AN AFRICAN RECONSIDERATION
OF CHRISTIAN ANAMNESIS

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The Christian religion is based on a fundamental datum: the paradigm of anamnesis. For the Jew of the Old Testament, just as for the Christian of the New Testament, remembrance gives structure to faith. And for man who had his origin in the African tradition, anamnesis equally constitutes an essential element of life. This subject, in itself, already raises several questions. Christian anamnesis, while turning towards the past, anticipates the future in the present and is oriented towards the future. African anamnesis, on the other hand, turns radically towards an ancestral past which it tries to reproduce in the present. Two worlds, two different conceptions of remembrance. African Christians find themselves at the crossroads of these two contrasting views of anamnesis. Is it possible to reconcile Christian anamnesis with African anamnesis? What relation can be established between the two kinds of anamnesis? And finally, is it possible for African anamnesis to function in the Christian thought system?

All these questions require a systematization, a spirit of synthesis and, above all, a proper structure. In this way, the present work will involve four points: the first point will define the concept of anamnesis. After this first stage, the second point will pay attention to the way anamnesis functions in the Bible (Old and New Testament). In the third point, I intend to study anamnesis according to the African conception. And finally, the last point will be a comparison between Christian anamnesis and African anamnesis. The conclusion will rearrange the principal ideas and the answers to the questions that have been asked. The bibliographical page will once again summarize the documents which helped me to accomplish this work.

1. The Semantic Field of the Concept of ANAMNESIS

Etymologically, the term anamnesis comes from the Greek word anamnesis which means memory. It is this Greek term which is the translation of zikkaron in Hebrew. This Hebrew word itself comes from the root zkr
which means memory.\(^1\) And, as Bord also says: “the terms which express anamnesis derive from the root zkr (verb zakar, noun zikkaron, askarah etc.); in the Septuagint they are indicated by the term mn m.\(^2\) In order to define the term anamnesis in a precise, clear and brief way, we shall follow Brehm in saying: “anamnesis means remembrance or recollection”.\(^3\) As far as Corbon is concerned, he clearly states: “In Hebrew the meaning of the verb zkr, in its various forms, gives some idea of it: remember, recall, mention, but also preserve and invoke.”\(^4\) Thus it has been clearly established that behind this term the idea of the past becomes manifest. Remembering, therefore, consists in recalling a past, in digging it up while following its trail in the library of memory. Remembering is also introducing the past and the future into the present.

2. Biblical Interpretation of Anamnesis

The etymology of the term anamnesis having been established, this second point will make an effort to understand the functioning of anamnesis in the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament.

The Old Testament has this as a characteristic: the fact that anamnesis constitutes the centre of the whole of the relations between “man and God”, and “God and man”. The Jewish faith is based on founding events (of salvation) which must absolutely be preserved in memory. As Hoornaert says: “in contrast to other religions, Judaism and Christianity are pre-eminently religions of remembrance.”\(^5\) But who is the one who remembers?

God remembers: Jewish consciousness is based on a fundamental fact: the conviction according to which Yahweh is a God who remembers. And there are indeed, in connection with this, lots of texts to prove this: God remembers Rachel (Gen. 30:22), he remembers people (Ps. 136:23), he remembers the Sinai covenant and all the others covenants with people (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David), he remembers or he forgets sin (Hos. 7:2; Jer. 14:10). And when God remembers, it means that something is going to happen. For example, when he remembers Rachel, she becomes pregnant. God’s anamnesis is therefore highly effective and reliable. His

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