



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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COURSE TITLE: GOD AND REVELATION

COURSE GUIDE

CTH 321 GOD AND REVELATION

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INTRODUCTION

This course, God and Revelation is about the person of God and man's knowledge of God. The need to know God arises from the fact that He is our creator, the object of our worship, and the one who controls and rule this world. The knowledge of God is important for our worship and how we live our lives. This course is part of what is called "Theology Proper." It is about God's essence, being, and His relationship with the creation.

The main aim of this course is to help you gain more knowledge of the person of God and His revelation. This course will lead you to see the necessity and importance of God's revelation to humanity. Revelation is God's self disclosure to humanity. God is "other than us," i.e. He is far removed from humanity and different from us in many ways but He has chosen to enter into a relationship with humanity. It is because of the relationship that He has revealed himself to us. Fundamentally, God has revealed Himself through general and special revelation but humanity also know Him through His attributes, names, and images which describe different aspects of God life. A careful study of God and Revelation will help you evaluate our worship and the way we conduct our lives before Him. This course will be based on biblical materials and emphasise the importance of biblical context and content. This is for you to avoid speculative teachings and evaluate claims to prophecies, miracles, dreams, and visions today.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE

The general purpose of this course is to lead you to in-depth study of God and Revelation. It is important to note that the materials of this course go beyond the introductory level. In this course you will be learning about the person of God, different views that people have about God, and the different ways God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity. We will look at different concepts such as attributes, natural theology, experiential theology, principle of accommodation, names and images of God.

COURSE AIMS

The aims of this course are to:

- introduce you to the meaning and nature of God
- lead you to examine the relationship between God and man and the basis of this relationship as well as man's status before God

- expose you to general and special revelation and their modes in order to see how God has dealt with humanity in the past and continues in the present
- lead you to see the differences between general and special revelation as well as their deficiencies and importance
- enable you to see the root of human problem and negative attitudes towards God
- help you to grasp the importance of natural phenomena to our knowledge of God.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To achieve the aims stated above, the course sets its overall objectives which are always stated at the beginning of each unit. You are strongly advised to always read these objectives carefully. These objectives will help you evaluate your progress. When you have successfully completed this course you should be able to:

- define God and explain the implication of the name
- identify the different sources of man's knowledge of God
- explain the nature and meaning of God's revelation
- identify the two most important aspects of God's revelation
- account for the relationship between general and special revelations
- discuss the modes of general and special revelation
- explain why attributes are considered part of God's revelation
- discuss the names of God
- account for the necessity and importance of the doctrine of inspiration
- identify the differences between natural theology and general revelation
- discuss progressive revelation and be able to give some of its examples
- explain images of God, their importance, and their different aspects.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

For you to complete this course, you are expected to read the units thoroughly, read recommended textbooks and other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria. Each and every unit has self - assessment exercises and you may be required to submit assignments for assessment purpose. It is assumed that this course should take you about 15 weeks to work through. In order to help you achieve this, you will find listed below all the components of the course, what you have to

do and how you should proceed to allocate your time to each unit in order to enable you complete the course on time and successfully.

COURSE MATERIALS

The key components of this course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Recommended Textbooks and other reference materials
4. Assignment file

STUDY UNITS

The study units in this course are as follow:

Module 1 The Knowledge and Revelation of God

- Unit 1 The Person and Knowledge of God
- Unit 2 The Existence of God
- Unit 3 The Denial of God's Existence
- Unit 4 Introduction to God's Revelation
- Unit 5 Analysis of General Revelation

Module 2 General Revelation and the Analysis of Special Revelation

- Unit 1 The Effects of General Revelation, and the Analysis of Natural and Experiential Theology
- Unit 2 Special Revelation
- Unit 3 The Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration
- Unit 4 Theories of Inspiration
- Unit 5 Methods of God's Revelation

Module 3 Other Means of Revelation: Attributes, Names, and Images

- Unit 1 Classification of the Attributes of God
- Unit 2 Attributes Belonging to the Essence and Existence of God
- Unit 3 Attributes Relating to God's Life
- Unit 4 God's Revelation in His Names
- Unit 5 God's Revelation through Images

Each unit contains a list of references and further readings. Do your best to get as many as possible of those textbooks and materials listed. The

textbooks and materials are meant to give you in-depth knowledge in the course.

ASSIGNMENT FILE

In the assignment file, you will find all the details of the work you are required to submit to your tutor for marking. The grade you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final grade you obtain from the course. Read more information on assignments in the assignment section of this course guide.

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

Your course materials contain the presentation schedule which gives you the key dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Do not forget to submit all your assignments by the due date. However, alternate dates and times for submission of the assignments in situation of emergency will be given and at the tutor's description. You should avoid falling behind in your work.

ASSESSMENT

There are three aspects to the assessment of the course. In the first place, there are self assessment exercises. In the second place, there are tutor-marked assignment and in the third place, a written final examination. You are expected to be sincere and honest in attempting the exercises. It is expected that you apply information, knowledge and skill that have been gained during the course. All assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the presentation schedule and assignment file.

The assignment submitted to your tutor counts for 30 per cent. The final examination at the end of the course counts for 70 per cent Total is 100 **per cent.**

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

There are three tutor-marked assignments in this course. Each assignment will count for 10 per cent towards your total course work. Assignment questions for this course are contained in the assignment file. You will be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your study units, reading and reference books. You are to read and do further research on your own. When you complete each assignment, send it together with a TMA form to your tutor on assignment file.

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination for this course will be of 2 hours 15 minutes duration and will be marked over 70 per cent of your total course grade. The examination will comprise of questions which reflect the type of self-assessment exercises, practice exercise, and tutor-marked assignments you have previously solved. Every area of this course will be assessed. You are advised to do thorough reading of the course material and even revise your tutor-marked assignments and self-assessment exercises to be fully prepared for the final examination. The final examination will cover all aspects of the course.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The course marking scheme is broken down as in the table below:

Assignments	Marks
Assignment 1-3	Three assignments, 10 per cent each =30 per cent
Final Examination	70 per cent of overall course grade
Total	100 per cent

COURSE OVERVIEW

Below is the table which brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them and the assignments that follow.

Unit	Title of Work	Week Activity	Unit Assessment
1	The Person of God	1	1
2	The Existence of God	1	1
3	The Denial of the Existence of God	1	1
4	Introduction to God's Revelation	1	1
5	General Revelation	1	1
6	The Effects of General Revelation, and the Analysis of Natural and Experiential Theology	1	1
7	Special Revelation	1	1
8	The Doctrine of Inspiration	1	1
9	Theories of Inspiration	1	1
10	Methods of God's Revelation	1	1
11	Classification of God's Attributes	1	1

12	Attributes Belonging to the Essence and Existence of God	1	1
13	Attributes Relating to God's Life	1	1
14	God's Revelation in His Names	1	1
15	God's Revelation Through Images	1	1
16	Final Examination	1	1

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

One good thing about Distance Learning Programme is that “the Study units” replace the lecturer of the course. The advantage of this programme is that course materials are designed in such a way that you work through the course at your pace, time and place that is convenient for you. The study materials are made such that you read the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. As a lecturer gives you an exercise to be done in-class, your study units provides exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

There is a common format for each study unit. In this format, the first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit to be treated and how each unit integrates with other units and the course as a whole. Next item is the objectives that make you know what you should be able to do as you complete studying the unit. These objectives are set to enable you use them to guide your study. As such, when you finish studying a particular unit, go back to check if you have achieved the objective. If you make a habit of doing this, you will increase your chances of passing the course well.

The unit content material is embedded in the main body of the unit. Self-assessment exercises are spread throughout the units. Working through these assessments will help you achieve the objectives for the unit and prepares you for the assignments and examination.

The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's work is to help you.

1. Read this course guide very well.
2. Organise your study schedule. Stick to the time you are expected to spend on each unit.
3. After making your study schedule, abide by it faithfully. Do not get behind in your course work because of your failure to adhere to your study schedule. Let your tutor know if you encounter difficulties.
4. Turn to unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.

5. Assemble the study materials e.g. textbooks as contained in the reference section and the course materials.
6. Work through the unit. As you work through the unit you will know what other sources to consult for further information.
7. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date information about your course will be available.
8. Do your assignments as required. They are to help you achieve the set objectives of the course.
9. Review the objectives of every unit to ensure that they are properly met. If there is any doubt, consult your tutor.
10. Start work on the next unit when you are sure that you have met the objectives of the previous unit. Continue in that order until you have worked through the course.
11. When you submit your assignment to your tutor, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. When the assignment is eventually returned pay particular attention to your tutor's comments both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also the written comments on the ordinary assignment.
12. When you finish studying the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Again, you are to cross check to make sure that the unit's objectives are achieved.

FACILITATORS/TUTORS AND TUTORIALS

In this two credits hour course, there are 28 hours of tutorials (14 - two hours sessions). You will be told of the dates, times and location of these tutorials together with the name and phone number of your tutor as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Each assignment will be marked by your tutor. Pay close attention to the comments your tutor might make on your assignment as these may help you in your progress. Ensure that your assignment gets to your tutor on or before the due date. Your tutorials are very important, therefore try and attend all of them. It is an opportunity to meet your tutor and get help in form of discussion over areas of difficulty encountered in the course of reading.

SUMMARY

This course introduces you to God and His revelation to humanity. It leads you to understand the person, nature, essence, and being as well as the activities of God in the created world. The course helps you to see God's involvement in the history of nations and lives of human beings. The nature and activities of God can be seen in the different aspects of God's revelation to humanity. God has chosen to reveal Himself in order to have a relationship with humanity. The presentations in this course are to help you evaluate the worship and conduct of the contemporary Church.

**MAIN
COURSE**

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MODULE 1 THE KNOWLEDGE AND REVELATION OF GOD

Unit 1	The Person and Knowledge of God
Unit 2	The Existence of God
Unit 3	The Denial of God's Existence
Unit 4	Introduction to God's Revelation
Unit 5	Analysis of General Revelation

UNIT 1 THE PERSON AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	The Person of God
3.2	Man's Knowledge of God
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor- Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be exposed to the meaning and connotation of the word God. You will find out that both in the Old and New Testaments, God is to be worshipped and invoked by human beings. This unit will lead you to understand that the Bible uses the word "know" differently. Knowing God means having a relationship with Him. This is expressed both in the Old and New Testaments. This unit also deals with the natural sources of man's knowledge of God and gives biblical support for all these views.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- explain what the Hebrew and Greek word about God reveal about Him
- state what the Bible means by knowing God
- identify the various sources of man's knowledge of God
- identify man's attitudes towards God's revealed knowledge.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Person of God

The word God in Hebrew is from the root word meaning “to call.” It denotes the object of worship as one whom men call upon, worship or invoke. It has the connotation of a personal object of religious perception and one with power. The New Testament word carries the meaning that object is spirit. When we put these thought together, the word God as found in the Bible fundamentally is about the almighty spirit who is worshipped and whose name and aids are invoked by human beings.

Everywhere people are religious, and in many parts of the world people recognise a High God. Sometimes the non-Christians’ ideas of the High God are so different that they cannot be identified with the God of the Scripture. But at other times the local idea of the High God is so close to the biblical picture of God that missionaries have simply used the local name for this God in their preaching.

It is not surprising that people have such an idea of God, because all nations descended from Adam and Eve, to whom God first revealed Himself (Acts 17:26). Moreover, as we have learned, all people can observe God’s General Revelation in his works of creation and providence (Rom. 1:19-21; Acts 14:17).

But knowing about God is not the same as what the Bible calls “knowing God.” Here, *knowing God* points to a relationship. In the Old Testament the word *know* is used for intimate personal fellowship, for example between a man and his wife (Gen. 4:1, 17, 25, etc.). It is also used for a relationship with God (e.g. Jer. 31:34; 2:8; 4:22). Such a relationship can only exist where God reveals His word. Thus we read of the boy Samuel, “Now Samuel did not yet **know the LORD**: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam. 3:7).

God’s special revelation and a personal relationship with him, is the only way for an accurate knowledge of Him, In the New Testament we find the same truth brought out in the story where Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.... Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (Jn. 14:9-11). Here Jesus firmly identifies “knowing” Him, and “knowing” the Father, with believing in Him. Without faith, in response to God’s special revelation, there can be no real “knowledge” of God (cf. Jn. 10:14; Gal. 4:9; Heb. 8:11).

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. What is the name of the god that your people worshipped before the advent of Christianity?
2. Were there any similarities between that god and the God that is found in the Bible?
3. From the above paragraph, what is it that leads to the real knowledge of God?

3.2 Man's Knowledge of God

Man's knowledge of God has several sources. These sources are as follows:

1. The Traditional or Historical Knowledge of God

Man's knowledge of God can be traced to the first man, Adam. Ever since God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26), man has known about God his creator. However, we can deduce from the Bible that sin distorted man's knowledge of God. The living relationship that Adam enjoyed with God was lost when Adam sinned. Throughout the generations that follow Adam, the truth about God was distorted as man invented lies about God his creator. Romans 1, teaches that men by their wickedness have suppressed the truth about God (V.18). They refuse to honor and worship God (V. 21). Instead they worshipped images of men and animals (V. 23). They did not worship the creator but they worshipped creatures that He has created (V.25).

2. The Perceived Knowledge of God

The first chapter of Romans also teaches that we can know about God through what we can see in the things He has created. Verses 19 and 20 reads:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, had been made known.

These verses do not mean to say that man can clearly see what God is like by just looking at the things he has created. We must remember that nature itself is affected by sin (Gen. 3:17,18; Roms. 8:19-22). Furthermore, man's perception itself is coloured by sin, consequently he cannot see God clearly in nature unless he looks through the spectacles of faith.

3. The Innate Knowledge of God

Some theologians believe that man also has an innate knowledge of God. By this we mean that man is born with the knowledge of God inside him, or that he has an instinctive knowledge of God. It is difficult to find a biblical support for this. What the Bible clearly teaches is that man has an innate knowledge of the law of God. Romans 2:15 says, “what the law requires is written on their hearts.” The Bible does not mention a similar innate knowledge of the Law-Giver, God himself.

SELF -ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. Explain the various sources of man’s knowledge of God.
- ii. Summarise what man had done as a result of the sin of Adam.
- iii. What is the problem with the innate knowledge of God?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Word God denotes an object to be honoured and worshipped. The Bible depicts God as an almighty spirit from whom human beings look for aids. Historical survey has shown that all people have some knowledge of God. While others have the correct knowledge, others have distorted knowledge of Him. Man’s general knowledge or awareness of God, which is the innate knowledge, is rooted in the fact that all men are descendants of Adam, who was created by God Himself.

5.0 SUMMARY

This introductory unit attempted to explain the meaning of the word God in Hebrew and Greek, and the implication of the name. This unit established that all men are created by God and are descendants of one man therefore all men are related. The three main sources of man’s knowledge of God discussed in this unit include the traditional or historical, man’s perceived knowledge, and man’s innate knowledge of God.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the meaning of the word God and state its implications.
2. Discuss the three sources of the man’s knowledge of God.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Bavick, H. (2004). *Reformed Dogmatics; God and Creation.*, Vol. 2. Translated by John Vreiend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Berkhof, I. (1981). *Systematic Theology.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Boice, M. J. (1978). *Foundations of the Christian Faith.* Vol. 1. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Erickson, M. (2006). *Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

UNIT 2 THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Existence of God
 - 3.2 Proofs of God's Existence
 - 3.2.1 Ontological Argument
 - 3.2.2 Cosmological Argument
 - 3.2.3 Teleological Argument
 - 3.2.4 Moral Argument
 - 3.2.5 Argument from Universal Consent
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we established the fact that every group of people has a religion and an idea of a High God whether they worship Him or not. Man's knowledge of God comes from the fact that mankind is created by God Himself and descends from the first man, comes from what he sees from created things, and also through an innate knowledge. Having established that, it is important to also establish the existence of God. We can only talk about the knowledge of God because He exists. The Bible, which is the main and most accurate source of the knowledge of God, does not take time to argue about the existence of God. It assumes the existence and teaches that it should be accepted by faith. Despite this, some theologians and philosophers have taken the pain to device rational arguments for God's existence. This unit takes you through some of these arguments, noting their importance and deficiencies. Though these arguments are helpful, they do not prove the existence of a personal loving God.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the position of the Bible on the issue of God's existence
- explain the nature of the faith that Christians exhibit
- identify the weaknesses and strengths of the proof of God's existence

- state the various arguments for God’s existence and their various versions
- identify the theologians who propounded these arguments.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Existence of God

The existence of God is the most important question in human existence. It affects the whole tenor of human life, whether man is regarded as the Supreme Being in the universe or whether it is believed that man has superior being that he must love and obey, or perhaps defy.

In reality one cannot speak of the knowledge or revelation of God unless the existence of God is established. In Christian theology, the greatest presumption is that God exists. This assumption is reasonable. This does not mean that we can logically demonstrate the existence of God. We accept the existence of God by faith but faith that is based on reliable information, faith that is not blind, faith based on evidence found primarily in the Bible as well as in nature. It should be noted that the proof from the Bible is not explicit or logical but assumed. The biblical verse that comes close to prove the existence of God is Hebrew 11:6. The opening verses of the Bible attest that God created the world and the entire Bible teaches that as the creator, God upholds all things, rules over the destinies of individuals and nations and He works all things according to His will. This can be seen clearly in the history of Israel and the life and work of His son Jesus Christ. The Bible is the revelation of God’s words in actions.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- In the above paragraph, there is a phrase which reads “faith based on evidence found primarily in the Bible as well as in nature.” What is the evidence that is seen in nature?
- Give biblical examples which show that God upholds nations and individuals.

3.2 The Proofs of God’s Existence

The rational arguments are to support the proposition that the existence of God is capable of logical demonstration. The fact is that we accept the existence of God by faith but it is faith based on reliable information. These arguments are part of what is called Natural Theology. Natural theology that stands on its own and is self-sufficient does not take us far. Even before these arguments are discussed it must be understood that they have fundamental deficiencies. They do not tell us about a

righteous and holy God. This does not mean they are worthless. Rational arguments are testimonies about God and can augment and strengthen our faith even though they are not grounds of faith and cannot induce faith. These arguments are a faithful observance of the God's created order.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Summarise the importance of rational proofs in the above paragraph.

3.2.1 Ontological Argument

This argument is expounded by Anselm, Descartes and Samuel Clarke. This argument comes in many forms; however, all of them are dealing with the attempt to prove the existence of God from thought. The idea is that whenever we think about God, we necessarily think of His existence. Here we are dealing with our consciousness. And we either trust it or despair it.

Here we are going to list only the three most popular forms:

- 1) The first one tries to prove the existence of God from the general ideas and norms present in the human mind.
- 2) The second form deduces the existence of God from the necessity of thinking of the highest absolute idea. It concludes that that idea is God.
- 3) The third has to do with the innateness of the idea of God as a fact that can in no way be explained except by the existence of the God who implanted this idea in the human mind.

Let us state the argument by Anselm in full:

- Man has the idea of absolutely perfect being, named God
- Something can only be absolutely perfect when it exists
- Therefore the absolute perfect being, named God, exists.

This argument only proves that the concept of God exists and not that God Himself exists. This argument is used by Existentialists who think about God as a concept and not a living being.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. What do we mean by norms?
- ii. What do we mean when we say God is absolutely perfect?

3.2.2 Cosmological Argument

This argument was propounded by John of Damascus, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. It is also known as Causal argument. Cosmos means the world or the universe. The argument is based on the existence of a cause. They argue that all things individually have a cause, so the world as a whole must also have a cause. They conclude that this primary great and the last cause is God.

They argued that:

- everything has a cause
- when we trace back all causes we come to one ultimate and absolute cause also called a first cause
- this absolute or first cause is God.

The deficiency of this argument is that it tells us nothing about the character of this cosmic cause. It only tells us that there is a self-existent, first and absolute world-cause. In addition, it cannot be proven that there is only one first cause for all things. The first may also be an impersonal thing, and does not prove the existence of a personal God.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. Mention anything you know that has a cause.
- ii. What are the importance and deficiencies of this argument?

3.2.3 Teleological Argument

The Greek word *telos* has the connotation of a definite purpose or a particular goal or end. Teleological argument proceeds from the order, beauty, harmony and purpose observable in the world. This order is observed in the entire world and particular creatures both animate and inanimate such as the sun, stars, moon, humans, plants and animals. The Bible also teaches that there is purpose for the creation and created things. Verses that testify to this include Prov.8; 1Cor. 3:21-23; Rom.8:28. The Teleological argument holds that:

- when we look at the world we see order, harmony and purpose in the things that exist
- this order and harmony implies that it is designed by an intelligent being
- this intelligent being is God.

The problem of this view is that it does not tell us whether there is one single intelligent being or there are many working in harmony and for the purposefulness of history.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

- i. According to this paragraph what is the goal of life?
- ii. What do we mean when we talk of the beauty and harmony of the world?
- iii. Read Prov.8; 1Cor.3:21-23; Rom. 8:28, and note down the purposes of creation.

3.2.4 Moral Argument

This argument is based on the ethical phenomena present in the human world. The exponents of this argument argue that there is a moral phenomena occurring in the life of human beings such as conscience, moral responsibility, repentance, reward and punishment, virtue and happiness, the fear of death and judgment, the triumphant of good over evil, etc. All these infer that there is a moral being who created and maintains that moral order. In deed moral phenomena are a powerful witness even to unbelievers. Some thinkers proposing this argument emphasis conscience whose voice is heard in everyone while others emphasis the moral law known by every human being and conclude that there is a supreme and sovereign law giver.

The version by Philosopher Emmanuel Kant states that:

- a. People everywhere recognise moral laws.
- b. When there are laws there must be a law giver.
- c. This law-giver is God.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

- i. Mention the basic moral responsibilities that you know.
- ii. How does reward and punishment help in reforming behavior?
- iii. What do we mean by moral order?
- iv. Who is the law giver in the Old Testament?

3.2.5 Argument from Universal Consent

This argument is also known as Historical or Ethnological argument. It is based on the fact that all human are religious. It was proposed by Cicero and reinforced by the study of religion. Every historical study of religion has shown that there are no peoples without religion and hence religion is the common possession of all humans. Those who have done

research into the study of religion have concluded that every group of people have a religion no matter how far back you go into the ancient times. However, the question historical research has not answered is the origin of religion. The psychological study of religion has also revealed that religion has not originated and cannot have accidentally originated from a combination of non-religious elements, but is rooted in the essence of human nature (Bavick 88). It is therefore concluded that the seed of religion in mankind is the creation of man in the image of God. It states that:

- All men everywhere are religious
- There is something in man's constitution that makes him religious
- This sense of divinity must have been put there by a Divine Being.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

- i. What was the religion of your people before the advent of Christianity?
- ii. What were the objects of worship of that religion?

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit established the existence of God. It reiterated that belief in the existence of God is related to how we live our lives. Those who believe that God exists and is concerned and will hold them accountable for the things they do live a more careful life. What we found out here is that the Bible and Christian theology assume the existence. However, we live in a world that wants proof for everything. The People at the time of Christ wanted miracles and signs to believe in Christ. All the proofs we discussed here are based on philosophical reasoning and have no or just little biblical support.

5.0 SUMMARY

Throughout the history of the Church, different theologians such as Anselm, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, and Samuel Clarke have come up with different theories to prove the existence of God. These theories can be used as a point of contact between a Christian and non-Christian; they have fundamental deficiencies in that they fail to prove the existence of a personal and loving God. The God portrayed in the Bible is interested in entering into relationship with human beings and also wants humans to enter into relationship with Him.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. State the importance and deficiencies of the rational proofs for God's existence.
2. Discuss the ontological argument of God existence.
3. Choose one from the following argument of God's existence and discuss in details:
 - a. Cosmological argument,
 - b. Moral argument.

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UNIT 3 THE DENIAL OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Denial of God's Existence
 - 3.2 Atheism
 - 3.3 Panentheism
 - 3.4 Polytheism
 - 3.5 Pantheism
 - 3.6 Deism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit we looked at the arguments developed by different theologians to prove the existence of God, and the deficiencies and strengths of these arguments. This unit presents a view that seems contrary to what was discussed in the last unit. It exposes you to the denial of God's existence and the implications of the denial. These denials include those who either feel God does not exist or have interest in what they do. Some of these views that will be presented here are not flat denials of God existence but misrepresentations of the person of God which equally amounts to his denial. The way one behaves in this life has some relationship with his or her view of God's existence. If you believe that God exists and He is going to hold you responsible for your behavior then you live cautiously.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different groups of atheists
- account for the difference between Pantheism and Panentheism
- identify the people who holds similar views in our day
- list and discuss all the wrong views about God.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Denial of God's Existence

In the last unit we said earlier that the idea of God is universal and it is found even among the uncivilised people. This does not mean that there is no one who does not deny the existence of a personal, self-existent, and perfect God revealed in the Bible. The denial comes in various forms. Some forms of it can be called misrepresentation of God rather than a flat denial. Views that do not acknowledge the existence of one true God can also be referred to as denial of the existence of God. At least there are wrong attempts to understand and know God. Some of these include:-

3.2 Atheism

Atheism comes from the combination of two Greek words, *a* –negative which means *no* and *theos* –which means God. Atheism therefore means “No God or Without God.” An atheist is one who asserts that there is no God. In this narrow respect, an atheist is a person who claims that the sentence, *God Exists* – expresses a false proposition. He rejects and repudiates belief in God. There are two kinds of atheists, namely, practical and theoretical atheists. A practical atheist is a Godless person who lives as if there is no God. The Bible makes references to this kind in Ps. 14:1 and 53:1 “The fool says in his heart, there is no God”. Ps. 10: 4b which says “All thoughts are that there is no God. That is, he does not seek God, or call on God; he ignores God, and assume God will also ignore him. He takes God to be inactive. In Eph. 2: 12 Paul argues that those who do not have Christ do not have God. Anyone who refuses to worship the true God is in a sense an atheist.

Theoretical atheist is more of an intellectual thing. It is based on the process of reasoning and rational argumentation. This group of atheists says that the human mind has no ability to determine whether or not God exists and that there is no valid proof for God's existence. They teach that the belief in God is a delusion. Theoretical atheism is a scientific or philosophical theory known as materialistic Monism.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. What is the opposite of foolishness?
- ii. Make a comparative chart of practical and theoretical atheists.
- iii. Find out the meaning of Materialistic Monism.

3.3 Panentheism

God is finite, distinct from the world, but inseparable from and interdependent with the world. Panentheism deals with God's knowledge, that God's knowledge grows and changes. God is identified with the world. As the world grows God also grows and God becomes. Everything that happens affects and changes God. In this way the God who loves the world shares the joys and sorrows of each creature in the world.

God is complex, He changes, grows but also retain His own integrity and wholeness during this process of change and growth. That is, there are some elements of God which remain the same regardless of what happens in the world. One of such elements is God's perfection.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. What does this group of people mean when they say God is finite?
- ii. Do you think this view contain any truth in it? If so what is the truth?

3.4 Polytheism

Polytheism simply means many gods. It is a belief that there is a plurality of gods which is distinct and separate. God is relegated to one among many in the pantheon of gods. These gods are formed around a member of aspects of life. These include natural forces, vegetation such as trees, sauced herbs, forests, animals and human forms.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Name a few tribal gods that you know and mention the aspect of life that they control.

3.5 Pantheism

A Jewish Philosopher Spinoza is considered a classic exponent of Pantheism in western culture. In one instance, this view identifies the whole universe with God. God is synonymous with nature. There is no distinction between the creator and creatures. It upholds that we are one in essence with God. Human beings are part of the divine essence. In sum, God equals everything and everything equals God. God is impersonal and immanent but not transcendent. It is a polite form of atheism. It is monistic about reality; the personal being is swallowed up in the one predominant over soul.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

By implication, who is this view saying humans are?

3.6 Deism

Deism is a belief in a supreme being who has no intervention in the universe. It is a denial of an active and living God. God is more or less sleeping if not dead. God is personal and transcendent but not immanent. He is the creator of the universe. God is compared with a clock master. God wound up the clock of the world once and forever at the beginning, so that it now proceeds as the world history without need of His further involvement. God now just watches what happens to man, is therefore autonomous. Deism denies Trinity, incarnation, atonement, miracle, divine authority of the Bible, particular elect people and any supernatural redemptive act in history.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

By implication this view is saying God is not in control. If God is not in control who in this view is in control?

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has discussed some views propounded to deny the existence of God. Some of these views take different shape today. For example, atheism takes the shape of materialism while pantheism wears the modern shape of monism. Deism is the view of liberal theologians who deny miracles and supernatural activities of God. Atheism and polytheism were found even in the Bible days and continue among many people today. It will also be noted that there are similarities among other views. Example, pantheism is a polite form of atheism, pantheism and polytheism have plurality of gods, panentheism and deism deals with the activities of God.

5.0 SUMMARY

There are many people throughout the history of mankind who believe in the existence of a high God. Some go as far as revering him while others only acknowledge his existence. This notwithstanding, there are also some people who deny the existence of God. This denial comes in different versions and immanent for different reasons. The denial of God usually leads to the denial of his works and important doctrines of the Bible such as miracles, incarnation, and the trinity. One of the reasons for various misrepresentations of God is lack of a clear revelation of God. The Bible calls such a person a fool. This means that such a person

lacks wisdom and understanding. Anyone with wisdom and understand can perceive God's existence in the things He has created and the received word.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by atheism?
2. What is the difference between panentheism and pantheism?
3. How is deism different from your view of God?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 INTRODUCTION TO GOD'S REVELATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Explanation of the Term Revelation
 - 3.2 The Nature of God's Revelation
 - 3.3 Revelation in the Old Testament
 - 3.4 Revelation in the New Testament
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last three units we looked at the existence of God, the proof and denial of His existence. This unit will lead you to the understanding of the nature of God's revelation. It is important to understand that God revelation is rooted in His incomprehensible nature and more important His love for humanity. In the revelation of God, it is God Himself who has taken the initiative to disclose Himself to us. The purpose of God revelation is that man may worship Him and do His will. This unit also discloses that God revelation is opened to all people. In the Old Testament, God's revelation revolved around the covenant through which He entered into relationship with Israel and in the New Testament it was about the person of Jesus Christ, His works and teachings. Christ, as His name, Emmanuel, which implies that God is living among His people in a visible form.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify reasons and grounds of God's revelation
- identify the relationship between God's revelation and His nature
- explain the meaning of the word revelation
- discuss the mode of revelation in the Old and New Testaments.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Explanation of the Term Revelation

Revelation is necessary because of the nature of God and the nature of man. God is infinite and man is finite and so if He does not reveal Himself, man will not know Him. Therefore when we are talking about God we begin with the premise that He is beyond the comprehension of mere human beings. However, His incomprehensibility does not stop us from knowing Him because He has made Himself known to us. This is what is called revelation. Revelation is a deliberate and free act of God. Revelation is the only means that we know about God. This is because we cannot go to God and study Him, the way we would study a human being, animal or some other part of God's creation. God is so infinitely far removed from us that we can only know God as He shows Himself to us (Job 11:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:9-10). Formally when a man studies God, he places himself above the object of his study. In the case of studying God we cannot place ourselves above God. In studying God we can only place ourselves under God and receive only what He wishes to reveal. In this way God is not the object but the subject. In God's revelation He is the one that has taken the initiative to disclose His divine identity and purpose. Revelation helps us to speak correctly about God, know how to approach and think correctly about Him. It also helps us to have fellowship with Him. The nature of God demands that statements about Him should be correct and must be in accordance with His nature. It is through revelation that we achieve this.

The fact that God is the subject of revelation is made clear by the meaning of the word revelation itself. The Greek word translated as revelation is *apokaluptoo* and it means "to take away a veil." The picture is that God is hidden by a veil, and we can only see Him when He takes away that veil Himself. When He reveals Himself, He unveils Himself. Sometimes God can also unveil future events as in the book of Revelations. Paul makes it clear that only the true believer has the veil lifted so that he can see God's revelation (2 Cor. 3:14-4:4).

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. Summarise what revelation can help us to achieve.
- ii. Explain the nature of God and of man from what you have learnt

3.2 The Nature of God's Revelation

There are two ways in which God reveals Himself to us; the first is in nature, the second is in His Word. We read about these ways in Psalm 19. First we read how all nature declares the glory of God (Ps. 19:1-6).

Then the Psalm goes on to speak about God's revelation in His Word. When Psalm 19 was written, God's Word consisted of the Law, what the Jews called the *Tohrah*, or what today we call the *Books of Moses* (Ps. 19:7-11).

Revelation has to do with how we have the knowledge of God and all the creatures in relation to Him. It is the source of our knowledge of God. The word Revelation literally means an unveiling or disclosure of something previously hidden. In theology, it refers to the self-disclosure of God in creation, in history of Israel, and above all in the person of Jesus. It is a personal disclosure of one subject or other.

The knowledge of God is not information or conceiving that God exists. Calvin says "properly speaking, God is known only where there is piety and where knowledge is fused with love of God and the desire to do His will."

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the elements of the proper knowledge of God?

3.3 Revelation in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God's revelation centers on the gracious covenant He made with Israel. The covenant had so many aspects such as the promise made to Abraham, the disclosures of the divine name, the giving of the Torah, the deliverance from Egypt, the preaching of the prophets about judgment and grace and God's disclosure of Himself in various events. The Old Testament affirms that man of himself cannot know God. God is known when He decides to disclose Himself (Deut. 4:32-34; Ps. 147:19). For the Israelites, life cannot be possible without revelation. Revelation makes true life possible. Revelation reveals God's name, majesty, power, action and His aid. The Old Testament uses various words such as disclose, announce and present something clear to someone to describe God's revelation.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. What does Old Testament revelation tells us about God?
- ii. Did your people have any concept of the covenant? If so how was the covenant made?

3.4 Revelation in the New Testament

In the New Testament revelation revolved around the new covenant made in Jesus Christ. It is found in the proclamation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, revelation refers to God's own self-disclosure, it points to particular events and particular people through whom God has communicated in decisive way with humanity, it is God's calls for our personal response and appropriation, it is always a disturbing or even shocking event, and it transforms our imagination. It must also be understood that revelation does not stop God from being a mystery. There are two channels through which we have the knowledge of God. These are general and special revelations.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. Does revelation tell us everything about God? Clue from the above paragraph.
- ii. When in the history of Israel was God appearing, disturbing and shocking.
- iii. Summarise the benefits of revelation to humanity as listed above.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit we have learnt that revelation is the means by which God makes Himself known to humanity. It is through revelation that we know the divine identity, purpose, and it is revelation that enables us to speak correctly about God. Revelation does not only help us to know God, it helps us to know more about ourselves and about our relationship with God and the rest of the creation.

5.0 SUMMARY

The explanation and nature of revelation provided in this unit is to enable you see the necessity of God's self disclosure. Of course more will be said about revelation as we progress. Meanwhile, it is important to note that revelation is the imitative of God and He carried it out in various ways in the history of His dealing with humanity. In the Old Testament, God's revelation centered on the covenant which included the Law of Moses that the people had to obey. In the New Testament, it was around the person of Jesus Christ who came to provide salvation through His work on the cross. In the Old Testament, the Law played a big role while in the New Testament, Grace played a big role.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Give the full explanation of the word revelation and its nature.
2. Discuss revelation in the Old and New Testaments.

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UNIT 5 ANALYSIS OF GENERAL REVELATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Meaning of General Revelation
 - 3.2 General Revelation in Nature
 - 3.3 General Revelation of God in History
 - 3.4 Human Conscience
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins the discussion of one of the aspects of God's revelation. You will recall that we have already mentioned that God has revealed Himself through general and special revelation. General revelation is manifested through creation and God's providential care. The modes of general revelation are nature, history and human consciousness. The most important biblical passages that testify to general revelation are Psalms 19 and Romans 1:18. General revelation reveals much about God to us, tells us why people everywhere are religious but do not lead us to a personal relationship with God. It is this deficiency that calls for another type of revelation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the meaning of general revelation
- explain the God's revelation in the created things
- explain what constitutes God's providential care
- state the relationship between sin and general revelation
- state the modes of general revelation and explain them.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Meaning of General Revelation

General revelation is also known as natural or universal revelation. It is found in the natural and universal order. We can summarise this as the revelation of God through creation and providence. In simple terms General revelation is the awareness of God. It is generally accepted that everyone by nature possesses the awareness of God. The awareness is the recognition that there is a God who deserves to be worshiped, obeyed and does great works and wonders. John Calvin says the General revelation is God's revelation in His works. He continues "there is no spot in the universe in which you cannot discern at least some sparks of His glory" (Bavick. 69). The created things are mirrors and documents of His majesty and divinity. The way God made humans is another way of His revelation. Bavick describes the created world as a theatre of God's glory (Bavick. 95). In this way God is immanent in the creation.

It is God's communication of Himself to all persons at all places and in all times. He manifests Himself through nature, history and in the inner being of human beings (human conscience).

Calvin says "there is within the human mind and by natural instinct an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy."

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. What does the word "universal" tell you about general revelation?
- ii. Mention the great works and wonders of God in the creation.
- iii. How are human beings a part of the revelation of God?

3.2 General Revelation in Nature

In Ps.19, we read; "The heavens are telling the Glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiworks." Paul says God's eternal power and deity have been clearly shown in the things that have been created. Paul argues that even pagans know God and the fact that God may be known from the greatness and the beauty of the things He has created has left man without an excuse for not knowing God. (Rom. 1:18-22). The created world is the medium of God's communication. God has manifested Himself in the creation so that as man comes in contact with with the creation, he receives the awareness of God. Creation gives us the practical and existential knowledge of God. In Athens, Paul talked about the unknown God that they have been worshipping (Acts 17:22ff). In Acts 14:15-17, Paul called on the people to turn to God who has made the heavens and the earth. He observed that God has not left

Himself without a witness even though He has allowed nations to walk in their ways. He provides rain, fruitful seasons, does good and satisfies their hearts with good and gladness i.e. benevolent preservation of its creation.

Job 36:24-37 draws attention to the rain that waters the earth, the thunder and lightening that strikes terror in the hearts. This suggests that these natural phenomena attest the power, majesty, goodness of God. We can go on and on to mention more of such passages.

It must, however, be noted that the knowledge of God is threatened by our moral attitudes, refusal of truth and love for injustice. For other people it could just be because of stupidity or deficiency of intellectual orientation or the use of wrong philosophical principles.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. Why is God going to punish even those who have not heard the gospel in a formal way?
- ii. According to this passage, what are the things that prevent man from having the true knowledge of God?
- iii. Which are the things mentioned in this unit that mostly remind people of the existence of God?

3.3 General Revelation of God in History

God reveals Himself through historical events that take place in the lives of individual as well as nations. Most of the things God was doing among the Israelites were for those nations to know He is God Almighty. Many non-Christians today too realise that God is in control and they thank God for taking charge of difficult situations.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Mention a few things that God did among the Israelites to show other nations that He is God.

3.4 Human Conscience

Everyone has a conscience and knows what is good or bad. Unsuppressed conscience knows what is good. In Rom. 1:24, Paul talks about the fact that the law is written on the heart of every individual. General revelation is not a ground for natural theology as advocated by Aquinas and the Roman Catholic, rather Paul says it opposes it because man's inclination is to always suppress the truth, Rom. 1:20ff.

It should be understood that a general revelation, (that is a possibility of some knowledge of the divine truth outside the Bible) which offers a common ground or a point of contact between the believer and unbeliever, is a just ground for God's justice in condemning those who have never heard the gospel in the full and formal sense. The worldwide phenomenon of religion (for all people are religious because they have some type of knowledge of God which they have suppressed for other gods; Rom. 1:18-22) is not enough reason. Sin has married the witness of general revelation and the testimony of God is blurred. General revelation does not enable the unbeliever to come to a true knowledge of God. What is needed is the spectacle of faith. When one is exposed to and regenerated through special revelation, he is enabled to see clearly what is in the general revelation.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. How do we know what is good and bad?
- ii. What make people to do what is bad?

4.0 CONCLUSION

General revelation is one important aspect of God's revelation. This revelation is made available to all people and the main medium of general revelation is the creation. Under general revelation we learnt that God can be seen through the greatness, beauty, and benevolent preservation of the created things and His providence to humanity and other living things. In this sense general revelation provides us with practical knowledge of God. This unit also explains how sin has prevented man from having the full knowledge of God through general revelation.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit provided you with the explanation of general revelation. General revelation is made available through nature, history, and human conscience. The discussion of general revelation under these modes reveals to us the nature of God. God is actively involved in this world and He is also in control. This unit teaches us that general revelation is important but it does not lead us to salvation and it is for this reason that there is need for special revelation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the meaning and nature of God's general revelation?
2. Discuss the three models of general revelation.

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MODULE 2 GENERAL REVELATION AND THE ANALYSIS OF SPECIAL REVELATION

- Unit 1 The Effects of General Revelation and Analysis of Natural and Experiential Theology
- Unit 2 Special Revelation
- Unit 3 The Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration
- Unit 4 Theories of Inspiration
- Unit 5 Methods of God's Revelation

UNIT 1 THE EFFECTS OF GENERAL REVELATION AND ANALYSIS OF NATURAL AND EXPERIENTIAL THEOLOGY

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Effects of General Revelation
 - 3.1.1 The Effects of General Revelation on the Non-Christian
 - 3.1.2 General Revelation and Salvation
 - 3.1.3 The Positive Effects of General Revelation
 - 3.1.4 The Effect of General Revelation on the Christian
 - 3.2 The Meaning of Natural Theology
 - 3.3 Experiential Theology or Experiential Revelation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit ends the discussion by looking at its effects. The effects are a form of the summary of general revelation. Romans 1: 18-35 is very important in the discussion of general revelation. It is the summary of the doctrine of general revelation. The passage shows the level of human disobedience and human desire for autonomy. General revelation and natural theology are related but have different goals, which will be discussed in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the effects of general revelation on the Christians and non-Christians
- state the negative and positive effects of general revelation as can be found in Romans 1:15-32
- explain the meaning of natural theology and its relationship with general revelation
- explain the eternal fate of those who are outside the Christian tradition.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Effects of General Revelation

General revelation has different effects on the non-Christian than it has on the Christian

3.1.1 The Effects of General Revelation on the Non- Christian

As you have already learnt, the book of Romans chapter one deals with the subject of general revelation in detail. Here we will try to summarise it as follows:

Negative Effects of General Revelation

- All the contents of God's general revelation are present to give man a true and reliable knowledge of God. This is found in verses 15,20
- Historically all men knew God but they did not honor Him or worship or give thanks to Him. See verse 21.
- Men claimed to be wise and think they are doing the right thing but became foolish instead, deliberately suppressing the truth about God. This thought is captured in verses 18, 22.
- Instead of men worshipping the creator who has created them, they have turned to worship the things that He has created thus becoming idolatrous. Read verses 23, 25.
- This became the corruption of religion and this corruption of religion led to the corruption of morality, and because of this God gave them up to their wickedness. From this we find the root of immorality and wickedness. Immorality and wickedness are found among people who refuse the right religion. Read verses 26-31.

- All these put the unbelievers in a position of “no excuse” and give us the justification why unbelievers will be punished for not believing in God. Verses 20, 32.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. From what you read above, what do you think is the reason for increased corruption, immorality and robbery among the youth today? What solution can you propose for these in the light of what you read?
2. Will God be right to punish our forefathers who died before missionaries came and preached the gospel in Nigeria?

3.1.2 General Revelation and Salvation

What we have learned about general revelation is that it does not bring salvation or bring men into a living relationship with God. General revelation is insufficient for salvation because of the following reasons:

- the handiwork of God in creation has been disturbed by sin (Gen. 3:17, 18 Rom. 8: 19-22)
- man’s perception of God in nature is distorted by sin (Rom 1: 18-21; 1 Cor.1:18ff)
- general revelation does not reveal Christ as the only true way to salvation (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2: 5; John 14:6).

The question that is often asked is “if Christ is the only way of salvation, does it then mean that all who stand outside the Jews-Christian tradition will perish?” It is hard to find an explicit answer to this question. From historical facts and testimonies of missionaries we can say that it does not mean that all those who receive no special revelation from God will perish. We must allow some possibility that God can reveal Himself to people outside the Jews-Christian tradition. Think for example of people like Mechizedek and Jethro. There is also the story of Cornelius, a worshipper of God, whose prayers will be answered by special revelation from God (Acts 10: 1-6). We are also reminded of Christ’s words, “my other sheep.” This expression is opened to different interpretations but it certainly means those outside the Jew-Christian tradition (John 10:16). However, we can be dogmatic in stating that without Christ there is no salvation for anyone as the Bible says (John 14:6).

Pelagians, Roman Catholics and liberals maintain that it is possible for one to come to the saving knowledge of God by means of General revelation only. Roman Catholics teach this under Natural theology.

3.1.3 The Positive Effects of General Revelation

The positive effect of general revelation upon a non-Christian is that it gives and helps them acquire religious and moral values. These restrain the full explosion of sin. This then makes life in the society possible. This is what is called blessing of the common grace. Secondly, general revelation prepares man for the reception of special revelation. It provides a point of contact for the preaching of the gospel to the unbeliever.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. Check in a theological dictionary and find out who the Pelagians are and what they stand for?
- ii. What do you understand by common grace?

3.1.4 The Effect of General Revelation on the Christian

Only a believer can take full advantage of the blessings of general revelation. One's relationship with Christ and through the guidance of the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit, the believer is enabled to understand the message of general revelation. When general revelation is understood in the correct way, it can give real knowledge of God, not in addition to what the Bible teaches but supporting what the Bible teaches. In addition to what is said above, general revelation provides the framework for special revelation. Without God's general revelation through His work of creation and providence, special revelation would make no concrete sense. General revelation also provides a point of contact between the Christian and non-Christian when seeking to preach to the non-Christian (Acts 14:14-17; 17: 30, 31).

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. Summarise the effect of general revelation to the Christian.
- ii. What do you understand by God's providence?

3.2 The Meaning of Natural Theology

Roman Catholic theologians identify natural theology as one of the aspects of God's revelation. It is closely related to general revelation but different from it. Natural theology teaches that truths about God can be learned from created things such as man, nature and the world through reason alone. This teaching was officially accepted as the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church at the Vatican 1 in 1870. The council taught that God has revealed Himself naturally and supernaturally. The council said "God can certainly be known from

created things by the natural light of human reason” (Ewell 752). The council affirmed against secularised skepticism that philosophical truths about God are legitimate and true form of theology.

Thomas Aquinas, the main exponent of this thought, believed that beyond the truths about God we get from the Bible, there is another body of truths based on the application of reason to the created world. The example in such truth is the existence of God. Here we are referring to the rational proofs for the existence of God discussed earlier. This view is supported by the testimony of Rom.1:20-21 which says, “For although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.” The implication is that if people have sensible minds (good reason), they will know God. Other verses that are quoted to support this view include Ps. 19 and Acts 14: 15-17. These passages imply that man can assess the knowledge of God outside the bounds of revealed theology. This view has led to the idea that reason has the same place or is higher than biblical revelation. The second and very important support for this view has to do with the accomplishments of pagan philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato and Pathagroras. Very important to note is that in this view, reason does not replace faith nor does philosophical inquiry replace the grace of God in Christ. Natural theology has its deficiencies. It is a limited revelation and does not reveal God as the savior of mankind. Other scholars who in one way or the other seems to support this theology are Tertullian, St. Augustine of Hippo, and Emil Brunner.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. If Vatican 1 took place in 1870 when was the Vatican 11 held? Check theological dictionaries.
- ii. What are some of the religious groups you know that do not emphasise the role of Christ as the savior?
- iii. Can you remember any African or Nigerian who have attained some recognisable level of academic achievement that can be said to have special gift?
- iv. What is the meaning of secular skepticism?

3.3 Experiential Theology or Experiential Revelation

Experiential revelation or theology is another source of human knowledge of God. Generally, experience is considered one of the sources of knowledge deriving from direct perception of reality. It is knowledge that can be gained externally and internally. Experience is different from hearing or reflecting about something. It can never be

transmitted or re-represented. In this way, experience is open to false claims, and judgment of its authenticity and truthfulness is difficult.

In theology, experiential revelation is one's personal encounter with God. It is the experience of God or His power in the life of an individual. It is an essential part of Christianity. There have been some Christian movements or groups that lay much weight on the primacy and authority of experience than other sources of the knowledge of God. Among them are the Pietistic, Revivalist, Holiness movements, and Pentecostals. These groups give preeminence to the experience of the believer. Some say, this experience must include speaking in tongues. They look at the Holy Spirit as the one who gives the experience. One liberal theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher said Christianity was about the humankind's experience of God and he de-emphasised God's action with regard to man. He said religion is not about morality or theoretical knowledge but the feeling of absolute dependence.

Those who emphasise experience do not reject the authority of the Bible but rather stress the fundamental and initiatory role of the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic group insists on a spirit-filled and living a separated life. Experiential theology or revelation arose as a reaction to sterile intellectualism and traditionalism. In addition, its emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and the Christian has continued to keep the doctrine of the Trinity on focus. This continued role bring to light the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion and redemption (Act 14: 15-18; Rom. 8; Gal. 4: 6-7). The emphasis on the Holy Spirit naturally leads to the emphasis on Christ (1 John 4:2; 1 Cor. 12:3). In order not to misuse experiential theology, it must be understood and treated as a corporate affair of the Church as Paul states clearly in 1 Cor. 12; Rom.12. Its aim should be to build and edify members. It is important to know that it is easy to misuse this revelation. It is misused when it is understood and treated as individualistic. In this way it becomes subjective and therefore impossible for the Christian community to nurture and evaluate it. Second, experience and reflection or the Holy Spirit and the Word must not be separated but considered complementary. Third, the role of the Holy Spirit must not be overemphasised to shadow the other members of the Trinity.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

- i. At this point, attempt to list all the types of revelation we have discussed so far.
- ii. Make a chart of the strengths and weaknesses of experiential theology.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit helps you to see the effect of sin on humanity. Sin is responsible for man's foolishness, refusal to worship God, human idolatrous nature, and corruption of religion. Because of sin, we cannot see God clearly in nature. When sin is taken away we can have a clear knowledge of God and know how to serve better. Knowing God clearly and serving Him are the main goals of salvation. While this unit exposes you to the possibility that some people are saved outside the Christian tradition, it does not teach that such will happen to all people.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we looked at the importance of general revelation to the Christian and non-Christian. Here we saw the deficiencies of general revelation, man's attitudes towards his creator, and attempts to address the difficult issue of the fate of people outside the Christian tradition. All people can understand general revelation but the Christian who is enabled by the Holy Spirit of God is able to understand it better and see God more clearly.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Account for the effects of general revelation on the Christian and non-Christian.
2. What is the relationship between general revelation and sin?
3. What do you understand by natural theology?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 SPECIAL REVELATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Meaning of Special Revelation
 - 3.2 Comparison of General and Special Revelation
 - 3.3 The Means of Special Revelation
 - 3.3.1 Theophanies
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 - 3.3.4 The Word
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- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

We have discussed the general revelation and two other related concepts. The deficiencies of these three concepts lead us to the discussion of special revelation. Special revelation is able to do what the three were not able to do, which is salvation. The aim of this unit is also to help you see the differences between general revelation and special revelation. Just like general revelation, God uses various means to reveal Himself in special revelation. Many of these modes seem to have ceased. The one that is continuous is the Word. There are others who believe that God is still revealing Himself through visions, dreams, and miracles and others who do not.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the meaning of special revelation
- enumerate the goal of special revelation
- mention the differences between general revelation and special revelation
- give the examples of theophanies
- discuss the various ways of God's direct communication with humanity
- explain the meaning of miracles
- identify the two aspects of the word.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of Special Revelation

We have just talked about God's revelation in nature, called *General Revelation*. We have seen that it is also spoken about in the New Testament after Christ came. We read about it in many passages including (Rom. 1:19, 20; Acts 14:17) which says that every human being can observe God's power and divinity in the things He has made and in His care over nature. But this general revelation does not tell us the way of salvation. That can only be found in God's Word, or in Christ, the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:1). We refer to this second type of revelation as *Special Revelation*.

Special Revelation is therefore God's manifestation of Himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with Him. Special Revelation is redemptive, for it publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself and that He (God) has now fulfilled that promise in the gift of His son in whom all men are called to believe. The gospel is news that the incarnate logos has born the sins of doomed men, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification.

God is a transcendent being – outside of us, unlimited in space or knowledge and we cannot fully comprehend him. God uses the *principle of accommodation* to make Himself known to us. Accommodation designates that characteristic of biblical literature which allows the writer, for the purpose of simplification, to adjust his language or explanation or description too the limitations of his readers without compromising the truth in the process. This is to some extent anthropomorphism. In this we understand a transcendent God. Special revelation makes God a personal God who reveals Himself by none and relatives to His people.

Special revelation tells us about God's plan of salvation. This begins with His promise of salvation to Adam and Eve, that the Seed of the woman (Christ) will crush the head of the serpent (Satan), Gen 3: 15. It continues in the tradition of Noah, the patriarchs, David, the prophets, and finally in the revelation of Christ. Not every human being has received God's special revelation. This revelation is limited to those who receive the call to repentance and salvation (2 Kings. 17:13; Ps. 103:7; Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:1).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. What is the main function of special revelation?
- ii. What do we mean when we refer to Christ as “the incarnate logos”?
- iii. Who are the Patriarchs?

3.2 Comparison of General and Special Revelation

The following table compares General and Special Revelation:

General Revelation:	Special Revelation
Comes by way of God’s creation and providence (Acts 14:17).	Comes by way of God’s prophetic Word, the Bible (Heb. 1:1- 2).
Reveals the existence, power and divinity of God (Rom. 1:20).	Reveals the love and graciousness of God in Christ (Rom. 5:8; Jn. 3:16).
Makes man aware of God’s moral law (Rom. 2:14-15), but generally leaves man satisfied with his own moral status.	Makes man aware that he falls short of God’s moral law (Rom. 7:7) and reveals how he may live in a God pleasing way (Ps. 119:24; 2 Tim. 3:16).
Leaves man without excuse for his moral misdeeds (Rom. 1:20, cf. Rom. 1:32).	Declares the way of salvation through the cross of Christ (2 Tim. 3:15).
Makes people religious (Acts 17:27, 28).	Brings salvation in Christ (Rom. 1:16).
Is perverted by sinful man, who turns to idolatry (Rom 1:22; 1:25; Eph. 4:18).	Is received by all who are called by God, but rejected by others (Acts 2:39; Jn. 3:36).
Provides a point of contact in evangelism and mission (cf. Acts 14:17; 17:22ff.).	Makes the work of evangelism and mission most necessary (Rom. 10:14, 15).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. We have mentioned the phrase the “moral Law” many times in the above chart. What do we mean by the moral law?
- ii. The above chart presents the difference between a religious person and a Christian. What is the difference between a religious person and a Christian?

3.3 The Means of Special Revelation

In the history of God’s dealings with mankind He revealed Himself and His Word in many ways. These can be summed up as follows:

3.3.1 Theophanies

Theophanies means God manifesting Himself in visible form (God appearances). In the Old Testament before the incarnation of Jesus Christ, He was called the “the angel of the Lord”; Gen. 32:1. Also we have the Shekinah glory. Ex.3: 2-4, 24:15-18, 40:34-35. In the N.T. Christ came as a unique manifestation of God as an actual human, with the human process and experience such as birth, pain, death, His life, teachings, actions etc. were a message to us. He was truly God’s son; even the demons testified to it that he was the son of God (Matt. 5:7, Matt. 27:54). We shall talk about Jesus more when we talk about the word.

Other visible manifestations include:-

- a. Fire and clouds (Gen 15:17; Ex. 3:2)
- b. Stormy winds (Job 38:1; Ps. 18:10-16)
- c. Zephyr (gentle breeze (1 Kings. 19:12)
- d. The Angel of the Lord (Ex. 23:20-23). The word *angel* means “messenger”, and we believe this messenger was really the divine Word (Jn. 1:1) who later came as Jesus (see Mal. 3:1).

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. Explain with examples what we mean by the teachings of Christ.
- ii. Read Ex.3: 2 and explain what is meant by God appearing in the cloud.
- iii. Use Bible Concordance and list four other places that the *angel of the Lord* is mentioned.

3.3.2 Direct Communications

- a. Audible voice. God spoke to Adam and Eve, Moses, Joshua, Samuel and other prophets as a person will speak to another person. He also spoke to the prophets, thus, the prophetic saying, “The Lord spoke to me saying or the word of the Lord came to me saying” (Gen. 2:16; 9:1; 32:26; Ex. 19:9)
- b. Urim and thummim (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 10:20,21)
- c. Dreams (Gen. 20:3-6; Num. 12:6)
- d. Visions; This was often used in the case of prophets and sometimes the New Testament authors like John the Apostle saw visions. A vision came when one was asleep, while a trance came or when wake (Num. 12:6; Is. 21:6; Dan. 1:17; Obad. 1:1; Acts. 11:5)
- e. In the person of Christ (Heb. 1:2; 2:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:11)

- f. Through angels. Angel Gabriel is usually the one who is sent to communicate God's message to the people (Dan.8: 16-17; Matt. 1:20)

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. Read Num. 27 and state how Urim and Thummim were used.
- ii. List three dreams and three visions of the Bible that you remember.

3.3.3 Miracles

God often revealed Himself to Israel and the Church through miracles. The Bible uses three words to indicate miracles, usually translated as, *sign*, *wonder* and *power*. God said He gave signs to Israel in order that "they will know that I am the Lord and that they are my people" (Ex. 6:7). Miracles were also done by prophets and apostles to show they came from God (Jn. 2:11; 20:30-31; 2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 15:12). Similarly the signs Jesus performed were proof of his divine appointment (Acts 2:22). Miraculous Events – This is God at work in concrete historical ways within the world, affecting what occurs, the mighty deeds of God. Example is the call of Abraham, the provision of Isaac, deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea. Christ said if I do these things among you; believe that the kingdom of God is come upon you. To the disciples of John he said 'go and tell him what you see, the blind receive their sight'.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

- i. List three miracles done by the prophets and three done by Jesus.
- ii. Attempt the definition of a miracle in your words.

3.3.4 The Word

We talk about the word in two ways; Christ and the Bible. Firstly, Jesus Christ. Our clearest knowledge of God comes through the word. Jesus Christ is the personification of God's word (John 1:1ff; Rev. 19:13). Jesus Christ is God's word made in the flesh that lived among us (John 1:18; 12:45; 14: 9-11).

Secondly, the word is also written down in the Bible. In the Bible, we find an infallible guide to the knowledge of God. Yet it must be realised that the Bible is not a resource book for an academic study about God. This is because "knowing" God in biblical language is much more than an intellectual or perceptual understanding of God. In the Bible, to know God means to acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour. It means to

have a living relationship with Him (Ps. 36:10; Dan. 11:32; Hos. 6:6; 2 Peter 1: 5,8). It is therefore not surprising that the Bible does not speak of itself as a resource book of information about God but rather as a book written to lead man into a living relationship with God (John 20:31; Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). It is only this way that one can really know God. In the Bible we have God's revelation to Israel and to the early Church recorded for all time. Not everything God and His Son have said and done that is recorded in Scripture (Jn. 20:30; 21:25). But as John tells us, what has been written is recorded in order that you might believe and "by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). This clearly reveals the purpose of God's written revelation, to bring the reader of God's Word to faith and eternal life. The process by which God's special revelation was put in the Bible is known as *inscripturation*. When we speak of God's special revelation being inscripturated it means that the Bible itself is God's revelation. Although the Bible is a record of what the various Bible authors have heard and observed (Hab. 2:2; 1 Jn. 1:1), these authors were themselves *inspired* in such a way that what they recorded became the Word of God. We shall talk about inspiration soon in details.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

- i. From what you have just read, what is the purpose of the Bible?
- ii. What were the sources of the Bible authors?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Though special revelation is different from general revelation in many ways, they are linked in many ways. While general revelation lays the ground for special revelation, special revelation helps us to understand general revelation better. While general revelation has many deficiencies special revelation does not. The two revelations come to us because of the loving grace of God. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us in many ways to show the extent of His love. He wants everyone to have the opportunity of knowing Him.

5.0 SUMMARY

As you have learnt, special revelation is the second and most important aspect of God's revelation. It is not for all persons but only for the elect. The main focus of special revelation is to lead humanity to salvation. Special revelation has come through various means such as:

Theophanies: God appearing in the person of Christ, in His glory, and through natural occurrences.

Direct communication: This is God speaking through dreams, visions, angels, Christ, Urium and Thumuim.

Miracles: These were performed by prophets, Christ and the apostles.

The Word: These include the Bible and Christ who is the living word.

6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the meaning of special revelation?
2. How does general revelation differ from special revelation?
3. Discuss the models of special revelation.

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UNIT 3 THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Meaning of Biblical Inspiration
 - 3.2 Testimony of Biblical Inspiration
 - 3.3 Other Supports for Biblical Inspiration
 - 3.4 Importance and Necessity of Biblical Inspiration
 - 3.5 Inerrancy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The last unit ended with the discussion of one of the modes of special revelation, the Word. This unit is devoted to the discussion of the Word in details especially the reliability and authority of the Bible. The Bible was written by human authors. These authors wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In writing the Bible, the authors were allowed to employ their culture, professional terms, language, and different styles to convey the message of God. This unit will also give various proofs for the doctrine of inspiration from the Bible.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:-

- explain the biblical concept of inspiration
- state the biblical support for the doctrine of inspiration
- identify the key verses that testify to the doctrine of inspiration
- state the importance of the doctrine of inspiration
- discuss the difference between inspiration and illumination
- explain the biblical concept of inerrancy
- state the relationship between inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of Biblical Inspiration

Of all the models of revelation, the Bible is much closer to us. We believe it is the word of God and it is by inspiration that the Bible is the word of God. Inspiration simply means the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which renders their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the word of God. It is the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit on those who received special revelation from God as they wrote the Bible. Through inspiration, the Bible conveys the truths that God wants His people to know and thereafter communicate to the world at large. The necessity of inspiration is that God does not repeat His revelation to every person. As such there is every need to preserve what was revealed to the use of the future generations. In summary, inspiration is what preserves the revelation of God especially the special revelation which is the Bible. Inspiration helps us to relay on the truth that God communicated with the first recipients. The revelation of God and inspiration go together.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Summarise the importance of inspiration as contained in the above paragraph.

3.2 Testimony of Biblical Inspiration

The Bible gives testimony about its inspiration itself. 2 Pet.1:20-21 says, “first of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit from God.” Here Peter is affirming that the Bible has divine origin and it was not produced by the decision or will of man. That is to say that the impetus which led to their writings was from the Holy Spirit. Paul writes; “All Scripture is God-breathed” or inspired. (2 Tim. 3:16). Elsewhere he said to the Corinthians that the words taught are by the Spirit and later he wrote: “Christ is speaking through me” (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 13:3). Paul commends the Thessalonians for accepting his words as the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

Inspiration was also the way by which God spoke through the Old Testament prophets so that they could proclaim: “Thus says the Lord” and “The word of the Lord came to me” (e.g. Ezek. 25:1, 3, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15). They also wrote at the direct command of God (Ex. 17:14; Is. 8:1; Dan. 12:4). Christ and His apostles clearly regarded the writings of the

prophets and other Old Testament authors as the Word of God (Mt. 15:4; Heb. 3:7, 1 Pet. 1:11, etc.).

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

In the time of Christ, what was the part of the Bible that was regarded as the Scriptures?

3.3 Other Supports for Biblical Inspiration

There are also proofs for the inspiration of the New Testament. When Christ was here on earth, He promised to give His disciples the Holy Spirit who will lead them in all truth. In John 14:26, Christ said, “but the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all I said to you.” Again Christ said that the words of the apostles have the same authority with His words (Luke 10:16). In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter affirms that the letters of Paul belong to the Bible. Paul also claimed divine authority of his writings as we see in Gal.1:8.

Others find support of inspiration in the fact that more than 600 Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament and in the organic unity of the Bible. The contents of the Bible also testify to its unity.

Inspiration means what the Bible says about the earth and history is completely trustworthy. It means that the entire Bible has prophetic authority. Inspiration talks about God Himself. It talks about His greatness and intelligence by which He is able to communicate Himself to human beings. God is the creator of the world and man and because of this He knows everything about them. It therefore follows that whatever He has communicated about the man and the world through divine revelation is true and accurate.

In the inspiration, God over-ruled human limitations and sinful biases so that those writers of the Bible were able to write what God wanted them to write correctly. The Holy Spirit guided their thoughts so that what they wrote is able to accomplish its intended objectives.

The writers were not completely or totally passive nor in an unconscious state. Their distinctive style and professional language stands out clearly in their writings. Example, Luke was a medical doctor and he used medical terms not found in the other gospels.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

- i. List two of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament.
- ii. One of the sentences above reads; “what the Bible says about the earth is completely trustworthy.” What does the Bible say about the earth?

3.4 Importance and Necessity of Biblical Inspiration

Inspiration is what makes the Bible the Word of God and gives it its authority. Like Christ, we must hold the Scriptures in high esteem. Christ repeatedly cites the Old Testament as stating God’s will for man. Christ tells us His own words are the fulfilment, and not a replacement of the Old Testament teachings (Mt. 5:17). He taught that not a “yod or tittle” (the smallest characters in Hebrew writing) would disappear from the law until all was fulfilled (Mt. 5:18). He also told us that “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35).

When the Roman Church began to deny the *authority of the Scripture* and replace it with the authority of the Pope and the Roman Church, the Reformers responded by formulating the doctrine of the *perfections of Scripture*. These perfections are the *sufficiency, clarity* and *necessity* of Scripture. By this, they meant that the Scriptures are sufficient to lead us to Christ and that they are clear enough for everyone to understand the main teachings without the help of a priest, and that we need them to grow in faith. The Roman Catholic Church of those days denied all of these. They allowed only priests to read Bibles because they said the book would lead untrained people astray.

Today the doctrine of the *necessity of Scripture* is denied in some Pentecostal churches which teach that people do not need the Bible when they are led by the Holy Spirit. We do indeed need to be led by the Spirit, but the work of the Spirit is to help us understand God’s word, not to replace it. This role of the Holy Spirit is called *illumination* (*Ps. 143:10; Col. 1:9*. The word *illumination* means “to shine upon” or “to make clear”). The Holy Spirit does not add to the Words of Scripture, but explains them. He was sent to point us to Christ, the Word of God (Jn. 1:1; 15:26).

The doctrine of the Holy Scripture is one of the key doctrines of the Bible. It governs the Christian’s approach to all other doctrines.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

- i. Can you summarise the importance of the Scriptures as stated in the above paragraph?
- ii. What is the relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit?

3.5 Inerrancy

The fact of inspiration leads to inerrancy and infallibility of the scriptures. It makes the Bible/Special revelation of God dependable, authoritative and authentic. Inerrancy is the belief that the Bible is fully true in all its teaching or affirms and in all of these it is without admixture of error. This extends to the areas of both history and science. It does not hold that the Bible has a primary purpose to present exact information concerning history and science. Therefore, the use of popular expressions, approximations and phenomenal language is acknowledged and is believed to fulfill the requirement of truthfulness. Apparent discrepancies, therefore, can and must be harmonised. The term inerrancy is used synonymously with infallibility. The word Infallibility simply means “not liable to fail in achieving its purpose” (Bavick 601). It means the writings of the Bible are effective in conveying liable ideas.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

- i. What does the Bible say that can be considered science?
- ii. It is important to get used to the word “infallibility.” Check the word from any dictionary and find out its meaning.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The study of the doctrine of inspiration is to help you know more about the nature of the Bible. The doctrine tells us how the Bible was written, the authority behind it, and the value of the Bible to us. It assures us of the reliability of the biblical materials, be it about history or science. This doctrine naturally leads to the doctrine of inerrancy. It explains why the Bible has no errors and can be trusted in its fullness.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt how God undertook the project of writing the Bible. God used human beings in writing the Bible. These men were filled with the Holy Spirit who enabled them to write God’s word. The role the Holy Spirit played makes the Bible the Word of God and not human. It is because of the role of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is a living book and a book that is able to achieve the purpose for which it was written.

The work of the Holy Spirit did not stop with inspiration; He is now working with us in the reading and understanding of the Bible. This is called illumination.

6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is your understanding of the doctrine of inspiration?
2. Give the Old and New Testament support for the doctrine of inspiration
3. Account for the importance and necessity of the doctrine of inspiration.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 THEORIES OF INSPIRATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Theories of Inspiration
 - 3.2 Intuition
 - 3.3 Mechanical Inspiration
 - 3.4 Dynamic Inspiration
 - 3.5 Organic Inspiration
 - 3.6 Partial Inspiration
 - 3.7 Subjective Inspiration
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In unit three we took time to explain the doctrine of inspiration, its necessity and its importance. This unit will lead to the different theories propounded by orthodox and liberal theologians. Some of the theories authenticate the authority of the Bible while others undermine the biblical message. Some of these theories are not accorded biblical support while some are based on mere philosophical deductions. The main aim of the doctrine of inspiration is to distinguish the Bible from other books and show that it is the real word of God, it is reliable and trustworthy. You will notice that organic inspiration is the only correct theory among these theories. It should also be noted that what is presented here is by no means exhaustive.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different theories of inspiration proposed in the history of the Church
- recognise the deficiencies of the various theories
- mention the personality, style, profession, culture of the writers that are reflected in their writings
- state a few elements of truth in the wrong theories.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Theories of Inspiration

When you look in the Bible, it is not explicit on how the writers were inspired. There are indications that sometimes God audibly dictated His words to the writers. In Exodus 4: 12, God said to Moses, “Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you should speak.” In many places God told His prophets and leaders what they should tell the people (Exodus 19:3-6; Num. 7:8, 9). God said to Jeremiah, “take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah and Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord has spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll” (Jer. 36:4).

There are many theories of inspiration, some of them are dynamic, mechanical or dictation, partial, intuition or rational, illumination or mystical, verbal, and plenary.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

3.2 Intuition

The proponents of this theory appeal to a high degree of insight on the side of the authors. They claim that the authors were endowed with a permanent high gift which enabled them to write the Bible. According to them, the Jews had a high religious gift just like other people are found with a high gift of Language or Mathematics. On the basis of this, it can be concluded that the Bible writers were not different from great religious men and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Buddha, Gandhi, just to mention but a few. The Bible therefore is about the religious experiences of the Jews. God is involved only by endowing the writers with the high gift but this is not special because He does the same to other people. This view is the view of liberal Christian.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. In your own words, explain the word intuition.
- ii. Among the religious groups and persons you know in Nigeria, which or who can you say have high religious gift?
- iii. Who are the liberals in a theological sense?

3.3 Mechanical Inspiration

The doctrine of *inspiration* does not mean that God used the Bible authors in much the same way that a modern author uses a typewriter or computer. They say God used the authors as one would use a machine.

This view, called mechanical inspiration, regards the authors as mere passive instruments in the writing of their books. While this view recognises the divine origin of God’s Word, it does not take into account the fact that all the Bible authors show abilities other than their writing skills. David was a poet; Solomon was a sage (philosopher), Luke, a historian, and Paul, a theologian. These abilities are clearly reflected in some of their books. Every author has his own style of writing, and often their very personalities are reflected in what they write.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What books or portions of the Bible can be attributed to David and Solomon?

3.4 Dynamic Inspiration

Dynamic inspiration holds that it was the authors, but not their books that were inspired. This position makes them look at the Bible as a book containing errors and mistakes. Those who hold this view readily departed from the teaching of the Bible. Thus they may argue that today we need not agree with Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality (Rom. 1:26, 27) because the book was written in a different time. They go on to argue that, since we live nearly 2000 years later, we know more about homosexuality than the Bible.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What do you think the proponents of this theory will say concerning what Christ said in Matthew 5: 18, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished?”

3.5 Organic Inspiration

The position defended by most Evangelicals is that of organic inspiration. God acted on the writers in an organic way so that there was connection between the contents of their writing and their own inner being. This view holds that each Bible book reflects the character, style, gifts and cultural context of its human author. The personal characteristics of the authors are closely manifested in the contents of their writings. For example Paul writes as a logical thinker while James writes as a practical person. At the same time it is believed that every Bible book is fully *inspired*, in the sense that God’s Spirit led the human authors to write in such a way that the resulting text can be fully

identified as the Word of God. It is God speaking to us in the words of men.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

- i. List down the different styles of writings found in the Bible.
- ii. What were the cultural contexts of the New Testament Era? Identify one each for the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Epistles.

3.6 Partial Inspiration

This view teaches that not all the Bible is inspired. The proponents of this view teach that parts of the Bible, for example, the Sermon on the Mount and the moral teachings can be considered inspired. However, when the Bible speaks of the historical facts of creation, the flood, the story that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, and the like, it is not without mistakes. The opposite of this is **Plenary Inspiration** which teaches that both the moral truths and the historical facts of the Bible are infallible and constitute great doctrines of the Bible.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

- i. What do we mean by the moral teachings of Christ?
- ii. List four other historical facts in the Bible other than the ones mentioned above; two in the old and two in the New Testament.

3.7 Subjective Inspiration

This view was taught by Karl Barth and Brunner. They said the Bible is not objectively inspired, but that the part of the Bible inspired is that which speaks to individual soul and heart. For example, if you read the Gospel of John and it touches you then it is inspired for you. By this view, the criterion for Biblical inspiration is not found in the Bible itself but it is found in the subjective response of the reader. In other words, this view denies the infallibility of the Bible.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Read Luke 24: 30-32 and Acts 2:37 and explain what this theory means.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The various theories in this unit reveal human feeble attempt to understand what God is doing. They also reveal that there are many people even in the Christian circle who do not take the Bible seriously. Such people teach that the biblical authors wrote without supernatural help and the Bible is just like any other ordinary book. Such thinking undermines the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible. What is clear from biblical testimony is that whatever the Bible teaches is infallible.

5.0 SUMMARY

The Bible is a book that testifies about itself. It tells us that the Holy Spirit inspired those who wrote it. However, the Bible does not mention the method of inspiration and it is this absence that has led to the different theories of inspiration. The summary of these theories is as follows:

- Intuition—the authors wrote on it because of the special gifts they had.
- Mechanical—the authors were used as machines or computers.
- Dynamic—the Holy Spirit through the authors
- Partial—not all the Bible is inspired only some parts.
- Subjective—it is the passage that speaks to you that is inspired.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Differentiate between mechanical and dynamic theories of inspiration.
2. Discuss the organic theory of inspiration.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 5 METHODS OF GOD’S REVELATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Principles of Accommodation
 - 3.1.1 Examples of Human Faculties and Body Parts
 - 3.1.2 Examples that Attribute Human Emotion and Actions of God
 - 3.1.3 Examples of God as Having Occupation, Office and Position
 - 3.1.4 Examples Comparing God with Non-Living Things
 - 3.2 Progressive Revelation
 - 3.2.1 The Maternal Promise
 - 3.2.2 The Birth of Jesus Christ
 - 3.2.3 The Sacrificial System
 - 3.2.4 Sermons on the Mount
 - 3.2.5 The Doctrine of Resurrection
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last two units you learnt the doctrine of inspiration which is about God working through the authors who wrote the Bible. The Bible has its reliability from this doctrine. This unit leads you to discover the methods God used to communicate His message to the authors and the general audience. This method is rooted in the nature of God. As we have already mentioned, God is spirit, not humans like us, and more than we can describe and understand. However, He has allowed us to describe Him in our language and understanding. This method also reveals our standing before God. Humans are feeble and far inferior to God. If He does not come to our level we will not understand Him.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the term anthropomorphism
- identify the body parts that we use to describe God
- identify the human emotions and actions that we attribute to God also

- state human offices and positions attributed to God
- explain progressive revelation
- state examples of progressive revelation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Principle of Accommodation

We have earlier mentioned the principle of accommodation. It is important that we discuss its details because it is one of the important aspects of God's revelation to humanity. Principle of accommodation is the description of God in the way that we can understand. It is basically God coming down to human level. It is describing God in earthly and human relations. As it was earlier mentioned, this is what is also called Anthropomorphism whereby we use human language and describe God as if He is a human being or as if He is something we are used to. Anthropomorphism comes from two Greek words, *anthropos* for man and *morphos* for shape or form. It means thinking about non-human thought in human form. Anthropomorphism is scattered and found throughout the Bible. We attribute the characters that pertain to humans and even to other creatures as well as non-living things to God.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How is anthropomorphism part of God's revelation?

3.1.1 Examples of Human Faculties and Body Parts

The following are examples that talk about God as having human faculties, body parts, sensations, affections, and actions. We read that God has a soul and Spirit (Lev. 26:11; Matt.12:28). God also has physical organs such as face (Exodus 33:20, 23; Matt. 18:10), eyes (Ps.17:8; Hebrews 4:13); eyelids (Ps.11: 4); apple of an eye (Ps 17:8; Zach. 2:8); ears (Ps. 55:3); nose (Deut. 13:10); mouth (Deut. 8:3); lips (Job 11:5); tongue (Isa. 30:27); neck (Jer. 18:17); finger (Exod. 8:19); arm (Exod.15:12); hands (Num. 11:23) right hand (Exd.15:12); heart (Gen. 6:6) intestines (Isa. 63:15); bosom (Ps. 74:11; and feet (Isa. 66:1).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. What do we mean when we talk about God's right hand?
- ii. What are the other body parts that can be attributed to God that are not mentioned here?

3.1.2 Examples that Attribute Human Emotion and Action to God

There are many other verses that attribute human emotion to God such as rejoicing (Isa. 62:5); sorrow (Ps.78:40); grief (Ps. 95:10); provocation (Jer.7:18-19); mercy, compassion, grace, and others like he has zeal, is jealous, repents, hates, has wrath, and is revengeful (Deut. 32:11; 16:22; 32:35; Ps. 2:5). There are also other human actions that are attributed to God; investigation (Gen. 18:21); searching (Ps.7:9); knowing (Gen.3:5); intending (Gen.50:20); forgetting (Sam. 1:11); remembering (Gen. 8:1) speaking (Gen.2:16); calling (Rom. 4:17); commanding (Isa. 5:6); rebuking (Ps. 18:15); answering (Mal.2:14); resting (Gen.2:2); working (John 5:17); seeing (Gen.1:10); hearing (Exod. 2:24); smelling (Gen. 8:21); testing (Ps.11:45); sitting (Ps. 9:7). Others are arising, going, coming, walking, meeting, visiting, passing, abandoning, writing, binding, sealing, engraving, striking, chastising, working, healing, killing and making alive, wiping, washing, cleansing, anointing, adorning, clothing, crowning, girding, destroying, inflecting, judging, condemning, etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. What are the things that can lead to God's grieving?
- ii. From above, do you think that what we do here on earth affect God? If so, in what way?

3.1.3 Examples of God as Having Occupation, Office and Position

There are various others that denote certain occupation, office, and position. This include bridegroom, (Isa. 61:10); a man (Isa. 54:5-6), a father (Deut.32:6); a judge, king, warrior, mighty hero, an architect, builder, shepherd, gardener, and physician. The Bible also describe God as having a seat, throne, footstool, rod, scepter, weapon, bow, arrows, shield, chariot, banner, book, seal, treasure, inheritance, etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. If God is the bridegroom, who is His bridesmaid?
- ii. What has God done that He is called 1, a warrior 2, an architect 3, builder 4, gardener?
- iii. Which of the books can be called God's book?

3.1.4 Examples Comparing God with Non-Living Things

He is also expressed in terms of living and non-living things. For example, He is compared to a lion, the sun, morning star, light, a lamp, fire, spring or fountain, food, bread, water, ointment, a rock, refuge, a tower, a stronghold, a shadow, a road, a temple, etc.,.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What does God do to be compared with a lion, rock and spring?

3.2 Progressive Revelation

Progressive revelation has to do with the nature of God's revelation. It simply means that God's revelation of His redemptive plan for humanity, revelation of Himself, and His will is gradual. It means to say that later developments weigh heavier than earlier ones and later developments were much clearer and much more vivid than earlier ones. God gradually lifted the veil over His plans and reveals them in stages. It also means that the earlier revelations were in anticipative or transient forms while the later were in the final and fulfilled forms.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What was the most important thing that the people in the Old Testament anticipated?

3.2.1 The Maternal Promise

Progressive revelation is understood better by examples and there are many examples in the Bible. Let us take a look at the redemption plan for humanity. We find the plan beginning in Gen.3:15. This is known as the maternal promise. This maternal promise already contains in principle the whole plan of salvation. This plan is then gradually developed by means of types, symbols, ceremonial laws and Scriptural teachings. The whole Old Testament points forward to Christ. The New Testament tells us of the great redemptive act of Christ in the four records of the gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). The book of Acts of the Apostles tells us of the early history of the Church. The Epistles explain the great redemptive acts of Christ (Death and resurrection). The book of Revelation portrays for us the final consummation of the great salvation. Therefore, we see that the plan of redemption is progressive in the Bible.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

- i. What can you see in Gen. 3:15 that marks the beginning of God's plan for salvation?
- ii. Mention a few types and a few symbols that form part of God's plan of salvation.

3.2.2 The Birth of Jesus Christ

Related to this is the birth of Christ. Again Gen. 3:15 mentions the fact that a savior will be born. Moses talks about it in Deut. 18. The promise is revealed to Abraham. Among the prophets it became clear that He will be born from the tribe of Judah from the lineage of David. Isaiah tells us that Christ will be born by a virgin and Micah tells us that Christ will be born in Bethlehem. In the New Testament the event itself took place. Christ was born by a named virgin in Bethlehem the city of David.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

- i. In what way was the birth of Christ revealed to Abraham? Read Gen. 12: 2, 3.
- ii. Read Isaiah 7: 10-14 and summarise the virgin birth story recorded there.
- iii. Do you see any similarities between that story and the one of Jesus Christ

3.2.3 The Sacrificial System

The Old Testament sacrifices were clearly pointing to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Various sacrifices were offered in the Old Testament. There were daily sacrifices offered in the court. Incense were offered twice daily in the outer tent while the high priest offered an animal sacrifice once a year in the holy of holies (Heb. 9:1-10). Sacrifices were to achieve forgiveness and atonement for sinners. In the New Testament, Christ offered an atoning sacrifice once and for all. His sacrifice brought an end to the sacrificial system and marked a fulfilled of the whole idea behind sacrifices.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

- i. What is the event in Christ's life that is considered His sacrifice?
- ii. Read Hebrews 7:11-26 and make a comparative chart of the Old Priests and their sacrifices with that of Christ.

3.2.4 Sermons on the Mount

Sermon on the Mount portrays the development of various doctrines and teachings. Christ is here taking the disciples and the new Christian community to another plane. By Christ saying, “You have heard it was said to the men of old...but I say to you” (Matt. 5: 21, 27, 33, 38, 43), He was making statement of the essence of the doctrine to replace earlier usage and understanding. It is clear from biblical history that marriage for example has undergone much development. When there were few people on earth people married their close relatives as the population increased abolished. The issue of how many wives one has to marry has also undergone development in the Bible. Likewise the issue of divorce.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

- i. Read Mat. 5: 31-32 and show the development of divorce.
- ii. Read again Matthew 5 -7 and list the teachings and the doctrines that Christ gave them new interpretation.

3.2.5 The Doctrine of Resurrection

The doctrine of resurrection is also found in the Old Testament, however, the meaning, anticipation, and better understanding of the doctrine is found in the New Testament. Few verses in Psalms make references to the doctrine without mentioning it by name. The Old Testament saints are expecting deliverance from death or sheol. David says “But God will redeem my life from the grave, He will surely take me to Himself” (Ps. 49:15). In Ps.17:15), the Psalmists is confident that he will be in the presence of God when he awakes. “As for me, I shall behold they face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form.” All these verses do not clearly affirm bodily resurrection. In another verse (Ps. 16: 8-10), David is talking about the assurance of salvation. Peter and Paul quote this passage in Acts and interpret it as a prediction of Christ’s resurrection.

The first to allude to bodily resurrection is Isaiah. “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning, the earth will give birth to her dead” (Isaiah 26:19). Prophet Daniel goes further and talks about resurrection of believers and unbelievers and the fate of each group. Then we have the vivid version of the dry bones by Ezekiel showing the process of resurrection (Ezek.37).

Jesus and the New Testament testified, witnessed, and taught the resurrection. When Jesus was addressing the Sadducees who denied the

resurrection of the dead, He made it clear that they deny it because of their lack of knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. “Now about the dead raising, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:24-27). The writer of Hebrews applauded Abraham for believing that God has the ability to raise the dead (Heb.11:29). In the Gospels the resurrection of Christ and others happened. The Epistles move beyond the witness of resurrection to the importance of it to the Christian faith.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

- i. Describe the process of resurrection found in Ezek. 37.
- ii. Read 1 Corinthians 15 and note the importance of the doctrine of resurrection to believers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The discussion of the principle of accommodation and progressive revelation are meant to help you understand the biblical materials better. The use of human language to describe God does not affect God’s dignity nor make Him equal with humanity. These things are just metaphors and attempts to describe what God means to us or we wish Him to be for us. Progressive revelation on the other hand shows God’s wisdom in dealing with feeble humans.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have surveyed the methods of God’s revelation. Again the methods show us the nature of God and that of humanity as well as God’s love and desire to have communion with humanity. It is because of this love and desire that God has chosen to lower Himself to human level. In revealing Himself to us, God used the language and adopt the methods that are appropriate and suit our understanding.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do we mean by the principle of accommodation?
2. Discuss the maternal promise.
3. Narrate the progressive revelation of the birth of Jesus Christ.
4. Beginning from the Old Testament, discuss how God gradually disclosed the doctrine of resurrection.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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MODULE 3 OTHER MEANS OF REVELATION: ATTRIBUTES, NAMES AND IMAGES

- Unit 1 Classification of the Attributes of God
- Unit 2 Attributes belonging to the Essence and Existence of God
- Unit 3 Attributes Relating to God's Life
- Unit 4 God's Revelation in His Names
- Unit 5 God's Revelation through Images

UNIT 1 CLASSIFICATION OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Definition of Attributes
 - 3.2 Incommunicable and Communicable Attributes of God
 - 3.3 Absolute and Relative Attributes of God
 - 3.4 Natural and Moral Attributes of God
 - 3.5 Immanent or Intransitive and Eminent or Transitive
 - 3.6 Explanation of Immanent and Transcendent
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit continues with another important aspect of God's revelation called the Attributes of God. Attributes tell us who God is and how He relates to His creatures. Attributes tell us that God exists apart from humanity and the world. He has qualities that humans do not have and has freely chosen to share some of the qualities with human beings. The implication of this is that God wants human beings to be like Him in some measure. This is why He created man in His image. God has many attributes and we will not be able to discuss all of them here. This unit will attempt to classify. The classification here is by no means exhaustive. You may meet different classifications in other books.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:-

- defines God through His attributes
- state what we mean by qualities or characteristic of God
- write out the qualities that we share with God and those that God does not share with us
- identify the attributes that God employed to relate to humanity
- identify the moral and non-moral qualities of God
- explain God's transcendent and immanent.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Attributes

Besides what is revealed in the names of God, the Bible also reveals other characteristics of God. These characteristics are usually called *The Divine Attributes*. Some of these attributes are found in a weaker form in human beings made in the likeness of God. Others belong to God alone. Attributes of God are qualities of God which constitute what He is; they are characteristics of His nature, permanent qualities of God, objective characteristics, part of His very nature, His being, His essence.

It is based on these attributes that the Westminster Catechism defines God by saying "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

The Westminster Catechism is the statement of faith of the Presbyterian Church. What is the confessional document of your Church?

Classification of Attributes

Many scholars have attempted the classification of these attributes of God. Below is a discussion of some of the classifications.

3.2 Incommunicable and Communicable Attributes of God

The incommunicable attributes are those that find no analogy in creatures. These are the ones that God has to Himself alone and does not share with humans. These include self-existence, infinity, immutability, oneness, simplicity, immensity etc. The communicable attributes are those that find analogy in the creatures. The qualities God has given us too, so to say; even though the measure that these are found in God to some extent and as Christians we are to strive at them, for example; holiness, righteousness, mercy, goodness, spirituality, intellectuality etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List any other quality of God that you think men share to some extent.

3.3 Absolute and Relative Attributes of God

Absolute refers to the essence of God as considered in itself. God is in Himself, apart from others. God is the absolute being and is the ultimate ground of existence. He is the infinite one, who does not exist in any necessary relations, because He is self-sufficient; but He is also relative. For He can freely and does freely enter into various relationships with His creatures. Absolute attributes include self-existence, immensity, and eternity. Relative includes omnipresence and omniscience, God is everywhere with us, knows and sees whatever we do.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List the kinds of relationships you think God has with His creatures.

3.4 Natural and Moral Attributes of God

Natural belong to the very constitutional nature of God, that these are original in God. Such as self-existence, simplicity, infinity etc. Moral refers to those that qualify God as a moral being. Such as truth, goodness, mercy, justice, holiness etc. Because of the several objections

raised in connection with the word Natural (That all the attributes are original in God) others prefers to call moral and non-moral attributes.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. Who can you classify as a moral being?
- ii. In what ways does your ethnic group show their morality?

3.5 Immanent or Intransitive and Eminent or Transitive

Immanent refers to those that do not go forth and operate outside of the divine essence, but remain immanent – i.e. spreading only within the Godhead. There are immensity, simplicity, eternity etc. Immanent refers to those that go forth and produce effects eternal to God such as omnipotent, benevolence, justice, etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the importance of attributes like omnipotence and omnipresence of God to us?

3.6 Explanation of Immanent and Transcendent

Other terms which are used to describe God are Immanent and Transcendent. Transcendent – God is other than everything in creation, He is distinct, separated from the world, He is exalted, independence of the creation. In simple terms God maintains a distance from His creation and superior to it in many significant ways. God is sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up – Isaiah 6:1-5; 55:8-9; 57:15; Ps. 113:3-6; John 8:23.

Immanent – God’s presence and activity in nature, humanity and history. He is universally and providentially involved. Immanent means nearness. God is immanent in the lives of His people; God dwells in them as His holy temples. Christians become more like God in thoughts and actions as they continue to live in His presence. On the other hand, God is present to the unrighteous in a different way. Jer. 23:24 says he is everywhere in the universe. Paul says “In Him we live, move and have our being” (Acts 17:27, 28). It should be noted that any extreme position on any of these two terms is very dangerous and leads to heresy.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

- i. In this study, we have mentioned two views that identify God with the creation. What are these views?
- ii. Read Isaiah 55: 8-9 and note down the ways that God is different from His creation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In the study of the attributes of God we see the nature of God, the way humanity has to approach Him, and how we should live our lives. The attributes teach us that God is far removed from us yet He is near and approachable. He is involved in the activities of this world, He is in control of the history, and His presence is felt in human lives. This is against Deism which we have described earlier in this study.

5.0 SUMMARY

Human beings understand things better when they are able to define them. Attributes are definitions of God. They tell us who He is and how He relates to His creatures. The classification of the attributes in the unit is to help you see the dual nature of God. The attributes tells us that God does not need the creation to exist for He existed when there was no creation. His relationship with us is voluntarily.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by communicable and incommunicable attributes of God?
2. Attempt the explanation of immanent and transcendent.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Bavick, H. (2004). *Reformed Dogmatics; God and Creation*. Vol. 2. Translated by John Vreind. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
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UNIT 2 ATTRIBUTES RELATING TO THE ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE OF GOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Immutability
 - 3.2 Infinity
 - 3.3 Eternity
 - 3.4 Self-sufficient (Independence)
 - 3.5 Spirituality
 - 3.6 Oneness or Unity of God.
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit you learnt about the attributes of God and their classification. In this unit, we begin the explanation of each of the attributes. The unit starts with the attributes dealing with God's essence and existence. Attributes under this category tell us that God is devoid of change, has no limitations, is timeless, independent, not material, and has unity of being and purpose. From them you can see that there is nothing like God. They also show us our dependence on God, God knowledge of who we are and the things we do, and that humans are nothing before God and thereby humbling us before God.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the un-changing nature of God
- identify the attribute that testifies to the non-limitation of God
- state the real meaning of eternity
- state the difference between God's independence and human independence
- explain what we mean by the oneness of God.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Immutability

That God is devoid of change. He is immutal in His being, perfection, purpose and promises. His knowledge and plans, moral principles remain forever the same. Improvement and deterioration are not found in God. Ex. 3:14; Psalms. 102:26 – 28; Heb. 1:11, 12; Jams. 1:17. This does not make God an actionless God (immobility). God has entered into a relationship with human beings. Their actions sometimes change what is around Him but His being remains the same. It does not also mean that what we do here does not affect God or He does not feel it. God grieves when we sin; He is really affected by what we do. Immutability does not mean God will not correct His people – He will punish them but His plan for them is not changed. Some of the terms used of God to show change may be only anthropophagic. He is free from growth or decay. He is the absolute being with absolute perfection. See Ex. 3:14; Ps.102: 26-28; Isa. 44:4; 48:12; Mal.3:6; Rom. 1:23; Heb. 1:11-12; James.1:17.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Look into the history of the Israelites especially their journey to the Promised Land. How does this history show that God does not change?

3.2 Infinity

That God is free from all limitations. There are no limitations to His divine being or attributes. He is unlike anything we experience. Infinity of God can be thought of in many ways. He is not limited by the universe, not confined to the world, not in power, knowledge or wisdom.

- a. Space – We cannot limit God to a particular space – we mean His omnipresence. The question of whereness and location is not applicable because God can be found everywhere. (Ps. 139). In the same way, God can be worshipped anywhere.
- b. Time – Time does not apply to God, He was before time began. We cannot ask how old He is, for He was, He is and He will be. (Ps. 90:1-2; Jude 2:5). God is timeless, He does not grow or develop – there are no variations in Him. This is to say that God knows what is happening with us now. God is conscious of what is happening now, what happened in the past and what is going to happen. To God, one (1) day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. Very important is that God does things in a logical order.

- c. Knowledge and Wisdom – His knowledge is immeasurable: Psalms.147:5; Prov.15:3; Matt.10:29-30. Everything is completely transparent before God, He knows every truth, He has access to all information – Rom. 11:33; Psalms. 104:24.
- d. Power – Omnipotence. God is to do all things which are proper objects of His power. The all power quality of God is found in His name *El-Shaddai*. Gen. 17:1 - The Almighty God. God has power over nature, history and humans. He is able to do all things that are in accordance with His nature. This does not mean that God sins or participates in evil.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. The seasons of the year testify to the fact that God does things logically. What other things show that God is logical?
- ii. The implication of God’s omnipresence means God can be worshipped anywhere. What is the implication of omniscience?

3.3 Eternity

Eternity means, God is timeless and exists through endless ages. Ps. 90:2; 102:12; Eph. 3:21. Things like past, present and future do not apply to Him. It means He has neither beginning nor ending. He is beyond temporal limits and relations.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is the difference between infinity and eternity?

3.4 Self- sufficient (Independence)

By self –sufficient we mean God is the originator of life and He is the giver of life to all things. “For God the father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also life in Himself” (John 5:26). Another verse that strongly supports this is Acts 17:25, 25. In it Paul says, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is He saved by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.” It means God is not dependent upon His creation, rather, the whole creation is dependent upon Him. The Bible testifies that He is the one that provides rain, food for all things, does not need the advice or counsel of anyone because His knowledge and understandings are above all He has made (Job 38: 41; Isa. 40: 12, -14). God is independent in His work of redemption. The ultimate goal of the whole work of creation is found in God alone. He alone has the power, knows the way and is able to do it.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. Job chapters 38 through 40 and Isaiah chapter 40 best summarise the self-sufficiency of God. Read these passages and what the authors mean by God's self-sufficiency.
- ii. If God is independent in His work of redemption then it means human beings have no part to play in their salvation. Explain this.

3.5 Spirituality

God is spirit not matter. He is found everywhere; He is in-complex, indivisible and unique. He has no body or physical existence. It is this spirit that was breathed in man to give him life. Part of us is spirit John 1:8; 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Name two creatures that have spiritual bodies.

3.6 Oneness or Unity of God

This attribute expresses the fullness of God's being. It is an attribute of relation. It means that even though they are three persons, yet God is one (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:6). It also means that the attributes of God do not clash. There is no contradiction in Him, in what He does, says, wills or plans. For example, God's justice does not clash with His love, nor love and punishment, or election and reprobation. In God, there is complete harmonious fullness of love, mercy, justice, compassion, and omnipotence. The unity of God can be seen in His creation, all the three persons were involved in the creation, they took counsel together and it was a complete creation. God has a united plan for the world and humanity. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

The unity of God involves humanity in some sense too. His fullness dwells in us (Col.2:9), He wants His church to be one as it is expressed in the trinity (John 17:21), and there is unity in the final consummation. In the consummation, the angels, the redeemed church and the whole creation are united to bless, honor, and glorify God (Rev. 5:13).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

- i. What are the ways in which you think that many churches we have today can unite and become one?
- ii. What is the name for those groups that are in one God?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The lesson we have learnt from discussing the attributes of God is that of God's abounding love and grace. While He does not need us to exist, He chose to create us and He cares for us. Many of the attributes of God such as omnipresence, omnipotent, omniscience are for human benefits. Through these He cares and protects us. Humans also benefit from attributes such as independence and oneness. They assure us that God's plan for us will not change and He will do whatever He wills.

5.0 SUMMARY

The set of attributes discussed in this unit show the difference that exists between God and man. They tell us that God is not like man. While God does not change, human beings change. While God is not limited by space, time, knowledge, and power humans are. While God does not depend on anything to exist, humans depend on God, parents, other humans, and the material world to exist. In a similar way, while God is a unit, humans are made of body and spirit.

6.0 TUTOR - MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the attribute of immutability
2. Discuss the various aspects of God infinity
3. Compare God's independence and human independence.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Bavick, H. (2004). *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, Vol. 2. Translated by John Vreind. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
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UNIT 3 ATTRIBUTES RELATING TO GOD’S LIFE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Righteousness
 - 3.2 Justice
 - 3.3 Love
 - 3.4 Wisdom
 - 3.5 Holiness
 - 3.6 Other Attributes
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This third unit continues the discussion of individual attributes of God. Most of the attributes here are also qualities that God demands from human beings. God demands righteousness, justice, love, wisdom, holiness, truthfulness, and faithfulness from human beings. These things are things that God has and He has also given them to us in some measure. God’s demand is that humans exhibit these in their relationship with Him, fellow humans, and the creation. In this unit you will learn the way God and humans use them.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:-

- discuss the relationship between righteousness and holiness
- explain what holiness means according to 2 cor. 6: 14-17
- state the biblical meaning of justice
- differentiate between knowledge and wisdom.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Righteousness

Righteousness is related to the holiness of God, it is a mode of His holiness, which has to do with God’s moral purity. This term commands adherence to the law. God is not under any law but law is in the very nature of God and His laws are a true expression of His nature – Psalms.

19:7 – 9. God commands only what is right and that has a positive effect on the believers who obey. God does not contradict the laws He has established. He does what is right. Measuring up to the standard of the law – Gen. 18:25; Jer. 9:24.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you think are the positive effects of the Law to a believer?

3.2 Justice

Justice has to do with God's administration of His kingdom in accordance with His law. God requires all moral agents to conform to His laws. God judges us according to the law which He has given us. He said He will punish sinners and He punishes sinners, the same thing applies to His promise of faithfulness and steadfast love. As a judge, He is fair; He shows no partiality or favoritism. When it is difficult for us to understand God's administration of His justice we should never conclude that He is unjust (Ps. 37). Justice of God should not be evaluated on short-term basis; it may be in this life or the life to come.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the difference between the Justice of God and the justice practiced by humans?

3.3 Love

God is love means that God is eternally sharing and giving Himself. God exercised love even before the creation. The persons in the Trinity love themselves. In John 14:31; Matt. 3:17, love is seen in other attributes such as benevolence, grace, mercy and persistence. In benevolence God takes care of His people's ultimate welfare (John 3:16; Deut. 7:7-8). God cares and provides for His people. In Grace, He deals with people not based on their merits or worthiness. It is dependent on His goodness and generosity. He requires nothing from us (Eph 1:5-8; 2:7-9; Titus 2:11; 3:3). God's mercy is His tenderheartedness, covering compassion and pitying concern for man. (Psalms. 103:13; Matt. 9:35-36; Mark 6:34). God's love is persistence and His patience is without limit. Look at the life of the Israelites (Psalms. 96:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

If love means sharing and giving, what then has God shared or given us to show His love to us?

3.4 Wisdom

Wisdom is one aspect of knowledge but not the same even though they are related. Knowledge comes through study while wisdom comes from an intuitive insight into things. Wisdom is practical while knowledge is theoretical. The wisdom of God is His intelligence and also has to do with the fact that He works all things to their appropriate ends. Through the wisdom of God, the best result of this is produced. His wisdom is manifested in the creation (Ps. 19:1-7; 104: 1-34); in taking care of all things (Ps. 33:10; Rom. 8: 28); and in the redemption plan and execution of it (Rom. 11:33; 1Cor.2: 7, Eph. 3: 10).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Differentiate between wisdom and knowledge.

3.5 Holiness

In the Old Testament this is the most prominent reference to God. The word “Holy” means to be separated, to be cut. God is absolutely distinct from all His creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. In virtue of His holiness He has no communion with sin. He also demonstrates in His moral creatures. We are also called upon to be holy, separated, cut off and withdrawn from ordinary usage (Ex. 15:11). The passage that best describes holiness is 2 Cor. 6:14 – 17.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Read 2 Cor. 6: 14-17 and note down what is considered holiness or unholiness.

3.6 Other Attributes

Truth – God is consistent in all His ways. Everything He does agree with His nature. He is faithful and trustworthy (John 14:6; 17:3).

Faithfulness – He keeps His promises, He proves to be true (Num. 23:19; Ps. 89:2, 1 Thess. 5:24).

Personality – God is personal. By person we mean one is capable of self-determination. A person is a responsible doer of an act. It should be

noted that all the members of the trinity are persons. God has self-cognisance, will, intellect and self-determination (Exod. 3:14; Gen. 3).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

List any four attributes that we have not discussed and explain them briefly.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Most of the attributes discussed in this unit fall under the communicable attributes of God. That is the ones that humans share with God in some measure. Believers have some of these attributes in a different way than unbelievers. God requires humans to exhibit these attributes before Him and their fellow humans. Attributes of Justice, love, truth, and faithfulness are for the good of the society generally. As God relates to us in love He also wants us to relate to others and the whole creation in love.

5.0 SUMMARY

Some of the attributes here look similar but are not the same. The demands and expressions of each differ. For example, righteousness deals with keeping the Law. Love is about sharing with one another. Wisdom is intuition and insight while holiness means to be separated from the common ordinary. While righteousness, justice and holiness have something to do with the law, love and wisdom do not. In another sense, we can look at love as law itself. For the Bible talks about the law of love.

6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the difference between God's righteousness and justice?
2. Show the difference between wisdom and knowledge of God.
3. Using 2 Cor. 6: 14-17, define holiness and explain this attribute of God.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Berkhof, I. (1981). *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

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UNIT 4 GOD'S REVELATION IN HIS NAMES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Meaning of God's Names
 - 3.2 Names Relating to God's Being
 - 3.3 Meaning of Jesus' Names
 - 3.4 Some Prominent Names of God
 - 3.4.1 I AM Who I AM
 - 3.4.2 Yahweh
 - 3.4.3 Elohim
 - 3.4.4 El Elyon
 - 3.4.5 El Shaddai
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Here we move from the discussion of attributes to names of God which also describe Him. Names in many cultures are very important and convey a lot of meaning. In the Bible, many of the names given to people and places have special meanings and history. They also convey authority, relationship and reputation. Names of God reveal in the same way reveals who He is. This unit will also look at the names of God and Christ and explain with their meaning for our welfare and salvation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the meaning of the word name
- discuss the meaning and reasons of individual names and places in the Bible
- define individual names of God
- state the messages that the names of God convey.
- state why the Israelites were not using the name Yahweh
- identify the meanings of the names of Christ.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The meaning of God's Names

One of the ways God has revealed Himself to humanity is through His names. We can say that the revelation of God is expressed and conveyed in His specific names. Our knowledge about God comes from His names. His names are identical with His nature. Usually, names are a way of human describing or talking about God in human terms or human language. The Hebrew word for name literally means sign or a distinguishing mark. The Greek and Latin words for name also mean sign. A name is a sign of a person bearing it. Names are often just (arbitrary) designators for us humans, not definite descriptions of a person's history, character or occupation. Yet names are sensitive. The use of a name may mark a change in relationship as names are linked with reputations.

A name reveals the characteristics of a person. Usually there is an arbitrary connection between a name and the person bearing it. Names are personal. It is usually unpleasant when one's name is garbled. A name stands for a person's honor, worth and personality. In earlier times names had transparent meaning and actually revealed the identity of the person or thing.

In the Bible, many names have meaning as well as reasons why they were given. Some of these include Eve (Gen. 3:20); Cain (Gen. 4:1); Seth (Gen.4:25); Noah (Gen. 5:29); Babel (Gen.11:9); Ishmael (Gen. 16:11); Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:25-26); Moses (Exod. 2:10); and Jesus and Immanuel (Mat.1: 21-23). We also have many people's names changed in order to act in different capacities. Those affected in this category include Abraham (Gen. 17:5); Sarah (Gen.17:15); Israel (Gen. 32:28); Jehoshua (Num.13:16); Jedidiah (2 Sam.12: 25); Mara (Ruth 1.20) and Peter (Mk. 3:10).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. Read the following verses Gen. 3:20; 25:25-26; and Ex. 2:10, and write down the meanings of these names.
- ii. Read Gen.17:5; 32:28; Ruth 1:20-22 and Mk 3:10 and find out the reason why the names of the people involved were changed.

3.2 Names Relating to God's Being

What we have said above is also true about the names of God. There is an intimate link between God and His names. The names are given by God Himself and are no means accidental or arbitrary. The names are

part of God's revelation to mankind. His personal characters find expressions in His names such as "I Am." His names reveal His supreme concreteness and His dignity. His name exhibits in and to the world His glory, honor, His redeeming power, His service, and His relationship. Generally, His names describe His relationship with His creatures. He enters into relationship with human beings through His names. The names of God are God Himself therefore must not be blasphemed, desecrated or used in vain. Rather they must be invoked, passed on the next generation, magnified, known, feared, exalted, sought out and sanctified.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- i. Which of the commandments is about the name of God?
- ii. Some of God's names reveal some relationship. Identify those names and the relationship conveyed by those names.

3.3 Meaning of Jesus' Names

The names of Jesus also work in the same way. They reveal His relationship and position in the Trinity; they reveal His work, mission, and relationship to humanity. The names of Jesus help us not just to gain more knowledge about Himself but also about God. They guarantee the truth of our knowledge of God and the benefits associated with knowing God and they tell us where to get salvation. In the Bible it is clear that salvation is given, miracles are performed, forgiveness is received, eternal life is given, we become children of God, prayers are said and heard, baptism is to be done in His name together with the Father and the Holy Spirit and we are to gather and call upon His name. Some of Jesus' names include, Immanuel, Lamp of God, Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Savior, Messiah, Christ, Rabbi, Teacher, Master, Son of Man, Son of God, and Lord.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. Which of the names of Jesus reveal His main mission in this world?
- ii. Briefly explain the following names in relation to the work of Jesus: Immanuel, Rabbi, Son of God, and Messiah.
- iii. Which of the names above reveal Jesus' relationship with the Father?

3.4 Some Prominent Names of God

The Bible makes it clear that God cannot be known or designated and grasped under a single name. We shall discuss a few of the prominent names of God.

3.4.1 I am Who I am

This name means that God is the self-existent, self-sufficient and eternal one. It emphasises the ontological nature of God and sets forth the faithfulness of God – *I AM* (or will be) who I have been, or I will be who I will be. It connotes the reality of His being against idols, also the necessariness, eternity and unchangeableness of His being, the constancy and certainty of His nature, will and word. The tense used here in Hebrew language comprehends all times, past, present and future. Self-existent means He has no origin and He is not answerable to any one while self-sufficient means God has no needs and depends on no one.

The name *I AM* means God is who He is; He is the same yesterday, today and forever. It means God will be what He will be. For the Israelites, it means God will be what He was for their fathers; He will be that now and remain that for them. He will also be everything for His people. When He used this name for Moses, He meant also that He is not a new and strange God but the God of their fathers and the same way He was with their fathers He will be with them and the generations after. The name reveals His nature and character. He is the unchangeable, faithful, eternal and self-sufficient one. It also reveals His relationship with His people. He will not change in His grace, love and assistance to His people. He will remain faithful to His promises.

3.4.2 Yahweh

This name is usually represented only by the consonants YHWH. It is the name that is usually represented by Jehovah. The Jews believed that God has manifested Himself in this name in a special way. They refer to it as the most preeminent, most glorious and God's proper name. The name describes the essence of God, the one who causes things to be and who bestows life. It was too sacred and they were forbidden to pronounce it. They substituted Adonai for it. **Adonai** means Lord, Master, the name of God used for Yahweh when the proper name of God came to be taught of as too sacred to be pronounced. **Ha-adon:** Related to Adonai is Ha-adon. The name means Lord of Lords or Lord of all the earth. It refers to God as the ruler to whom all things are subject and to whom humans beings related to as servants (Gen. 18:27).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

- i. In what ways are we dependent on God?
- ii. Give one or two examples of God's faithfulness to His promises.
- iii. Who are the group of worshippers that mostly identify themselves with Jehovah?
- iv. Summarise the things that God does under the name Yahweh.

3.4.3 Elohim

El is the general name for God or any god. The Hebrews used the compound name **Elohim** for their God. It means the mighty one and it speaks of His majesty or plentitude (Gen. 1:26-27). The name refers to God as the strong one or the object of dread. This is a plural name for God. The name is a witness to the doctrine of the Trinity and the plural also denotes God as the fullness of life and power.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What do we mean when we say God is Plural?

3.4.4 El Elyon

This Hebrew name means the most high, the strongest mighty one, one who is exalted high above everything. This is the name Melchizedek used in Gen. 14:18. Balaam used it in Numbers 24:16 while the king of Babylon used it in Isaiah 14:14. Other passages that used this name include Mark 5: 7; Luke 1:32; Acts 16:17.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Check the passages above and note down how this name is used.

3.4.5 El Shaddai

This name was used more in the time of the patriarchs (see Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; Exod.6:3; Num.24:4). It was also used by Job and Psalms and a few times by the Prophets. In the New Testament it is used in 2Cor. 5:18; Rev.4:8. The name means the Almighty God or All-sufficient God. It has the connotation of the one who bountifully supplies all things.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

In what ways has God shown His might in history?

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit looked at the biblical usage of names generally, and the names of God and Christ in particular. In the beginning God commanded man to name the things He has created. In the same way God revealed and continues to reveal Himself through names. These names are a testimony that man is able to describe God, His works, and His majesty as well as His awesomeness. The lesson we learn from the Israelites is that God is honored or disrespected through the way we use His name. It is believed that the names of God stand for God Himself.

5.0 SUMMARY

The way names are used and applied in the Bible is similar to the way Africans used names and apply them. As you have learnt, names of God express relationship (Ezek. 3:13, Gen. 32:27-29), character and history (Gen. 25:23-25; 1 Sam. 25:25; 1 Sam. 4:21), authority (Zech. 14:24; Luke 10:17; John 17:11), reputation (Prov. 22:1; Ps. 34:3; Ezek. 20:9), and reveal the nature of God (Ex. 3:14; Judges 6:12). Some of the names reveal one aspect or nature of God more than the other, so care must be taken to study the context carefully.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. In details, explain the name I AM WHO I AM.
2. How did the Israelites understand and use the name YAHWEH?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Bavick, H. (2004). *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*. Vol. 2. Translated by John Vreind. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
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UNIT 5 GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH IMAGES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Explanation of the Use of Images
 - 3.2 Natural and Cultural Images
 - 3.3 Anthropomorphism
 - 3.4 Human Personality
 - 3.5 Social Images
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn activities of God and what humans think about Him, and also the kind of language biblical authors adopted. The biblical authors used many images in describing God and other things. As you will discover, images have impact on human thinking, worship, and behavior. To understand images, you must take note of the time, culture, and experience of the authors. The description of God using images arises out of a particular situation, need, and experience. Images are not difficult to understand but the ones foreign to our culture must be interpreted with care.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the important of images in understanding God
- state the power and what images can achieve
- mention the difference between natural and cultural image
- discuss anthropomorphism and athropopathism
- discuss the social roles of God.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Explanation of the Use of Images

The Bible is written in oriental style which is full of images. Both God and the biblical writer choose the use of images to tell us about God. Africans learn through images and the knowledge of images about God in the Bible will help our preaching, hence through them the gospel becomes more vital and more impressive.

An image is a likeness of something. Like portraits, images are verbal portraits often in the form of similes or metaphors. Images interpret but only in part not all of the qualities of an object are to be considered in what the image represents. Images depict and evoke feelings.

Images are packed with power. They focus and distill some particular facet of the life and character of God. In this way, images are like names of God authorised and revelatory emblems of God. We ought to resist the temptation to translate images of God right away: translation dissipates some of the power and character of the image.

Images of God have enormous power to focus our worship, direct our thought, stimulate our feeling, and even alter our behaviour. They have the power to shape our longings and even mediate in our conversion for good or ill. The reason is that we tend to become like what we worship. Images also have the power to deceive and distort just as they have the power to portray and reveal, i.e. all images could both lie and tell the truth.

Images limit themselves to some particular aspect of the character of God. In so doing, they run a risk. We have to bracket those associations and implications of an image that are not intended, e.g. “God is our rock”, does not mean God is inanimate.

Images are inevitably shaped by mind, time, culture and experience of their human authors. Else they wouldn't have meant anything to their original audience. But we live in another time and culture, and those of our human authors of scripture. Example: what did “God is my shepherd, father, king or our covenant Lord” mean?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. Summarise the limitations of images.
- ii. Check a dictionary to find out the meaning of oriental
- iii. What character of God are we referring to when we say God is my shepherd.

3.2 Natural and Cultural Images

We refer to things that God made Himself and those that are products of human culture as activities: Rock- Ps. 31:2; 42:9; 92:15. Light – Ps. 27:1; 1 Sam. 60:1; 1 John 1:5; Matt. 4:16. Fire – Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; Heb. 12:29. Water – Jer. 2:13; Ps. 42:2. Dry root – Hos. 5:12, Fortress, stronghold, tower of refuge – 2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 13:3; 61:3; Neh. 1:7; Shield 2 Sam. 22:2. Lamp 2 Sam. 22:29; Temple – Lev. 21:22. Even animals like Lion – Amos 1:2; Joel 3:16, Leopard Hos. 13:7; Bear Hos. 13:8 etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What does it mean when we say God is a dry root and water?

3.3 Anthropomorphism

This has to do with the realm of human beings. Note that we have discussed this in details. This is expressing the activities of God borrowed from human beings (language) God speaking in Gen. 1:3; 1:28 to Moses and the prophets. God breathing (Gen. 2:7) walking (Gen. 3:8), resting (Gen. 2:20), writing (Ex. 31:18), shooting (Ps. 64:7) and laughing (Ps. 2:4). Then God as having hands, arms, nostrils, face, mouth, voice, ear, eyes. Even as a woman or mother – Luke 15:8-10.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

- i. How and for what reason does God use the following parts of the body: eyes, face, ears, and voice.
- ii. In what ways does God speak to us today? In addition to your answer see Heb.1: 1-3.

3.4 Human Personality

This can be referred to as anthropomorphism, and this has to do with mental, emotional and characters of God. These include Knowing – Gen. 3:15; 1 Sam. 2:3; Ps. 44:21, Remembering – Gen. 9:15, 16; 2 Kings 20:3, Regretting, Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11, grieving, feeling, patient, gracious, loving and merciful, etc.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Group the things mentioned in the paragraph under mental and emotional qualities.

3.5 Social Images

Here the Bible talks about God as playing the roles of a Father- Ps. 103:3, Mother, Judge, Lord, Warrior, Archer, King, Husband, Builder, Friend, Potter, and Barber – Is. 7:20. God is also associated with the roles of Watchman and Shepherd – Isa. 42:13; Heb. 11:10; Rom. 9:21; Isa. 42:14.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

With the use of a Bible Concordance, find out the verses that talk about God as Mother, Barber and Archer and explain the context in which these roles are attributed to God.

4.0 CONCLUSION

One of the most fascinating aspects of images is that they bring one close to a particular culture. They help you go into another person's culture and expose you to cultures that are not yours. Images are artistic language to paint visible pictures on our minds. In dealing with images you must seek to understand what that image meant for people at that time, avoid assumptions in the interpretation of images, and critically analyse the context.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt the guidelines of interpreting images and that images could both lie and tell the truth." This sentence must be taken serious. This unit has classified images into four categories to help put them into perspective. All these images reveal God's dealing with human beings either helping or punishing. God is the God of love as well as of justice.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the images of God together with their implications.
2. Discuss any two aspects of the images of God

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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