

ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND BIBLICAL LITERACY: AIDS TO CONCEPTUALISING THE NATURE OF GOD

Sunday Tasen Okune
stokune@unical.edu.ng

Department of English & Literary studies,
University of Calabar
&

Godwin Oko Ushie
Goddyushie@unical.edu.ng, imaduoshama04@gmail.com
Department of English & literary studies,
University of Calabar

Abstract

This paper seeks to interrogate the anthropomorphic expressions as couched in the *Bible* used to describe God in the light of the fact that He is a Spirit Being, a fact which presupposes that He is not human. The declaration that "God is a Spirit" (John 4: 24) and God's invitation to the co-creators of mankind, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Gen1: 26) pose a problem of understanding the Holy Writ and conceptualizing the nature of God and hence raise a number of posers such as: "Is God knowable as man is since He is a Spirit?" "Does He possess a corporeal substance the way man possesses members such as hands, eyes, ears, back and so on?" "Is God being literal or figurative when He semiotises His nature in anthropomorphic terms— when He makes reference to His hands, eyes, ears, back, and so on in His communication with men?" These posers become imperative in the light of Peircean semiotic theory, which this paper has adopted in its analysis, and which postulates that there is no direct relationship between a word and its referent. These are the questions this paper attempts to answer by interrogating the anthropomorphic terms that intersperse the Bible. The paper seeks to help Bible readers conceptualize God and so afford them biblical literacy, which knowledge Christians claim, can afford an enquirer salvation.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, God, semiotics, salvation and biblical literacy

Introduction

The Bible abounds in instances of phraseology about God that are either contradictory and curious or seemingly inconsistent with His nature. The concept "God" decidedly conjures up in the mind a Spirit-being; that is one who is invisible and, hence, unknowable. The questions, "Is there God?" and "How can man know God?" cannot be adequately answered by man's intuitive method of

search as postulated by the mystic religions such as Eckankar, AMORC, Grail Message, etc., nor by reason (epistemology), wisdom and understanding as postulated by philosophers. The questions cannot also be answered by the study of History, natural sciences, Literature, and Ethics or even by moralizing. God cannot be adequately known through these methods because His Being, which is metaphysical, is beyond man's methods of inquiry. Conceptualizing Him must, therefore, be by His own means – that of 'special revelation' of Himself – through the Bible (Hammond 1968, p.18). Each of man's methods of inquiry about God may give imperfect glimpses of God. Only a special revelation can give someone knowledge of God and Christians claim it is this type of knowledge of God that can save mankind. By salvation it means redemption from damnation; i.e., from condemnatory judgment that unsaved people shall suffer. "Revelation", according to Lloyd-Jones (2003) "is the act by which God communicates to human beings the truth concerning Himself, His nature, will or purpose, and it also includes the unveiling of all this – the drawing back of the veil that conceals this, in order that we may see it" (p.13). This revelation avails man the character and the nature of God as composites of His saving grace. This special revelation is not like man's search for knowledge of God. While the first is an attempt by man to look for God, the second is an attempt by God Himself, of drawing back the veil that veils man and giving the latter an insight of Himself that leads to saving knowledge. This is called redemptive revelation. Christians assert that this is an exclusive preserve of people who submit to the redemptive revelation, i.e., Christians.

Even the Christian knowledge of God cannot be exhaustive: God cannot be fully comprehended by man, nor can His nature be fully grasped by man's senses—the tactile, visual, auditory, gustatory and olfactory senses. God is a Spirit, a Supernatural Being. The notion of Spirit conveys the notion of intangibility, immaterialness, non-substantiality and formlessness, which cannot be "projected in discursive form and expression" (Langer 2014, p.139). A number of Bible verses corroborate this notion about Him: 'No man hath seen God at any time' (John 1:18); 'Now unto the King, eternal, and immortal, invisible...' (1Tim 1:17); "You hath neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape" (Jn 5:37); and "God is not a man that He should lie, or son of man that He should repent" (Num. 23:19). But in dealing with man, in His revelation to man – man who is tangible and whose discursive and expressive model attempts to capture every experience or abstraction in linguistic terms, God or his human channel or both may deploy human terms to communicate His message, His nature, His character and His works. And they are supernatural and metaphysical. This is what is technically called "anthropomorphism". It, therefore, "attributes human form, shape or other characteristics" to God. And when the reference is to his emotion, it is termed, 'anthropopathism' (Keith Schoville, 2018,

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/anthropomorphism>, and Caird, 1980). Caird asserts that "...the transcendent does not come to finite creatures unmediated, but always under cover of something else..." (p.177). In the same vein, anthropomorphic imagery comes in handy to mediate God to finite beings linguistically speaking. He identifies five common anthropomorphic metaphors used "to express God's relationship with his worshippers as king/subject, judge/litigant, husband/wife, father/child, master/servant" (p.177).

Anthropomorphism is likened to what Langer (2014) says of an "expressive form, in which perceived/imaginable parts/aspects of God are represented with humanity, which has analogous relations" (p.138). Anthropomorphism, therefore, is a term that designates a description of God (who is a Spirit) in human terms thereby giving the impression that God has a physical form/shape or features such as "eyes of the Lord" (Deut. 11:12; 24:4, 1Pet. 3:12); "His right hand" (Rev. 1:1, Deut. 4:34, Jer. 18:6); "finger of God" (Deut 9:10, Lk. 11:20); "face" (Exod. 33:11,20, 23; Ps. 4:6, Rev 22:4), etc. It is an attempt to make man comprehend God graphically, pictorially and quasi-physically even though He is incorporeal, intangible and hence incomprehensible. One of the ways man cognizes objective realities is by processing the resources of description – and description can be done by means of similitude or metaphorisation. Even an abstraction may also be likened to physical things so that the quality of the unknown or unseen can be known or visualised. This, essentially, is what is involved in the deployment of anthropomorphic terms in the description of God by Bible writers or by God condescending to speak in such terms with man such as He spoke with Moses as in "... the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"(Exo.33:11). Again, He said:

Thou canst see *my face*: for there shall *no man see me*, and live.... Behold there is a place by me, and thou shall stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with *my hand* while I pass by: And I will take away *mine hand*, and thou shall see *my back parts*, but *my face* shall not be seen (Exo.33:20-23) [italics added].

The context of this passage is that Moses had demanded to be allowed to see the presence of God to build up his confidence in His being since the Israelites were stiff-necked people who would always seek signs from God. So, he requested that God's presence go with him, so he could see God's glory and have the courage to lead them. It was in an attempt by God to show Moses His glory that God promised him thus. God showing Moses his back could be explained in two ways: even though God is essentially a Spirit Being, he can transmute into a

human person to appear to some people. This was one of such appearances. Another example was the appearance of God to Abraham when God was going to judge and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:2-33), in which He is portrayed as one of the "three men". These appearances are theologically called "*Theophanies*". Another related explanation is that God spoke about Himself in human language so that humans can understand. So, His "back parts" could mean His glory. So, even if Moses was practically hidden in a cleft of a rock, God's glory could appear in a "form and manner" too awesome for Moses to behold, so God could cover him up and allow him to see the rear of the glory.

Note what Phaido says:

The invisible (*constant*) can only be conceived by the intellect while the visible (*changeable*) can only be perceived by the senses (Phaido 79 a). When the soul investigates without the mediation of the body, it is directed at the world of the *pure and eternal, immortal and unchanging, constant and equally natured things* (Phaido, 79 d quoted in D. F. M. Strauss, 5).

The import of Phaido's assertion is that that which is invisible is constant - and God is. A spirit is invisible and constant. And such a being can only be cognized by the intellect - a component of the soul that investigates this invisible, but a constant Being without the mediation of the body. And discovery and cognition of same is the exclusive preserve of the spirit man which further strengthens the assertion that only those who submit to God's revelation of Himself can truly know Him. And such knowledge cannot be arrived at by man's senses.

Anthropomorphic Terms in the Bible

Anthropomorphism comes from two Greek words *anthropos* (meaning *man*) and *morphe* (meaning *form*). God has no physical form, though Bible writers ascribe human attributes to Him. But through the Holy Scripture the Invisible God has revealed Himself to mankind. In order to portray God's Invisible attributes in physical terms, Bible writers often employed the familiar feature of humanity to refer to God. For instance, "the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, neither His ear too dull to hear" (Isa. 59:1). God stretches out His hand to destroy Egypt (Exod. 7:5) and scatters His enemies with His "mighty arm". (Ps. 89:10b)

Again, "my eyes run to and fro in the earth..." (II Chron. 16:9). Again, reference is made to the "apple of God's eye" (Zech. 2:8). There is a reference to God being "hungry" in the Psalms (Psalms 50:12). Besides, the Psalm speaks about God's "anger" and "wrath" (Ps. 2:5). God rests (Gen. 2:2), even when He is said to be all-powerful (Jer. 32:17, 27). God is spoken of as changing His mind (Exo. 32:14). Furthermore, God is Omniscient, yet He who declares the end from

the beginning regrets creating man (Gen. 6:6; I Sam. 15:35). God displays human emotion of jealousy (Exod. 20:5), pity (Judges 2:18), scoffing, laughing (Ps. 2:4), loving (Ps. 33:5), God has a face (Num. 6:24; Ps. 4:6b). Note reference to God speaking and breathing (Ps. 33:6), yet He does not have a physical form. How can these seeming contradictions be resolved?

The Concept of Biblical Literacy

Biblical literacy is the familiarization of oneself with the Bible, its books (in both the Old Testament and the New Testament), its themes and the inter-connectedness of the books. Biblical literacy also involves one's ability to interpret the Bible in its cultural, historical, contextual, grammatical, figurative and spiritual terms. In dealing with the inter-connectedness of the Bible, the Biblically literate reader should also be able to see *how* and *where* the New Testament serves as a fulfillment of the Old Testament. According to Durgin, Biblical literacy is "thorough familiarity with the key narratives, people, order of events, and basic, clear themes throughout the whole Bible – yes, even the minor prophets" (<https://hebraicthought.org/bible.lit...>).

Blair regrettably notes that pastors, authors and pundits are decrying the fact that we are in a famine in terms of biblical literacy. This famine is not due to lack of access to the Bible, but due to lack of interest and cultural cynicism towards Christianity and the Bible. According to Blair, "Biblical literacy" has been defined simply as the acquisition and accumulation of facts about the contents of the Bible and the ability to recall these facts immediately. He also argues that Biblical literacy is beyond merely acquiring facts about the Bible. He explains that literacy has typically been referred to as the ability to read, write and communicate. In this view, not only should one read the Bible, but one should know it through memorization and recall. Blair quotes Steelman, Pierce and Koppenhaver as saying that "to be literate is to be able to gather and to construct meaning using written language". Thus, biblical literacy is not just acquiring facts and the ability to recall them, but the ability to use them to create meaning about life, about God, about the world, and the individual's place in all of it. He explains that it is one thing to read a book and another to be able to recall facts contained in it. But it is quite another thing entirely to allow the narrative contained in that book to shape one's thinking.

Nelson defines biblical literacy as "the ability to rightly read and understand the Bible, using the proper tools of study, thereby becoming well acquainted with the Bible's character (innate qualities) and content" (p.1). Nelson further argues that "Basic literacy, even in an intellectual sense is essential for true saving faith" (1), and that "the mind must rightly comprehend what it is that the heart must respond to" (p.1).

On the other hand, Bailey has made a very vital observation regarding sound Biblical literacy and its importance in understanding Biblical narratives. He stresses the importance of cultural studies in appreciating Biblical literature. Bailey laments that much damage is done to Biblical exegesis, especially the Gospel narratives, when we read the Bible with the spectacle of Western bias. He argues that the Bible literature is set within the Middle Eastern culture where the Bible dramas occurred. While the Old Testament narratives were written in Hebrew and Aramaic (languages spoken in Palestine), the New Testament was written in the Greek language, and these constitute valuable tools in understanding the semiotics of Biblical literature. Thus, an understanding of the Middle Eastern culture would undoubtedly shed some light in the reader's appreciation of Bible themes (pp.11-21).

Writing about God in anthropomorphic representation is not the exclusive task of the Bible and clergy alone; the "Metaphysical Poets", a term coined by the 18th century English critic, Samuel Johnson (1709 – 84), to refer to a group of 17th century (C. 1600 – C. 1690) poets who flourished in England during the period in question, occasionally wrote on religious themes, something beyond the secular and the mundane. Themes such as love/lust, morality, nature, diverse forms of historical memorials, etc., characterised their works. Notable amongst these poets were the likes of John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvel, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley and Thomas Traherne (Abrams and Harpham, 59, 215-217). John Donne, for instance, "imagines religious enlightenment as a form of sexual ecstasy. He parallels the sense of fulfillment to be derived from religious worship to the pleasure derived from sexual activity". In the poem, "Holy Sonnets 14" (1633), the poet persona implores God to rape him, an act which will free him from worldly concerns and make him chaste. Although on the surface, the device seems profane, it is anthropopathic in its rendition: God is semiotised as a man and the process of being enraptured is pictured as a sexual activity. This theme and device are even pursued further in "Holy Sonnets 18" (1690), where he analogises entering the one true Church as entering a woman during an intercourse. The church, like a woman, is to be embraced and open to most men. What is more, the Church in biblical anthropomorphic phraseology is pictured as The Bride of Christ, (SparksNotes.com/plus 2022).

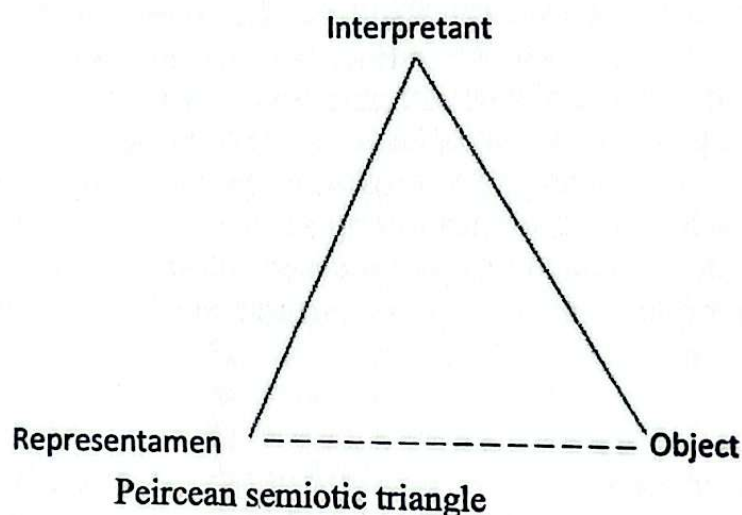
Research Gap

So much has been written on biblical themes such as the nature of God from the standpoint of sectarian or purely religious bias. But not many attempts have been done in terms of interrogating the Bible from an academic perspective. In essence, this paper sheds more light on the nature of God from the academic stance by interrogating the Christian's view of God.

If God is Spirit (John 4:24), can we study what is invisible in physical terms, such that people can relate to it – in this instance about God? But the fact that God is a Spirit does not preclude the fact that He can be known by humans based on what the sacred writs have said about Him. Writing to the Romans, St. Paul declares that the invisible attributes of God are clearly evident and comprehended by creation, even His eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1:20). Thus, this work explores anthropomorphism as employed in the Bible and seeks to resolve the seeming contradiction in ascribing human attributes to God.

Theoretical Framework: Peircean Semiotic Theory

Charles Sanders Peirce, a pragmatist philosopher and logician formulated a semiotic theory, a theory of the nature of the sign (or of the word) that is essentially triadic, ie containing three parts, namely, (a) The *representamen*: This is analogous to de Saussure's 'signifier'. It refers to the form of the sign, which need not be material, though it may be; (b) An *interpretant* or the sense made of the sign; and (c) An object, which is something (or somebody) beyond the sign it refers to. It is otherwise called a referent (Chandler, p.29). This triadic model of the sign is diagrammatically represented as a triangle of a sort called 'Peircean Semiotic Triangle'. The representamen or signifier can be a spoken or a written form of a word unlike the Saussurean model that assigns only the sound property to the signifier. The interpretant is a sign (a sense) in the mind of an interpreter, which is analogous to the signified. The object is the referent, the real thing. The broken lines connecting the representamen and the object indicate that there is no direct relationship between a form of a word or sign and its referent. See figure below:



This semiotic model helps us in the process of interrogating the anthropomorphic terms relating to God in this way. The phrase, "finger of God" is a representamen or a form of the signifier. It can be a verbalised phrase or even a written one. The sense it conveys to the interpreter (in this case humans as the audience of biblical text) is an expressive form which pictures God as having a tangible part like finger, common with humanity. This is what Peirce terms an 'interpretant'. This is a sign pointing to yet another thing, the object. The object is the real meaning, which is beyond the tangible. Tangible things are more understood by humans than the intangible. The 'object' of God is the intangible Spirit Being who cannot be fully cognized by man. "The finger of God", therefore bespeaks of God's manifest power, what He does and what He can do. Anthropomorphic terms, therefore, give the impression /portrayal that God is human or physical; the eternal reality is that God is transcendental: a Spirit. But it is to satisfy the need to make man grasp the essence of God that an anthropomorphic term is devised. And God himself not only permits it, He also uses it. An overview of most or all of the nature or essence of God leads one to the view that anthropomorphism is at variance with the reality of the nature of God.

Analysis: The Concept of God

The concept of God is derived largely from the Biblical accounts of whom God is. This is not to argue, however, that the concept of God is not discussed in other sacred texts and philosophies. The concept of God is illustrated by His attributes which arise from the fact that God self-discloses Himself to His creation. Mikolaski (1979) asserts that "God is the creator and sustainer of all" (Matt. 6:37; 7:11; Luke 11:13; 12:30). He observes that New Testament teaching on the doctrine of God is continuous with Old Testament teaching, adding that New Testament epitomizes the three-fold nature of God – "God is personal, God is love, and God is good" (p.463). As a personal God, He reveals Himself as Father in both Old and New Testaments. The frequent allusions to the divine fatherhood of God suggest a filial relationship with those who are obedient to God. Besides, God is revealed as a God of love (Gk. Agape). The Johannine writings declare that the very nature of God is love and that Christ is the gift of God's love to the world (I John 4:8, 16b; John 3:16; I John 4:9, 10). While Paul sees the atonement as the gift of love (Rom. 5:8, 9), Peter avers that God's love is expressed through His mercy (I Pet. 2:3, 10) "which culminates in the sacrifice of Christ" (2:24, 25) (p.463).

Again, Mikolaski opines that God is good and that this is demonstrated in His holiness, righteousness, justice, and perfection. As a holy and righteous God, He calls men to holiness. And as a good God, He bestows the riches of His grace

upon humans by justifying the sinner. According to the Gospels, the goodness and righteousness of God, through Christ, "transcend moral rectitude" (p.464).

Furthermore, Mikolaski (1978) draws from the scriptures that God is Spirit, (John 4:24), infinite, invisible (John 1:18; Rom. 11:33; Col. 1:15; Heb. 12:9; I John 4:12, 20), light (I John 1:5). God is also said to be glorious, and this glory is disclosed in Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; Col. 1:27; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:16-18). In addition, God is the Lord, self-sufficient, the author of life (John 5:26; I Tim. 6:16), free and sovereign in His works (Acts 18:21; Rom. 15:32; Eph. 1:11; James 4:15), God is unchangeable (Rom. 11:29; James 1:17), God is righteous and He Judges justly (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:2, 6; 3:6; I Peter 1:17), yet is full of mercy and compassion (Luke 1:50; Rom. 2:4; Eph. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:15), God is all-powerful (Matt. 11:25; Luke 1:37; Rom. 4:17; Eph. 1:11), God is patient and faithful in His dealings (Rom. 2:4; I Thess. 5:24; 2 Tim. 2:13; I Peter 4:19). Citing a number of scriptures, Mikolaski surmises that there is but one God (John 5:44; 17:13; I Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:5, 6; I Tim. 1:17; 2:5; James 2:19), who is omnipresent (Acts 17:24, 27, 28) and omniscient (Rom. 11:33-36; Heb. 4:13) (p.464).

Writing about the nature and attributes of God in the Old Testament, Ellison (1979) opines that God is called by two main names or titles such as *Elohim* and *Yahweh*. The name *Elohim* reveals God in the 'plural majesty', when reference is to the God of Israel. As *Elohim*, God discloses Himself as the God of all the earth and all men, who is revealed to all through nature and His mighty acts. The title *Yahweh* is the name of God within Israel because of the revelation of Himself through Moses, the prophets and in the Torah (Psalm 19). By thus revealing Himself to Israel, God would make Himself known to all nations through Israel. Ellison also asserts that God reveals Himself as the Creator. The use of *Elohim* as the one true source of power in the world also suggests the concept of Creator who creates out of nothing (pp.57-58).

In addition, Ellison (1979) discusses the metaphysical attributes of God, which are derived from Philosophy (metaphysics). These attributes are God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, which can be found in the Old Testament. Ellison observes that in the Old Testament the all-sovereignty of God is associated with the title *El-Shaddai* (Exod. 6:3). As omniscient, God is sometimes represented as though He did not know the future (Jer. 13:5-11), that is, when the scripture states that God 'repented'. Next is God's omnipresence which suggests His transcendence because He is spirit whose power is exercised at a distance (58).

Concerning God's moral attributes, Ellison identifies the following - holiness, righteousness, compassion and mercy, grace, love, etc. These attributes, and others, depict God as a perfect God and in whom all these attributes perfectly combine (p.58).

Tozer (2003) discusses several attributes of God such as His self-existence, transcendence, eternalness, omnipotence, immutability, omniscience, wisdom, sovereignty, love, faithfulness, etc. This paragraph will dwell a bit on the faithfulness of God. Tozer asserts that God's faithfulness implies that He will never be or act in a manner that is inconsistent with Himself. Since God will not and cannot act in a way that is not consistent with His nature, His people can trust Him. God's faithfulness applies both to humanity and to creation as well. God's faithfulness also means that He is a covenant keeping God who watches over His word to execute it (pp.163 – 179)

Ladd (1987) examines the various concepts of God found in the teachings of Jesus. He goes on to say that one of these concepts depicts God as one who seeks. This is not to suggest, however, that Jesus' purpose was to teach a new theoretical truth about God, since God is One Who is to be experienced, not a teaching to be imparted. As the seeking God, he goes seeking out the sinner. The truth is set forth at length in the three parables in Luke 15. Besides, the view of God as the seeking God, He is also the inviting God who invites humanity to the banquet or feast of eschatological salvation (Matt. 22:1ff; Luke 14:16ff; cf. Matt. 8:11). Next is the concept that God is the fatherly God. Here, there is an inseparable relationship between the Kingdom of God and His fatherhood. The righteous are to inherit the kingdom of the Father (Matt. 14:43; 25:34; 6:9, 10; 26:29, Luke 12:32). The universal Fatherhood of God is well illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24). Ladd also asserts that while God seeks the sinner and offers him the gift of the kingdom, He is nevertheless the God who is the Judge of those who spurn His gracious offer of His Kingdom (Matt. 3:12; 25:34, 41; 23:13, 33; 18:6) (81 – 90).

For his part, Berkouwer (2008) asserts that God's invisibility "does not, of course imply that He is unknowable, as if man had no choice but to be agnostic" (p.360). The invisible God has revealed Himself and man is enabled to encounter Him and communicate with Him. So when the Bible talks of "seeing God" (Heb. 11:27), this should be understood as metaphorical. That the ancients encountered God in various ways and circumstances, reflects "the goodness of God in His gracious nearness, His condescending love and mercy" (Judges 6:22; 13:22; Exod. 3:6; Isa. 6:5; Num. 12:8; Exod. 24:9-11; 33:18, 20, 23) (p.361).

How can we reconcile God's visibility and invisibility? Berkouwer (2008) well observes that man cannot visually grasp God. Yet in the Bible, instances abound of the theophanic revelation of God, which is divine condescension (Exod. 24:10, 17; 34:5; 1Kings 8:11-12; Ezek. 1:26-28; Exod. 19:21). These variety of images and comparisons portray "God's inapproachable elusiveness and elevation above human grasp" as described by the prophets in numerous similes. Meanwhile, the God who had hitherto been invisible has revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 14:9; 12:45; 1:18) (362-366).

The Nature of God

Here, attempt shall be made to describe the essence and anthropomorphic terms that are related to, or that enhance, the understanding of same and those that detract from it. Popular theology asserts that God is infinite, i.e., not finite; free from restriction, limitation and confinement and defect (Hammond, 44-45). He is an absolute being. He is eternal, without a beginning and without an end. Rather, he is the beginning of things, time and space. If God has no beginning, why is it stated in Gen.1:1 & John 1:1 that 'in the beginning...'? Perhaps to give man an account that makes meaning about creation, the Bible anthropomorphically puts it as if God has a beginning or as if the Word that became flesh has a beginning. But from the scripture it can be gathered that God is the beginning of all things. Jesus declares that 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end....' (Rev. 22:13, 1:8). This is to capture the timelessness of the Godhead, who has no beginning and no end. (Deut 32:40 "... I live forever").

God's spirit nature is a 'given'. Jesus declares bluntly: "God is a Spirit" (Jn. 4:24). "You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (Jn 5.37). God being a spirit means that He is not corporeal, not confined to body or form, not possessing a body (Hammond, p.48-49; Kendall, p.43). This means that qualities that belong to matter are not ascribable to him. He is invisible. However, He is pictured as a father, in anthropomorphic term. The Son, the second person in the Trinity incarnated, i.e., took on flesh, came to the earth and lived as man, though being hundred percent God. He is the only person in the Triune God that possesses every quality of human person in flesh. He was born; he lived and died. He hungered and thirsted. He grew weak in flesh, ate, drank and defaecated. He sometimes spoke of God the Father in a likened manner that could confuse logical reasoning man into conceiving God as a human person. He declared: "... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father?" (Jn. 14:9). On the face value, it seems that Jesus says he is the carbon copy or the clone version of the Father-with identical physical features. Rather, what he means from this is that when men find that Jesus is the Way, they will begin to understand his descent from the Father from that revelation. Jesus, being the express image of God, radiates the moral attributes of God -holiness, compassion, mercy, grace, love and faithfulness in keeping covenants. And he declares that he and his father are one. This anthropomorphic term helps man to understand the nature of God more succinctly.

In several instances the Lord makes reference to His "right hand" metaphorically signifying the power of God"...Neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand: For I lift my hand to heaven (Exo. 32:39-40) mighty hand (Exo.32:11. Therefore, behold I will cause them to know this once will I cause them to know my hand and my might and they shall know that my name is great

(Jer.16:21). Twice God speaks of His hands as a source of protection (Exo33)" ...and I will cover thee with my hand until I have passed...". Closely related to this is the metaphoric use of "the finger of God" to represent the Spirit and hence the power of God (Lk.11:20 cf. Matt 12:28 "...Spirit of God"). The Egyptians recognized the power of God by declaring. "This is the finger of God" (Exo8:19). These anthropomorphic terms (hands and fingers) help man to know God, more of his omnipotence; hence the language here is facilitative, but contradictory in the cognition of God's invisibility.

His being almighty is explained in his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. He is the be- all- and -the- end all. He is father of all (2Corinth 6:18). He is the Lord of hosts (Jer. 5:14). He is ruler of all. He is the most high that rules (Dan 5:32). He occupies a throne in heaven (Rev. 4:1-6). His omnipotence is captured in His might, power and strength, (again symbolized by His hand, finger, spirit etc). His omniscience is also explained in his ability to know all things, in secret, or in distant and hidden places. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good (Prov.15:3). The 'eyes' here represent both the omniscience and omnipresence. He is all knowing (Ps.139:1-4). His hands, eyes, thought, mind are everywhere.

Intriguingly, when God refuses to give man attention or answer his prayers, He is said to "hide His face" (Mic. 3:4, Isaiah 59:3, 1:15). He is said to withdraw his presence, to be separated from his sinful people (Isaiah 59:1-2). At such times, does he cease to be everywhere, to be confined to some other places? Certainly not. This withdrawal of face or presence is a human way of capturing God's social withdrawal of the protection He gives, of alienation, of non-cooperation. It bespeaks of withdrawal of favour or withdrawal of God's good disposition to man. God's mercy is for those who deserve it. That God is a person is implied in the scriptures. The express characteristics of a person include possession of mind, thought, intelligence, will, reason, individuality, self-consciousness and self-determination. All these are inherent in God - the Triune God. God has demonstrated all these. He has shown that his thoughts "for man are for an expected end", meaning that he means well for humanity. He has good plans and good destinies for people. He invites the sinner to come and 'reason' with him (Isa.1:18). Jesus prayed that God's will be done (Matt. 6:10).

That God is a person is gleaned from the various appearances and conversations He made with many persons such as Abraham, Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, Jeremiah, Joshua, Balaam, etc. In several instances, God promises to be good to obedient people, so He is a personal God who cares (Exo. 3:6). Perhaps, it is this essence of God and His desire for man to know Him as a person that He devised anthropomorphic term for Him. He gave man a consciousness and a tendency to have a relationship with Him - to worship a personal God who controls his affairs. Even though He is God of all humanity, his personality is

couched in the masculine gender (Kendall, 1987, p.40). According to him, Adam was made in the image of God, while Eve was made for man and from man and that all references in the scriptures speak of God as 'He' or 'Him'.

God is holy, i.e. He has no sin and His actions cannot be faulted. In fact, the rightness or wrongness of an action is defined by Him. He declares to Moses: "... where thou standest is holy" (Exo. 3:5) "... you shall sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy for I am holy" (Lev.11:44, 45). The four beasts before the heavenly throne declared: "... Holy, holy, holy is Lord God Almighty, which was, and is and is to come" (Rev. 4:8). And He tolerates neither sin, compromise nor his glory being shared. It is this particular uncompromising quality that is captured in an intriguing anthropopathic term "jealous God". He brooks no rival. "Thou shall worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God (Exo.34:14, 20.5). He is not jealous out of evil covetousness, but because his loyalty is shared with other deities instead of sole loyalty because of His supremacy, sole creatorship and sole ownership. He demands total loyalty. If a sovereign earthly ruler of a nation or kingdom demands this of his citizens, even much more the Almighty God. And if a spouse so aspires to solely own another's body and love, how much more God who created man, not just in His image, but for Himself (Rev.4:11)?

Conclusion

Anthropomorphism is an attempt to pigeon-hole the cognition of God by man who has limited intelligence. Anthropomorphic terms constitute expressive form of semiotising God as having tangible parts as humans. They are signs pointing to the actual meaning, which is that God is a Spirit Being; transcendental. And this is beyond man's cognition. Only God is perfect in knowledge, wisdom, understanding and discernment. He knows all His creatures inside out. Man cannot know everything nor can he totally comprehend God. He can only know God or know about Him to that extent which God reveals Himself, the anthropomorphic language, notwithstanding. This is because in flesh man is limited. This attempt to 'embody' God contradicts His very nature. And any God that is known in all His ramifications ceases to be God. So, even though God gave man language and glimpses of Himself, man cannot fully comprehend God, for His ways are past finding. However, anthropomorphism in the scriptures helps mortal man to figure out a personal, holy, almighty, invisible and infinite God- a God who dwells in heaven and yet in human body, rather than in earthly building, and who inhabits the praise of His people. He is, indeed, an enigma, really a stumbling block to the logical and academic mind. Biblical literacy, therefore, tasks us to go beyond logic to the metaphysical realm, which demands that we understand the spiritual in anthropomorphic terms.

References

- Abrahams, M. H. & Harpham, G. G. (2012). *A glossary of Literary Terms* (10th ed.). U.S.A. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Bailey, K.E (2008). *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic.
- Berkouwer, G. C. (1972). *The return of Christ*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Blair, S. C. (n.d.). *The Chaplain's Report*. Journeys in Faith and Work Blog at Wordpress.com (Retrieved on 01/18/2022).
- Caird, G. B. (1980). *The language and imagery of the Bible*. London: Gerald, Duckworth & Co/Ltd.
- Chandler, D. *Semiotics: The Basics* 2nd edn. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Durgin, C. (n.d.). Are you Bible-Literate? Confer for Hebraic Thought, King's College, New York. <https://hebraicthought.org/bible-lit...> (Retrieved 01/26/2022).
- Ellison, H. L. (1979). The Theology of the Old Testament. In *New International Bible Commentary: Based on the NIV*. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan, PP. 55 – 59.
- Hammond, T.C. (1968). In *Understanding, Be Men: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Revised and Edited* by David F. Wright. London: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Kendall, R. T. (1996). *Understanding Theology*. Fearn, Ross-shire.
- Ladd, G. E. (1987). *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.
- Langer, S. K. (2014). Expressiveness. In Timothy Naylor, Patricia Dansby & the English Department (Compilers) *The San Jacinto Reader 2nd Edition*. Pearson Custom Publishing, 135-141
- Lloyd-Jones, M. (2003). *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son vol.1*. Wheatney: Crossway Books.
- McKeon, R. (2001). (Ed). *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. With an introduction by C.D.C. Reeve. (Originally published by Random House in 1941). New York: The Modern Library.
- Mikolaski, S. J. (1979). The Theology of the New Testament. in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, Vol. 1. Grand Rapid, Michigan: Zondervan pp.462 – 464

- Mikolaski, S. J. (1978). The Theology of the New Testament. In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, pp. 457-480
- Nelson, F. (2011). The Importance of Biblical Literacy for the Next Generation (Paper presented at Children Desiring God Conference: Holding Fast to the Word of Truth) Retrieved 02/10/22.
- New International Version of the Holy Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986.
- Schoville, K. (2018).
<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/anthropomorphism/> retrieved 14 November.
- SparksNotes.com/plus 2022. Donne's Poetry. Retrieved on 24 September, 2022
- Strauss, D. F. M., "God in Himself" and "God as Revealed to Us": The Impact of Substance Concept". *Acta Theologica* 2010 30(1): 123-144 1015-8758 © UV/UFS <http://www.uovs.ac.za/actatheologica>
- (1979). *The Holy Bible Authorised King James*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.
- Tozer, A. W. (2003). *The Attributes of God: Deeper into the Father's Heart*, Vol. 2. Kaduna: Evangel Publishers Ltd.