

RECOGNIZING THE SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS ANGER

Chapter 21

Spong's General Contentions:

Spong sites historical data to point out there is a high correlation between theistic religion and killing anger in Chapter 21. This theistic God we created and its illusions are the source of irrational responses by Christians, especially when our belief and illusions are challenged.

Spong believes theism:

1. Diminishes humanity; and
2. Creates destructive religious anger.

Until the 20th century, Christians have accepted with comfort gender, race and sexual orientation prejudices as part of Christianity. Slavery was justified using the scriptures and no serious challenges were made to other dogmas that accompanied its theistic God. However, the 20th century has brought about better understanding of natural disasters that they are not the work of God sending us messages. That the supernatural God does not go around punishing evildoers as the theistic God would have us believe. Spong quotes the English biblical scholar Michael Goulder who puts it "theistic God in our time has become unemployed." The role of Christianity is fading and replaced by secular society playing an ever-increasing role in our lives. Only way for Christianity to regain its relevance in our society is if Christianity consciousness is transformed.

Thesis:

Spong believes for Jesus' teaching to play a relevant role in the 21st century, it must transform its consciousness and abandon its dehumanizing practices. Unless the dogma and mythology surrounding it is destroyed, the destructive harm created by the dogma and mythology will bring an end to Christianity's relevance.

Spong sites John 10:10 "*I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly*" (그러나 내가 온것은 양들이 생명을 얻되 더욱 풍성히 얻도록 하기 위해서이다) as his conviction that the essence of Christianity is abundant life and the ultimate value in Christianity.

Problem:

The theistic God was created to satisfy what Spong calls "*all-consuming intuitive anxiety and fear*" of early people. However, the theistic God we created has systematically embedded prejudices and tribal mentality. If you enjoy God's favor and our enemies God's disfavor, and you do not find issue with suffering of others that are in disfavor. When you believe you have a monopoly on the ultimate truth, you attack anyone who disagrees with your beliefs. When reliance on such beliefs is challenged, the fear and prejudice turns into anger. This is especially true when challenges come from competing views.

Christians have committed atrocities (포악) in the name of their theistic God. History shows, religion in general create a level of comfort in the prejudices. Spong sites the Bible Belt, the Crusades and anti-Semitism as examples. The problems with believing

you have the ultimate truth and the promise of reward in the afterlife allows injustice to perpetuate. The weight and consequences of current lives are not as important as that of afterlife.

Argument:

Spong points out that many of the past prejudices have been permeated. Such as the outlaw of slavery in the U.S. However, he adds that in order to overcome such prejudices which create a comfort zone for many fundamentalist by creating a sphere of tribal instincts, something powerful has force it to change. He outlines the destructive harm brought by such irrational views and how cycle of victimizing certain groups will continue if action is not taken. By continuing to hold on to the religion of fear and control, Christianity has becoming more irrelevant in our society.

Throughout the Old Testament, the scripture uses wrathful God to create fear to control. The New Testament uses guilt for control, substituting a wrathful God with guilt. Spong calls it "ecclesiastical weapon." By constantly reminding people of their failures, inadequacies, and weakness, this ecclesiastical weapon creates self-negativity and self-rejection. The constant message of guilt and degradation leads to dependence among Christians and eventually to anger. Spong states: denigrated people always denigrate; hated people always hate; abuse people always abuse; and punished people always punish.

Christians cannot deny its history with prejudices it held and current prejudices it holds. Many human rights progress were made through secularized society's leadership. This has happened in Western Europe and somewhat in the United States. Spong points out Christianity can play a relevant role if it changes. He welcomes the current forum of discussions for the validity of female participation in the clergy and the homosexual participation in our churches are good signs for progress. Debate is the first step to recognize the irrational behavior and eventual change.

The fundamental views, the literal views and the tribal lens we view Christianity has to change. If not, Christianity will simply become less and less relevant and the theism will find new groups to victimize. Currently, the anger is directed toward homosexuals. The first 21st century victim has been identified.

The theistic Christianity based on dogma and myths is becoming less relevant in the 21st century. Underneath the myths, there is message that should not be lost. Spong wants a new Christology to move beyond theism, separating our theistic understanding of God from the true Jesus' teachings. This is a *moral imperative* and only pathway into to future of loving Christianity. This is what Spong calls "Jesus for the Non-religious."

Discussion:

1. Christianity (Judeo-Christianity) for centuries relied on threat and challenge, either through fear or guilt to build its base. Without it, can this new paradigm work if the "all-consuming intuitive anxiety and fear" is part of human nature according to Spong?
2. Is Spong's new paradigm more a human development process and less religious (Christian base)?