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**THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE STATE OF
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR AFRICAN ECCLESIOLOGY**

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THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE STATE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR AFRICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

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Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of the study is to establish the past, the present, and the future state of biblical theology for African Ecclesiology examined the birth, growth of Biblical theology from the apostolic, church Fathers' era in a brief using it as a spring board for the future of Biblical theology in Africa.

Methodology: The paper employed descriptive, historical, philosophical deductions to pragmatically elicit points to be reckoned with.

Findings: The paper noted that Biblical theology was surnamed Dogmatics at the onset. Dogmatics existed as the rule for faith in all ecclesiastical practice till the time when scholars saw it fit that the Bible is capable of speaking for itself rather than rules that is devoid of sound Biblical text. There and then a scientific approach to Biblical interpretation gained the purview of the church. Ever since then, Biblical theological studies as a discipline had grown severally into several theological disciplines and it is still growing. The question now is what is going to be the future of Biblical theological interpretation in Africa? Several scholars in Africa are already coming up with new ideas that are scientific in the interpretations of the Scriptures in a way that is akin to the Africans unlike when the Bible is made to think it is a foreign religion. Unique contribution shall begin to come forth.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends that while the proposal of the future of Biblical Theology is crucial and intriguing, as a worthwhile venture, this writer sounds a note of warning that biblical scholarship should not forget the root of biblical text

Keywords: *Past, Present, Future, Bible, Eccesiology.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the textbook of the church, a library of instruction for the wayfarer, and the book of wisdom for whoever cares to be wise. It is the manual for the spiritual pilgrim from the world of sin into the celestial city, the Kingdom of God (Oyemomi, 2013). The author started with Abraham, and his children till the time of Moses, the man through whom He called out a people out of bondage to become a treasure for Him. He gazetted the relationship He had with them by giving them the Law for faith and practice through Moses on Mount Sinai (Rosner, 2000). That Law, (The Torah) the Ten Commandments metamorphosed into the Bible we have today, a composite manual to answer any riddle about the Kingdom work and about everyday life. That went on till the coming of the Saviour who was the ultimate revelation of God to human race. When he left this world, he left his apostles who he commissioned to do exactly what he did with the power to out-do him (White, 1979).

Indeed, they carried out the commandments of the Lord to go into the whole world to proclaim the Gospel. They did and run the church with what is called Apostolic Creed. This developed in the hands of the church Fathers to what is known and called the Dogma of the Church. It is synonymous with what this writer will regard as Biblical theology of the time. The question now is what is dogma?

2.0 THE PAST OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: WHAT IS DOGMA?

The word Dogma is a Greek word meaning “a decree or order issued by authority” like in Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14. The entry in Acts 16:4 actually speaks of Dogma or ordinances imposed by apostolic authority (Collins, 1985). It is also an opinion which was applied to the teachings of various philosophical schools and some practical decree coming from people in authority, which may not necessarily be logical or be subjected to empirical verification. At the end of nineteenth century, after a chequered history, the word “Dogma” came to bear the actual meaning of a divinely revealed truth, which was proclaimed as such by solemn church teaching by the Roman Catholics through the infallible authority of the magisterial, now made to be binding on the faithful (Scobie, 2000).

However, the term Dogmas were not found in the constitutive period of premier revelation that culminated with the event of Christ and the apostolic age and in its literary expression of the New Testament books. Rather it was clearly defined in the Dogmas of the person of Jesus Christ’s two natures, in the Council of Chalcedon in 451. It also emerged in the period of the interpretation of dependent revelation. That shows that Dogmas is in no way to be treated as the ultimate norm, rather, the supreme rule of faith is the Scriptures in addition with the sacred Tradition in the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine revelation, which witnessed the original experience of faith and the preaching of the apostolic church (Collins 1969).

Dogmas fall within the wider circle of church doctrines both past and present, hence all Dogmas are doctrines in a particular solemn expression of it, but surely not all doctrines have the status of Dogmatics, yet the development of Dogmatics has been part of the wider development of Biblical doctrine. Doctrinal development also belongs to the wider terrain of change, growth and decline or reform in Christian life in all history.

Any interpretation of dogma therefore should recognize the context of the history and culture in which it has been formulated. Yet there has never been a satisfactory dogmatic explanation of the mystery of God's self-revelation in Christ. It is just like dogma on Christology and the church. Therefore, there has not been a dogma that stopped believers from further reflection on the truth. So, faith has the responsibility to seek further understanding and appropriate formulations of the kerygma (Collins, 1985). The term Dogmatic Theology appeared in the 17th century, even though the reality of it had been in the great syntheses of Thomas Aquinas and others from the wake of 12th and 13th centuries. In those syntheses, Dogmatics was distinguished from systematic theology not as a result of superiority or inferiority of one, but to allow systematic theology to embrace Dogmatics and also include moral theology, fundamental theology as well as apologetics.

Against this backdrop, John Macquarrie avoided the term Dogmatic Theology in some pejorative overtones of Dogmatics in ordinary speech. Yet his symbolic and applied theology covers much spectrum as in Dogmatics (Collins). Dogmatic Theology focuses on the examination and the presentation of coherent and systematic Christian doctrines of Trinity, incarnation, redemption, sin, grace, church, sacraments, and *eschaton*, to mention some. It uses the data of revelation to do its work in the light of faith. Judging from Karl Barth's title on *Church Dogmatics*, it will be assumed (Collins) that Dogmatic Theology is essentially ecclesiastical as a work of faith undertaken within, and for the church. It elucidates the official stand of the faithful and the communal practice of the entire body.

Furthermore, Dogmatic theology, ordinarily expresses dialogue between historic faith of Christians in the context of philosophical reasoning. In doing that, it uses the scriptures, the official church teaching, the theological history, texts of liturgy and other issues that make up the tradition of the believing community. To bring coherence in this enterprise, Dogmatic Theology polemically will take up questions, concepts, terms and schemes for the understanding of oneself, the society and the world, which have been elaborated in philosophy, with little adjustment, because philosophical ideas cannot just be adopted hook-line and sinker into theology. However, Dogmatic Theology sometimes made use of philosophical reasoning to clarify some elaborate theological concept (Rosner, 2000).

David Tracy in the *Analogical Imagination* drew attention to the issue of setting, audience and environment in formulating standard dogma. To him, a good performance in Dogmatic Theology will be partly by its audience, be it a seminary, monastery, a diocese, church at large, a university, general academia or the society at large plus the goal of writing should inform the system to be adopted. Also, Thomas More, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and other theologians attested to the idea of Tracy that at least, theologies should be judged in terms of questions like for whom and to whom are these theologians speaking? Where are they doing their work, and what do they mean to achieve? (Rosner)

It therefore came to be "the decrees of the ecumenical councils of the church usually formulated to correct teachings put forward by heretics. There and then Dogma became a church tradition of ideas and rules of faith. Therefore 17th Christian community may have accepted the written dogma generally formulated by the ecumenical councils of the ancient and undivided church; however, the dogma came of age needing re-interpretation to suit the modern understanding due to the ancient Greek philosophical modes of expression in which they were formulated greatly unintelligible to the twentieth century men (Rosner).

Notwithstanding, the Roman Catholic church has continued until this century to promulgate dogmas, however the Reformation churches have been used to Confessional Statements and doctrines rather than dogma, hence since the age of Enlightenment, the words “dogma” and “dogmatic” have been pejoratively used as authoritarian, unreasoned and having an obscurantist attitude of mind (Richardson, 1969).

The terms Dogmatics and Dogmatic Theology speak of systematic scholarly study of Christian doctrine and the official rules of the church. Roman Catholics and Protestants before the age of Enlightenment assumed that the Bible is the source material book of divine inspiration and revealed truth. However, the Bible itself failed to organize or systematize its multi-faceted truth. Therefore, it became necessary for the church’s theologians to perform this task. Then dogmatician or dogmatics theologians accepted the challenge.

There came a big gulf between dogmaticians and biblical scholars as a result of the rise of the historical-critical method of biblical research after the Age of Enlightenment. Biblical scholarship there and then, embarked on a strict scientific and uncompromising committed line of approach, while theologians of Dogmatics were spinning unscientific theories, and mere dogma, out of their heads.

As much as the dogma of Karl Barth was the most influential of the time, yet he remained aloof from the work of the scientific historians. Their conclusions about some issues like the historical Jesus behind the New Testament. For K. Barth, revelation is shared miracle and it shined by its own light to which biblical research became *person-non-grata*. Therefore, out of the existentialist theologians, came a new movement known as the “new hermeneutics” which placed premium on interpretation and hermeneutics as a main task of biblical scholars, so much that the theologians of Dogmatics stood to lose recognition and the daily bread of the practitioners (Collins, 1985).

3.0 WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY? THE PRESENT

Biblical theology is an integral part of a whole process of determining the meaning of biblical text as it applies to the contemporary time as against the church’s dogma, which may be devoid of immaculate biblical text. Though scholars do distinguish this from other theological disciplines such as: systematic, historical, and practical theologies, yet these disciplines are interdependent. This is against the background that the fruit of biblical exegesis or exposition of text has been the backbone and priority for other theological discipline in their operations. The common ground on which they all come to balance is the dogmatic presupposition about the nature and authority of the Bible. In other words, basic to these disciplines is that they all engage in the task as biblical theologians from a living tradition of the church (Rosner). Historical theology has been broadly understood to be the diachronic study of theology, for example, the study of the changing face of theology across time. Historical theology is merely a temporal extension of biblical theology or otherwise put, biblical theology is little more than an earlier version of historical theology (Carson, 2000). Let us have a brief historical survey of the change-over from Dogmatics to Biblical Theology.

The use of the word “biblical theology” was primarily by the pen of W. J. Christmann in 1607 in a write up. About one and a half century later, having been favoured among the intelligentsia, G.T. Zachariae published a four-volume book, an exegetically rigorous but detailed version of the same approach by Christmann. Some other writers tow the same line

of action with the sole aim of extracting timeless truths from the bible in accordance with the reason which is acceptable to the confessional stance of the ecclesiastical establishment. Then came the most influential submission by P.J. Gabler in 1787 (Carson). It was all an influence of the Reformation (Guthrie, 1981). Prior to this time, dogmatics (Guthrie) was the rule of faith in the church, and so there was no thought for anything as biblical theology, because the interpretation of the Bible was not an open business. There was no exegesis or biblical exposition. Hence the church' tradition was taking priority over biblical facts (Carson, 1977).

However, it was the desire of the Reformers to break away from the formal ecclesiastical tradition. This gave rise to the interest in biblical theology, so much that the authority of the biblical text was placed over and above the authority of the church; hence the attempt to construct a more systematized biblical teaching became a necessity. The views of the Reformers at this time surely gave birth to what ultimately shaped and laid the foundation for the discipline of biblical theological studies (Carson, 1977).

The Reformers argued against the forced interpretation of the medieval scholasticism for the plain meaning of Scripture, which eventually encouraged a great quest in biblical languages and enhanced independent understanding of the scripture irrespective of the church's decision, and the idea of the creeds. As at then, there was no distinction between the OT and NT Theology. All scriptures were used in support of doctrine, there and then NT Theology emerge

Things went on as it were until the age of rationalism when the concern shifted to the lack of consideration to the historical background in which the Christian theology grew and developed, yet exegesis was still dogmatized at this time. Then came the rise of critical period, which finally made the field of NT Theology a distinctive study. The ball was set rolling for the separation of dogmatic and biblical theology with Gabler's write-up in 1787. His inaugural lecture at the University of Altdorf captured the rising mood and precipitated the next line of action, which led to the oration on the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology. He charged that dogmatic theology is too far away removed from the Scripture. There and then, a largely inductive study of the biblical text started gaining ground, and widespread agreement reached among the godly, the learned, and the cautious theologians. Other rationalistic interpreters of New Testament Theology gave their support to Gabler's idea from the biblical texts as the age of reason became full blown (Carson).

Among the notable supporters who tow Gabler's line of thought is Wrede who dealt with the New Testament as an historian. He also reacted against the older dogmatics. In his conviction, the link between biblical and dogmatic theology must be cut off. In his attempt to do that, he ran into the problem of having to proof that biblical texts were concerned with the history of religion, and that was equal to an abandonment of NT theology (Morgan, 1975).

Rationalistic ideas gave an approach to the New Testament that was affected by the Hegaelian philosophy which influenced scholastic approach to history. Eventually, it led to the radical reconstruction of the early Christian history, so much that the theology of the church changed with the theological reconstruction by Baur's criticism of biblical text through emphasis on historical consideration (Carson).

Holtzmann became the foremost exponent of the historical movement. His work, *New Testament Theology* is a classic assertion of the liberal thought. He rejected any theological approach based on dogmatic mindset. However, he based his approach on the literature of

historical critical analysis. Other eminent scholars who supported Holtzmann are Hofmann, Tholuck, Benard, Weiss, Zahn and Feine. An outstanding work of this era was *New Testament Theology* by A. Schlatter who though gave recognition to historical method, yet he retained a dogmatic interest. A *New Testament Theology* published in America by G.B. Stevens put dogmatic finally to where it belongs, that is, into extinction (Carson).

The appearance of Wrede's essay, *Task and Methods of New Testament Theology* brought about a new limelight. He overreacted against dogmatics so much that New Testament Theology resolved to be a history of early Christian religion. He insisted, as a representative of the school of religion, that theology must be studied in the historical context, but then it led to the comparative study of other religions to ascertain how they had influenced one another. The NT ceased to be an authoritative source of early Christian theology, but rather a part of the first century religion, which led to an overemphasis on Jewish apocalypse that never represent true New Testament Theology, nor fulfilled Wrede's historical critical approach (Carson).

Albert Schweitzer's reaction against the Jesus of history Movement was totally non eschatological and it led to setting the Hellenistic background of Paul against the Jewish apocalyptic background of Jesus, hence, there was no unified theology of NT in that situation. Therefore, any New Testament Theology has the obligation to take resort on the emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, Paul or John, because the rise of Form Criticism has raised attitudinal scepticism towards the historical Jesus especially judging from Bultmann's presentation, the teachings of Jesus was discounted so much that NT theology has concentrated on Pauline epistles and the fourth Gospel which were considered to be Hellenistic especially by the work of R. Bultmann's New Testament Theology.

Bultmann's introduced a dogma different from the church's traditional dogmatics, but he drew inspiration from existential philosophy. Even then, the NT on which he based his new data had already been demythologized, hence, there was no connection between the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus. However, Hans Conzelmann, a disciple of Bultmann published *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*. This publication gave full weight to the study of Jesus as an historical figure, but still influenced by existential philosophy. The question then is, "Can this really be a New Testament Theology"? The Oscar Cullmann led Movement of biblical theology sought to locate unity within various NT passages. It held on to the fact that the acts and words of God are fundamental to salvation. This view challenged the position of existentialism; hence, history has become a last resort as an approach to New Testament Theology. Cullmann's work is a focus on Christology, just like Floyd Filson's work, but they never end up with a complete New Testament Theology. Alan Richardson, through his book titled: *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* surely was aware of the common basis of New Testament Theology than his predecessors, but he was charged for playing down too much on the background for not differentiating between the theologies of various authors. In his book, *New Testament Theology*, E. Stauffer structured on a different pattern. He was concerned to set out a theology of history from the NT worldview (Rosner).

For J. Jeremia New Testament Theology deals with the teachings of Jesus than that of Bultmann with less dogmatic influence, but with little attention to New Testament Theology. W.G. Kummel, L Cooppelt, M Ceinertz and K.H. Schelkle have concentrated on Jesus, Paul and John. Kummel had been criticized for his theory of dominating personalities. Goppelt divided his theology into two namely the activities of Jesus and the various unity of the

apostolic witness to Christ. Meinertz presented his evidence under literary divisions of the New Testament as found suitable, but Schelkle chose a thematic approach. G.E. Ladd in the *Theology of the New Testament* adopted historical approach, because he believed New Testament Theology has a descriptive function (Rosner).

It is certain from this brief survey that there is no common ground on what New Testament Theology should actually focus. Some have preferred thematic approach yet some are afraid of it that it may suffer detraction from the inner cohesion of the individual. It is safe to conclude on this note that an New Testament Theology that will satisfy every situation has not been formed. We are all obliged to give priority to what is considered most important giving the outline of his objectives and some rationale behind the choices made. It is fitting to propose a working definition of our priority in this study, and that is put simply in a layman's language that the discipline of New Testament Theology is redemption history, how God completed his plan and purpose of salvation through the sending of His son, the Messiah, and began His Reign through the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, otherwise called the second Exodus, the second great act of deliverance according to Luke 9:31 which culminated in "the Fact of Christ" (Rosner) according to M.W.Thomsen (4-5).

Ever since this phenomenon of the shift from Dogmatics to Biblical Theology, the enterprise of biblical interpretation has always been a dynamic one. It is therefore suffice to give a consideration to what the future of the business of biblical interpretation would be.

4.0 THE FUTURE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The future of Biblical Theology is highly dependent on the success made on the heavy challenges imposed on the unity of the Bible by New Testament theology (Richardson). Such challenges range from: How New Testament theology should be constructed? How simultaneously is it visible to expound the unity of New Testament and the entire canon of which the New Testament is a part and at the same time do justice to the apparent diversity in the canon? How simultaneous is it in tracing the diversity, and the peculiar emphasis, the historical development inherent in the various New Testament and biblical books, and at the same time doing justice in its unifying business? J.D. Dunn proposed a methodological stance to handle this issue, while Caird invoked a creative device, and they yet not solved the problem (Dunn). Such huge questions should be procedurally handled with intimate acquaintance with the New Testament text, and with a grasp of social-cultural, historical frameworks in which the books were written so as to sharpen the horizon provided by the entire canon to foster the skills for the NT to speak for itself through a renewed creative imagination to serve generations of men.

Other challenges are the question of the center of NT theology which is ridden by three further challenges, namely, what is the meaning of a mere generalization in the choice of a center? How can one avoid a mere generalization in the choice of a center? And, how can a man avoid the tendency to elevate one book or corpus of the New Testament to domesticate the rest of the biblical themes? While it may be difficult to arrive at the answers to these questions, some prescriptions may be made which are by nature futuristic of the pendulum that will likely be towed by the biblical theologians.

New Testament theologians will continue to wrestle with the center of NT theology because this pursuit is diametrical and so interwoven that one can move from of anyone them to another topic like swimming in its ocean depth. Such diversities are alluded to, by D. A

Carson by an examination of how the temple functioned and developed in OT so that in terms of NT theology, an observation is conducted on how it is treated by the Synoptist via Jesus' observation of temple ritual and the cleansing of the temple (Carson). Other features are the rending of the veil at the death of Jesus in Matthew 27:51. The Johannine peculiarity and the emphasis on Jesus self identity with the destruction of the temple in Chapter 2 are also intriguing.

The various metaphorical usage of the temple in Pauline writings is also a worthy consideration in this pursuit. It also studied several areas of temple ritual with the work of Christ highly documented in the Epistles to the Hebrews and the temple plot is also grafted into the Apocalypse of John with the celebration of its absence in the New Jerusalem.

The presence of God and the temple ushers in those who are accredited candidates for the new heavens. So each theme will better be treated within the framework of each book or corpus before attempting the treatment on a larger NT horizon. That comprehensive treatment will help ward off the tendency to fall victim of an arbitrary canon within the canon.

Furthermore, the future of Biblical Theology will avoid the dogmatic antithesis that locates distinctive treatments while complimentary and sweeping development is dismissed. Also the careful literary historical analyses of some biblical themes may foster a renewed ability to see the shape of the theme in some issues that matters to the Jews, for example, the Temple. Finally the time invested so far on the history of interpretation will enlarge the views of interpreters as well as fostering the right gap and degree of objectivity in the exegetical enterprises of the development of New Testament theology.

Again, questions concerning the future of Biblical Theology have to do with the relation of the NT theology to the OT, and the use of OT in the NT. Varieties of opinion poll apart. The NT interpretation of the Old Testament to some is unthinkable allusion, yet others are so committed to the canons of postmodernism that any claimed supremacy is considered an anathema in the field of interpretation, while others refused to be a party to what has already been labelled as cultural genocide (Carson).

The outcome of the issues is embedded in "the appropriation techniques deployed by the New Testament writers and their relationship to the Jewish *middoth*, the hermeneutical axioms of the New Testament citing of the Old Testament place of the Torah in Matthew and Paul, the meaning of language symbol, imagination, to mention but a few, are all akin on the use of OT in the NT so much that both the NT and the OT become a broad bank of Biblical Theology that are inseparable in theology and content (Carson).

Grenz and Olson affirmed the challenge of Biblical Theology as a problem of articulating the Christian understanding of the nature of the God of the Bible who is constantly involved in the history and natural processes of the word. The twentieth century theologians made effort to engage in theological enterprise at the wake of the imbalance emanating from their forbears and the demise of the medieval consensus that occurred through the Enlightenment (Grenz, and Olson, 1992).

The medieval thinkers resorted to spatial categories to resolve a balance on transcendence, and immanence. They succeeded in creating a gulf that separated the realm of transcendence and immanence. The thinkers of the nineteenth century endeavoured to search for new modalities to construct theology for the era beyond the Enlightenment. Their solution bore

witness to the instability between transcendence and immanence as a lopsided emphasis on the effort to redress the imbalance by going too far in one direction (Grenz).

Thereafter, the tension between immanence and transcendence increased so much that the twentieth century theologians advocated for the demise of the discipline. However, the issue remains a major task for the 21st century thinkers to resolve. The twentieth century thinkers began a protest hermeneutics of immanence (Grenz).

Notwithstanding, the hermeneutical interpretation of the “word”, “God”, and “heaven” remain an issue to be elucidated by the biblical theologian. How does he speak, where is heaven? How does God speak and how do we understand his word? Attempts have been made through liberal theology process, theology, radical, secular, and narrative theology. A host of others have emanated, all from biblical theological enterprises to give explanation to emerging issues (Grenz).

However, the twenty first century ‘masquerade’ that has shaped biblical theology in some ways is postmodernism, which is passing a transitional era. The question as to the destination of post modernity remains an open phenomenon. While the experts in post modernity are busy with the task of deconstructing the modern mindset, modernity’s attempt to achieve heaven on earth remains a failure. This is against the backdrop that the modern world is incapable of transforming the earth into heaven and that will also lead to the reality that we are in for a greater possibility that God is coming to our earth to create a new world.

The role of the Bible varies widely in Christian thoughts throughout history. What used to be dogmatic has eventually turned to biblical theology, and since then several other theologies are springing up on daily basis, drawing ideas and inspiration from biblical text with linguistic historical and hermeneutical sophistication, but the theological, political, philosophical commitments of church leaders dominated the way the Bible was read and interpreted.

The rise of critical thinking that started with Rene Descartes 1596 – 1650, and Emmanuel Kant 1724 – 1804 put the church didache and the Bible in a new insight, so that the dogma of the church was replaced by Enlightenment rationalism and its progeny. There and then Biblical Theology became a distinct discipline. That gave room to the historical approach by R. Morgan to biblical interpretation and in the 20th century; Bultmann existentialist reading of the New Testament dominated the floor of biblical interpretation. The works of Procksch, Eichrodt, Vriezen, Jadcob, and Von Rad commanded attention for the Old Testament interpretation, so that both the OT and the NT interpretations became a volatile subject. Some of the interpretations were rejected on the criticism that they lack salvific understanding, but J. P. Gabler rescued the discipline with his lectures in 1787 from the dogmatic chains of postmodernism, relativism and reductionism, selfish materialism, narcissistic individualism, New Age spiritism, feminism, and so on. These were the destructive biblical theological opposition in the ecclesiology of the day and many have really got drowned in the disintegrative pluralistic and deconstructive impulses that characterised intellectual mind at the end of the millennium, and beyond.

However, the Evangelical thinkers have learnt much about the Bible from their observations and even more about articulating the Bible’s messages in the language of the time. This development notwithstanding, biblical theology suffered idiomatic languages via the enthronement of conceptualities that were imported into it (Yarbrough, 1996).

“Biblical Theology will move forward, if its practitioners know, love, and submit to the God of the Bible rather than the ideologies of the age. God is not a composite of the latest critical theories. This is not to denigrate scholarship, but to recognize that God’s word, if living and true, calls for substantially, different approaches to it than post Enlightenment academic theology, in its present forms, furnishes. Biblical literacy in the church, to say nothing of biblical redemption in the world, is at stake. Both the church and the world could gain transforming conviction, from the fruit of a discipline, humble enough to discern, and brave enough to advocate the ancient, yet contemporary verities that Biblical Theology is charged to bring to light.” (Yarbrough, 1996).

5.0 THE STATE OF AFRICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

Biblical Theological enterprise in African ecclesiology is evolving. Gone are the days when Africa is one hundred percent dependent on the theological materials published outside the soil of Africa that has no touch with African way of life and experience. Several materials written in line with sound Biblical Theology are emerging gradually in the market, and African church is better for it. This is against the backdrop that most African community are now communicating the gospel message in their own native language, and most of the materials on theology are now written with contextual application mindset.

Hence several materials written in line with sound Biblical Theology are emerging gradually in the market. For example, about seven years ago, about 300 African scholars were gathered to produce a formidable *Africa Study Bible* (Adeboye, 2016) to which this writer is a contributor. This volume was written to reflect African experience, way of life, and proverb from day to day life in her existential experiences. Also, *African Bible Commentary* (Adeyemo, 2016) has also been one of the great African contributions, which is towing the line of the future of African ecclesiology. Several hermeneutical principles have been expressed and published. Even Seminaries and Universities are coming up with quality works that are loaded with African flavour. Professor Emiola Nihinlola came up with *Theology under the Mango Tree* (Nihinlola, 2013) about five years ago among many others of his writings as systematic theologian. S. O. Abogunrin has written so much and has also raised so many scholars before his home call. Prof. Dapo Asaju, (2003) Andrews Igenzoa, (2005) David (Tuesday Adamo) has written several articles and books on African biblical interpretation, among which is *Exploration in African Biblical Study*. These few African scholars are signals that the future of the church in Africa is great. Africa is true to the faith, and tradition of the Bible. In the future other continents in the world will look forward to African roots to imbibe the faith that was committed to the saints

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This work has given due recognition to the historical antecedents behind biblical interpretation. The growth of its enterprise from the past, the present has been duly considered with lenses into the future what it shall look like or the turn of events that may likely befall the business of biblical interpretation judging from its past, and present struggles. Today African scholarship is gaining prominence, and most African scholars are making effort to rise up to the challenge to present the gospel, and interpret God into the real African situation and experience.

This should be considered a major phenomenon growth of the African Christianity. Therefore, the church in Africa will do well to catch the vision to encourage her called theologians, and academician to keep researching for the gold mine of the treasure called the Scriptures. It is a fact that when biblical authors, were doing the write up, they never had it at the back of their minds that they were writing anything called the Bible, which billions of peoples around the world will be reading and researching into thousands of another. They were not privileged to come together to agree on the logic, coherence, and logicity of their write up. What we have today is only a divine magnanimity, which brought the material to become a whole over a period of about one thousand six hundred years of material collections.

Recommendations

While the proposal of the future of Biblical Theology is crucial and intriguing, as a worthwhile venture, this writer sounds a note of warning that biblical scholarship should not forget the root of biblical text. Our critical work today should be given kudos, yet it should be cautioned, lest we are judging divine initiative. While judging divine initiative may not be a serious problem, because the scriptures allows us to judge the spirits whether they are of God, yet we have the responsibility to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church, in the process of our investigation, and in our own contemporary environment.

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