickness and diseases, and freely offers healing and deliverance to those who are willing.

The concept and practice of prayer in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church is predicated on faith-healing and on belief on „spirit theory" as against the orthodox medicine's „germ theory. These concepts of spirit theory and germ theory were coined by Aylward Shorter to describe the prevalent practice amongst AICs and Pentecostal churches to fault every malady on the activity of demons or evil spirit which have to be exorcised through the means of deliverance.

In one of his publications, Olukoya said more and more people are coming to grips with the fact that it is impossible to enjoy one's life on earth without going through some form of spiritual deliverance.¹⁸ This situation is more pertinent when we consider that Africans and blacks in the Diaspora are products of negative foundation. The MFM Church believes emphatically that the African is surrounded by innumerable evil spirits that seeks his destruction from which he must constantly extricate himself by means of deliverance or exorcism. This belief in pervasive evil ruling the African sphere is corroborated by the claims of David

¹⁷ Daniel, <http://www.pulse.ng/communities/religion/mountain-of-fire-7-intriguing-things-about-this-popular-church-id6785746.html> (Accessed on 18th April, 2018).

¹⁸ Haven, *History, Structures and Practices of MFM* <https://research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/42205209> (Accessed on 1st April, 2018).

Tuesday Adamo who reasons that “the existence of evil is painfully real in the African indigenous tradition. Witches, sorcerers, wizards, evil spirits and all ill-wishers are considered enemies. The awareness of these enemies is a major source of fear and anxiety in African indigenous society.”¹⁹

In other instances Olukoya believes that infirmities are caused by curses, and until these curses are done away with, the victim will continue to suffer. Hidden curses can hinder several people from being healed. A minister who is worth his salt will know that the first thing to do in a healing meeting is to break the curses of infirmity. If the curse of infirmity is in place and you continue to shout your voice hoarse without breaking the curse, no single healing will take place. The prayer of healing will not work if the victim is still under the umbrella of infirmity.

This makes healing intractably linked to deliverance as one cannot be done without the other. According to Olukoya, the enemy has poured legion of angry spirits into the world. These spirits act in a rage, and exhibit unthinkable madness and wickedness. At the MFM church headquarters, this writer interviewed a member who was once a member of one of the mainline churches on why he joined the MFM church, he said he was married for many years, but had no child. Moreover, this was a disturbing experience for him, especially the pressure and the embarrassment he received from the extended family. He was invited for one of the Power Must change Hands prayer programmes for the barren. He went with his wife and here they were told the root cause of their problem, the evil forces in their ancestry. They began attending these programmes regularly and praying vigorously to overcome these forces responsible for their barrenness. To their surprise, his wife became pregnant, and today they have two children.

Conclusion

Hick starts like Irenaeus with the thought that God's aim is for humans to be perfect (to be great and good like God). God created human beings are free but immature and imperfect creatures, with an immense but undeveloped capacity for moral and spiritual development. While, John Hick believed that God created us immature and innocent as it isn't possible to create outright free intelligent, morally mature beings. MFM believes that God created us perfect; therefore we need not evil to attain where God wants us. Hick says God considers being who have grown into moral goodness (the hard way - through making tough choices) a much greater good than being 'ready-made' with moral goodness.

The soul making theodicy of John Hick proposes the important and complementing factors as though God uses evil to work out good things in humans, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries through the x-ray of their theology of prayer sees evil as an element that is abruptly anti the purpose and plan of God for man's destiny. Far beyond this is the proposition by MFM that as children of God, evil is expected to be totally excavated from our lives. Meanwhile, some evils are relative and good in the real sense but blur when it comes to human comprehension; but some serves no good purpose thus, should be excavated.

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¹⁹Haven, *History, Structures and Practices of MFM* <https://research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/42205209> (Accessed on 1st April, 2018).