

Response

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After careful reading of Rev Daka's article, I have created pictures of the issues raised. I have done this by looking at the behaviour people exhibit when death occurs in my culture and others where I have lived. I thank God that Rev Daka could take such a topic into focus for the Church to consider on the African continent. After thoughtful examination of Rev Daka's concern, I have come to agree with him that many teachers of the Bible teach little about this great Christian doctrine for reasons that might be discovered as the ball keeps rolling.

After a somewhat deeper reflection on "hope in the midst of death", I look at it as a strong evangelistic message in a religiously pluralistic society as we have it today. Hope in the midst of death is anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and Bible promises, and teaching it faithfully is as effective as teaching "*receive Jesus Christ as your personal saviour*". It may sound rather strange to embark on a teaching like this and hope to win people for Christ, but the fact of the matter is that death is one of the common denominators on which the various human traditions rest. This means a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a scientist, an atheist, and everyone else is puzzled with this human phenomenon we call death. Well-articulated "hope in the midst of death" as one distinctive in Christianity will set a clear platform for evangelizing the perishing world. There are many strong Christians today who testify to how they got saved as a result of funeral messages because they found the way out of this sinister reality we call death with which many people wrestle.

"Hope in the midst of death" will not only serve as evangelistic, it will also strengthen Christians who do not understand their faith, and it will also challenge us to stay focused on holy living. In short, "*hope*" will evangelize, strengthen, and stimulate for sanctification.

Talking about "hope in the midst of death", we assume that we are talking from the side of the bereaved since he/she is the one expressing some behavioural patterns. True, the level of hope will be exhibited in the mourner. We also need to note that observable behaviour will not

necessarily match the level of hope the mourner has. For example, calmness during loss does not necessarily express hope because this is a personality trait that even a hopeless sinner can express. At the same time, calmness can be a sign of hope. Joy on the other hand cannot be a sign of hope during loss. Loss is real and painful so that expressing joy during loss might be a psychological insensitivity to human feelings. Again, joy can be a sign of hope. Hope in my opinion should be first a mental assurance based on the promises of God rather than an emotional exposition only. The assurance is that when Christ returns the corpse we bury will return to the best life and we shall live together again if we have all walked in the ways of the Lord. It does not matter how sinister the corpse looks, how destroyed they can be, how bad they can look when we bury them, and how badly worms can eat them, the promise from the Bible is that they shall live again by the power of God. *Lack of hope in the midst of death is unbelief and carnality even when it hurts.*

Talking about hope based on the promises of God, below are some passages that challenge the Christians:

1. Those who have experienced God's touch and power know that there is a future for the man of peace when he dies (Psalms 37:37; 49:15; 116:15).
2. Wisdom demands that we understand life from God's design that during death the righteous has a refuge, (Proverbs 14:32), and that death *is a positive* circumstance (Ecclesiastes 7:1-2).
3. The prophets of God have told this and it will come to pass that those who die in peace actually go to rest (Isaiah 57:2) and at the end of the days they will receive inheritance (Daniel 12:13).
4. The good news from the Master over death is that beyond this world righteous people shall receive comfort (Luke 16:25).
5. Our minds should be instructed and reminded of the following:
 - a. That we belong to Christ even in the midst of death. We are not left to the dust no matter the desperate condition of the corpse in the coffin and the graveyard (Romans 14:8).

- b. That death is powerless; it has no sting. We shall not be held perishing in the grave even if our present experience is of the mortal and perishable (1Corinthians 15:51-57).
- c. That it is not in our powers to resurrect; it is the power of God (2 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14) who demonstrated it by raising Christ.
- d. That through a righteous death we are at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Philippians 1:23).

What else can we say about “hope in the midst of death”? As I grow in Christ, I know that each day of my life is a life of calling. The Lord called me to a holy life, now I can hear the Spirit calling me to a beautiful death, a death full of hope for me and for all those who believe: “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them*” (Revelation 14:13).

What a mighty topic Rev Daka has brought! Yes, there is hope in the midst of death. Let us not mourn like people who do not understand.

Turning to little technical matters in the paper, I have the following suggestions:

1. I feel the title could have been affirmative rather than interrogative. Something like “*There is Hope in the Midst of Death*” instead of “*Is There Hope in the Midst of Death?*”
2. Three issues in the phrase: “A Paper Towards an African Theology of Hope”. First, I feel the paper is about the theology of death rather than the theology of hope. Hope comes as an element in the theology of death. This can be seen in the reoccurring “theology of death” phrase in the treatment of the article. Second, I feel it should also read “...Toward a Biblical Theology of ...”. I have a bias that there is no African, Indian, or American theology that would fully agree with the Bible. Speaking as an African, pure African theology at times stands in contradiction with the word of God as demonstrated in the last sentence of the second paragraph in Rev Daka’s article. I would not want to elevate the African position as authoritative on the subject of death, but rather the Bible and what it says on death in the African milieu. Thus, I would write “*A Paper Towards a Biblical Theology of Death in the African Context*” instead of African, Indian, or American Theologies. Third, the word

“hope” seems to be open to many interpretations. We may assume we understand that it is hope for the life after death, but that also can be abused. Many people believe in life after death contrary to what the Bible teaches. A little further explanation on the nature of the hope we are looking for would help.

3. The third paragraph has fundamental questions in the search for the theology of death which indeed need to be tackled as the ball keeps rolling: *What is death? What is the origin and cause of death? What happens when people die?* These are real and fundamental questions at least in the African context that need to be treated individually. I am personally facing them as I plant the Church in Southern Democratic Republic of Congo. For greater impact on the understanding of death in Africa, we might need to talk about the nature of the death of Christ to make Christian hope relevant.
4. The article is very good, but it seems to have some sweeping statements that might need attention or clarification when it is in its final written form. For example: the last sentence of the first paragraph on the first page: “...no adequate knowledge...” could read, “a clearly articulated theology of death fosters an adequate knowledge, experience...”
5. The paragraph beginning with: “*Who are the recipients of this honour...*” and the one saying “*Those that are living now are the recipients of honour and respect...*” seem to tackle a different topic outside “hope in the midst of death”. If this could be looked into, we could have more details related to the question of who receives the honour. These two paragraphs might fit well under the question “*Who are the ancestors?*” rather than “*Is there Hope in the Midst of Death?*”

I would wish to thank Rev Daka for “starting the ball rolling” on this crucial issue affecting the Christian faith in the African milieu.