

The Significance of Pauline Eschatology to the Ibibio Christians of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract— This essay explores the developments of eschatology in world Christianity to show how Christian thought and practice have interacted in various societies and contexts to produce unique understandings of time and history. The kingdom of God is not an abstract concept, and biblical eschatology does not consist of speculative theology. The focus of biblical eschatology is on “the last Adam”, (1 Cor. 15:45) who by his life, death, resurrection and ascension ushered in the age to come, a new creation. The church of Jesus Christ is the eschatological community and is composed of people united by faith in Jesus, people living on the basis of the Good News of his kingdom as one finds among Ibibio Christians. This article makes a scholarly contribution by mapping the main developments in the field of eschatology among Ibibio Christians, and requires careful hermeneutical exploration and articulation. This essay covers the question of human uniqueness in Ibibioland as in every cultural context since eschatology represents the climax of a rich narrative of creation and redemption in which God as supreme agent preserves and restores the world from its collapse into sin and death. Thus, this essay proposes a reconceptualization of Christian future expectations as human participation in God’s vision of comprehensive optimal well-being among Ibibio Christians, opening up new vistas, challenges and opportunities.

Index Terms—Eschatology, Christian, Theology, Ibibioland, Kingdom of God, Parousia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Christian eschatology is a major branch of study within Christian theology dealing with the “last things”. It is a concept derived from the combination of two Greek words “meaning “last” (ἔσχατος) and “study” (-λογία). It can be applied to the study of ‘end things’, whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, the end of the world or the nature of the Kingdom of God. Generally, Christian eschatology studies the ultimate destiny of the individual soul and the entire created order, based primarily upon biblical texts within the Old and New Testaments.

Karl Rahner (1998) observes that eschatology is the biblical doctrine about the last things (cf. also Hoekema, 1979; Macquarie, 1977), especially as having to do with the return of Christ or the Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the age, the coming judgments, various expressions of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, the nature of the glorified body and the prospects for eternal destiny. Schnelle (2003) states that the death of others presents to the living the question of their own destiny and so eschatology must always provide a persuasive answer to the questions of

life and death. Eschatology is the study of the last things to happen on this earth in this present age. The word is used to cover the study of such important events as the second coming/parousia of Jesus Christ, the judgement of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the creation of the new heaven and earth. These include the kingdom of God exhibited in Jesus Christ and experienced now through the Holy Spirit in anticipation of its fullness in the new heaven and earth of the age to come, the nature of the millennium, the intermediate state, the concept of immortality and the eternal destiny of the wicked (Douglas and Jenney, 1984).

Eschatological passages are found in many places in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testaments. There are also many extra-biblical examples of eschatological prophecies, as well as church traditions. It is an ancient branch of study in Christian theology, informed by Biblical texts such as the Olivet discourse, the sheep and the goats, and other discourses of end times by Jesus, with the doctrine of the Second Coming discussed by Paul the Apostle (Romans 2:5-16; 14:10; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Thess 1:5) and Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–107 AD; cf. Roberts, and Donaldson, 1885, Vol. 1: Chapter 6), then given more consideration by the Christian apologist, Justin Martyr (c. 100–165; cf. Osborn, 1973: 198). Treatment of eschatology continued in the West in the teachings of Tertullian (c. 160–225), and was given fuller reflection and speculation soon after by Origen (c. 185–254; cf. Roberts & Donaldson, eds., 1994). The word was used first by the Lutheran theologian Abraham Calovius (1612–86) but only came into general usage in the 19th century (cf. Dietrich, 1999–2003: 122).

The growing modern interest in eschatology is tied to developments in Anglophone Christianity. Puritans in the 18th and 19th centuries were particularly interested in a postmillennial hope which surrounded Christian conversion (Murray, 1975). This would be contrasted with the growing interest in premillennialism, advocated by dispensational figures such as J. N. Darby (cf. Blaising & Bock, eds., 2000: 9–56). Both of these strands had significant influences on the growing interests in eschatology in Christian missions and in Christianity in West Africa and Asia (Walls, 2016: 182–200; Chow, 2016: 201–215). However, in the 20th century, there was a growing number of German scholars such as Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg who were likewise interested in eschatology (Fergusson, 1997: 226–244).

By end of the nineteenth century Johannes Weiss and others had discovered “eschatology” as the very form of early Christian consciousness, aspiration, and reflection (Weiss,

1971). Soon Albert Schweitzer effectively thematize the issue of eschatology as to make it foundational for the exegesis of the New Testament, the history of religions (Judeo-Christian sector), and New Testament theology. Moreover, these two thought-forms, "development" and "eschatology", inevitably intersected. Kabisch was the first to bring development to bear on eschatology grasped as a controlling principle, and Schweitzer offered the first real appreciation of this effort as well as the sharpest critique of its shortcomings (Schweitzer, 1912: 58-63). Let me observe here that it was because the eschatological consciousness was a vital experience in earliest Christianity, but lay outside the experience of modernity and the consciousness of development, that the combination of the two generated the most uninhibited hypotheses and far-ranging, free-wheeling reconstructions of early Christian thought.

Here I propose, firstly, the main lines of the discussion of development in one sphere of Pauline eschatology, namely, the theme of the coming resurrection of the dead; and secondly, I dare question whether the Pauline texts (1 Thess 4; 1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 5; Phil 1) support the maximalists or the minimalists in the debate on the "development" of Paul's view. Maximalists argue that Paul moved from a relatively crude, conventional affirmation of the resurrection to a more refined conception of survival, and often enough they have characterized this as a transition from Jewish to Greek categories. Minimalists doubt or deny a change of categories, but often enough have acknowledged the appearance of the new, if minor, doctrinal elements in the later texts, or at least some variation in Paul's personal attitude toward the prospect of death and resurrection. Third, I propose to reflect on the context in which this debate has significance beyond antiquarian or even historical curiosity.

Christian eschatology has been reduced to 'heaven' alone, and even the word itself causes problem. Experience has shown that the situation has not changed, and so there is the need to present this view. The aim is to discover what may have gone wrong and to re-present the original Christian eschatological vision, to the extent of one's possibility, toward a better life here on earth, and full realization of Christian eschatological hope. Material was gathered mainly through library consultation. Theoretically, the study is expository and somewhat critical.

II. THE CONCEPT AND NATURE OF ESCHATOLOGY

The concept arose from the study of Christianity's most central eschatological document, namely, the Book of Revelation, but the principles embodied in them can be applied to all prophecy in the Bible. They are by no means mutually exclusive and are often combined to form a more complete and coherent interpretation of prophetic passages. Most interpretations fit into one, or a combination, of these approaches. The alternate methods of prophetic interpretation, futurism and preterism which came from Jesuit writings, were brought about to oppose the historicism interpretation which had been used from Biblical times (Moser: 26, 27; Guinness, 1887: 268; Tanner.: 16, 17) that Reformers used in teaching that the Antichrist was the Papacy or the power of the Roman Catholic Church

(*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4).

There are essentially four basic forms of eschatology. First, is preterism which is the eschatological view that interprets some or all prophecies of the Bible as events which have already happened. This school of thought interprets the Book of Daniel as referring to events that happened from the 7th century BC until the first century AD, while seeing the prophecies of Revelation as events that happened in the first century AD. Second, is historicism, which is a method of interpretation of Biblical prophecies that associates symbols with historical persons, nations or events. It can result in a view of progressive and continuous fulfillment of prophecy covering the period from Biblical times to the Second Coming. Third, is futurism which sees most eschatological prophecies as chiefly referring to events which have not yet been fulfilled, but will take place at the end of the age and the end of the world. Fourth, is idealism which is a spiritual approach, or the allegorical approach, or the non-literal approach in Christian eschatology that sees all the imagery of the Book of Revelation as symbols (Campbell & Bell, 2001: 212-213). This paper will not spend time discussing these four types of eschatology as that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In this paper, emphasis is placed on the individual eschatology with special focus on Christian eschatology otherwise known as Biblical eschatology. Attempt is also made to dwell a little on death, as an aspect of the last things. The concept and nature of eschatology is examined; the Ibibio people and their religious worldview is briefly highlighted. Also examined in this paper is the eschatological significance of the Ibibio Christians and finally the conclusion is drawn.

III. SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Christian eschatology is simply the doctrine about the last things (Rahner, 1998). It is the doctrine about man as human being that is open to the absolute future of Almighty God. It gives expression to man as a Christian to understand himself as human being who exists from his present towards his future. According to Mc Brain (1974), Christianity is said to be a religion that revolves around eschatology. As a rule, religions claim to offer answers to questions regarding the beyond and to help their followers attain ultimate happiness variously referred to as heaven, paradise, eternal life or nirvana. Christianity is no exception. One of the central tenets of its creed proclaimed that its founder, Jesus Christ, died, and was raised to life, will come again to judge the living and the dead and that there will be resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

Despite the fact that Christianity is regarded as eschatological in essence, a religion of hope, based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it would seem that with the likely exception of lent, Easter and the funerary liturgical services, eschatological talk rarely features in Christian preaching and discourse in contemporary times (Mc Brain, 1974). Traditionally speaking, the word eschatology connotes elements which include *death, judgement, heaven* and *hell*. According to Mc Brain (1974) eschatology, in the traditional sense of word, is the area of theology which is concerned with the study of the last thing(s).

The “last things” are various moments or stages in the final manifestations process of death, particular judgement, heaven, hell, purgatory, the Second Coming of Christ, resurrection of the body, general judgement and consummation of all things in the perfection of the kingdom of god (Mc Brain 1974;123). According to Hoekema (1979), eschatology must not be thought of as something which is found only in such Biblical books as Daniel and Revelation, but as dominating and permeating the entire message of the Bible. Hence, in view of the mode in which eschatological statements are made in the Old and New Testaments, Christianity holds that these are anticipatory eyewitness accounts of a future which are still outstanding (Rahner, 1998). This somehow made some Christians to face problems and difficulties with regards to credibility of eschatological statements based on how they understood the issues. Only those who expect something from the future keep the memory alert (Schenelle, 2003).

The Old and New Testaments as well as the doctrine of the Church emphasize about the future, death, heaven, hell, the return of Christ, the new heaven and new earth and the last days. Therefore, Christian eschatology is all about man’s future that is, making statements about the futurity as the future of man in all his dimensions. Biblical scholars note that there is very little eschatology in the Old Testament (Hoekema, 1979). This is because Old Testament writers do not give clear teachings on most of the major doctrines of future eschatology such as life after death, the second coming of Christ, the final judgement, etc. Macquarie (1977) reveals that the result of the researches of such New Testament scholars as Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer show that it has come to be accepted that the teaching of the New Testament is to be understood against the background of eschatological expectation and hope of Christians that constitute the New Testament preaching. Hoekema (1979) states that Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving and, therefore, also revolutionizing and transforming the present. Eschatology is not an element of Christianity rather it is the medium of the Christian faith, the key in which everything in it is set. It is the characteristic of all the Christian proclamation and of every existence and of the whole church (Moltmann, 1967).

Different types of eschatology exist. Some of them are individual eschatology and collective eschatology. An eschatology which makes statements about man insofar as he is a free person as well as a concrete and corporeal being in time and space and insofar as he is an ever unique individual who cannot be deducted is simply known as individual eschatology. On the other hand, the eschatology which makes assertions about the same person insofar as he is a member of a community and an individual within a collective history is known as a collective eschatology. This is simply making assertions about the future of mankind and the world in as much as the world is understood by Christianity to begin with the environment of transcendental spirit.

IV. PAULINE ESCHATOLOGY

Paul came from a strict Jewish family living in the diaspora. The city of tarsus, where he was born about the

beginning of our era (Acts 21:39, 22:3) was the capital city of the region and Roman province of Cilicia. It is situated close to the Mediterranean sea (Gunther. 1978). Paul’s family traced its descent from the tribe of Benjamin (cf Rom. 11:1), the tribe from which Israel’s first king came from (cf 1 Sam. 9:1-2; 10:20-21). This ancestry was important in the Apostle’s own self-understanding as indicated in 1 Cor. 15:8-9 (Schenelle, 2005).

Regarding his legal status, Paul was a privileged Jew of the Diaspora (cf Acts 16:37-38). He possessed Roman citizenship, which could be obtained by birth, release or purchase from slavery, release from being a prisoner of war, discharged from the military service, adoption, or acceptance into a citizens’ association. He bore a Roman’s name Saul. He had both Greek and Jewish education and belonged to the urban middle class. He was a craftman – tent maker and was a Pharisee. In Phil. 3:5-6, statements regarding his Jewish past were made that he was circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, as to the law, a Pharisee, a zealous persecutor of the church and righteous under the law blameless. He hereby claimed to belong to the elect covenant of God (Schnell, 2005).

Paul never spoke voluntarily of the Damascus event. He always brings up the subject when provoked by his opponents. All the texts showed that Damascus is to be interpreted in Christological and soteriological terms, centred on the overwhelming revelation that Jesus Christ belongs to the realm of God and on the call of Paul to be an apostle. From the Damascus event, Paul derived his right to belong to the circle of the original Jerusalem disciples, a group firmly fixed in history and bound to a particular place even though in fact he was a wandering apostle. The legitimacy of his apostleship was disputed throughout his life and he had not known the historical Jesus. He appealed to a prophetic revelation and call. He, in fact, operated as a missionary Scribal teacher. Paul established the Church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey in A. D. 51 and wrote this letter to encourage the young believers there. He wanted to assure them of his love, to praise them for their faithfulness during persecution and to remind them of their hope – the sure *return of their Lord and saviour*. Paul comforts the Thessalonians by reminding them of the hope of their resurrection (4:13). There he warned them to be prepared at all times, for Jesus Christ could come at any moment. He gave them a handful of reminders on how to prepare themselves for the second coming – warned the unruly (5:14), comforted the faint hearted (5:14). He exhorted them to be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks and test everything that is taught (5:20-21) and avoid evil (5:22).

V. THE IBIBIO PEOPLE AND THEIR RELIGIOUS WORLD-VIEW

Ibibio people constitute one of the major tribes that settle in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. They speak Ibibio as their language. Farming, fishing and trading are their major occupations. Although they were later converted to Christianity, Ibibio people were originally known as traditional worshippers. Historically, the group tradition of Ibibio was recounted annually at the shrines of the

community deities. This underscores that Ibibio people originally attached great importance to the worshipping of local deities, hence their strong belief in traditional religion, which de-emphasized on the Christian eschatology. This could be reason why Macquarie (1977) noted that eschatology became problem requiring interpretation at the very early stage of the Christian community's history.

The visit of the Christian missionaries to Ibibioland in the early 18th century brought about Christianity to Ibibio people. This development brought about serious Christianity revival in Ibibioland, which made Ibibio people gave their lives to Christ. The traditional belief in Ibibioland had gradually faded away, thereby bringing in Christian beliefs in the lives of Ibibio people. This marked the beginning of the Biblical eschatology experience and expectations among Ibibio people. Today, the expectations of Ibibio people about the future, the death, the second coming of Christ or the returning of Jesus Christ, heaven and hell, the new heaven and the new earth and about the last days are very significant in the life pattern of Ibibio people. According to Schnelle (2003), the basic and the point of departure for what is to come are for Paul something that has already happened, namely that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide the foundation for all eschatological affirmations.

VI. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE TO IBIBIO CHRISTIANS

Eschatology is very significant to Ibibio people especially now that they have fully embraced Christianity. Having read and heard about the eschatological statement in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the doctrines of the church, Ibibio people have come to realize the significance of eschatology in their life pattern. The Ibibio people are now very familiar with the biblical eschatological statement relating to stories of death, heaven and hell. The Second Coming of Christ, etc, are real and they tailor their expectations towards these futurity events yet to manifest. Because eschatology is significant in the lives of Ibibio people, they have the Christian belief and faith hence they are patiently waiting for the last things such as death, the Second Coming of Christ, the end time, etc to manifest.

Death is one of the major events expected to happen in ones life time. It is inevitable that it must come to pass, hence the expectation of every human being. The biblical explanation of death is not that of a normal out working of natural processes. Its presentation of human death is the reaffirmation that something has gone awry in God's created order. Death is not a hopeless termination of human consciousness. It is something that has to do with the hope of the resurrection. This is also the expectations of the Ibibio people as they see themselves as Christians. Hence, eschatology is very significant to Ibibio people as Christians, for they now hope for the future and the resurrection on the last day.

Death is of three interrelated categories; namely, physical, spiritual and eternal death. The eschatological expectation of Ibibio people also cover the three categories of death, hence the significance of eschatology to Ibibio people cannot be over-emphasized. Every Ibibio person who sees

himself as a Christian believes in eschatological statements from the Bible. For instance, it is clear that the origin of human death is traced to Edenic rebellion (Gen. 3:19). This mortality eventually overtook Adam (Gen. 5:5) and is a certainty for all his descendants (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Apart from direct miraculous provision, as in the case of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), God has fixed an hour of death for each human being (Heb. 9:27). In our fallen and finite state, human beings are powerless to avert the reality of death (Ps. 89:48). Basically, it is discovered that the two forms of eschatology, prophetic and apocalyptic, that are found in the Old Testament are the same with the eschatological ideas that are contained in the teaching of Jesus. While prophetic eschatology emphasizes earthly well-being, based on justice, mercy and generosity, as indispensable conditions for earning God's favour, apocalyptic eschatology stresses the nature of reward hereafter to be fulfilled while on earth.

Eschatology is a key to comprehending the life and mission of Jesus. No one can comprehend this without an appropriate eschatological lens. The decline of Christian eschatology is said to be anchored on the general decline of religion, with particular reference to its ability to influence good behaviour and actions. The religions' set-back in turn is said to feed on widespread materialism and financial fraud. Globally speaking, it is a common observation, among many Christian scholars, that there is a predominant over-preoccupation with miracles and earthly desire, which leave little or no room for generosity, mercy, compassionate acts and humanitarian sacrifice, as enjoined by Jesus, with special reference to the idea of the Cross towards inward eschatological benefits.

Eschatology refers to the theology of the last things, that is, things that will take place at the close of the age. Since, it is an established fact, the Bible confirms some of the things that will happen. It, therefore, calls upon the Ibibio Christians to be careful the way they live their lives. Every Ibibio Christian should live well with God and his neighbours; it calls for a day to day watchfulness, and it calls for soberness and humility.

Eschatology, according to Kendel (1998), gives a historical perspective. When we consider the future we must in some way reflect on the past. It reminds us that God has a plan. God has given us promises concerning the future. It shows that there is purpose in history and we are not just thrown into our existence by God, a God who does not know his mind or the mind of others. What is going on today in the world is under God's own sovereign control. The future is carefully thought-out by an all-wise God. It brings us face to face with the final judgement. This, therefore, calls for a well thought out and careful life, lived well with God and man. Because Jesus Christ came back to life, all believers will come back to life after death. All Christians, including those living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore, one need not despair when love ones die or world events take a drastic turn, like COVID-19 pandemic. God will turn the tragedies of the believers to triumphs, poverty to riches, pain to glory, defeat to victory; everyone will be safe and secure. As Paul comforts the Thessalonians with the promise of the resurrection, so the Ibibio Christians should

comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.

The eschatological hope is of great significance to the Ibibio Christians, because it will help them to be ready at all times for the Second Coming of Christ, since nobody knows the date. The Lord will return suddenly unexpected. It will help them to prepare by encouraging one another. The Biblical teaching on the intermediate state is of great significance. Believers who have died are "dead in Christ" (cf Thess. 4:16). Neither life or death or anything else will be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39). Death for the Christians, however, is a homecoming. It is the end of his pilgrimage; it is a return to his own home.

The Second Coming of Christ is fading into the background in the church. Whatever the reason may be, it is a sign of the loss of a lively, vital anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ, it is a most serious spiritual malady in the contemporary church in Ibibioland. All Christians should eagerly look forward to Christ's return, and should live in the light of that expectation everyday anew. The very unexpectedness of the Second Coming, however, means that we must always be watching for it. Jesus himself indicates certain signs of his coming to include being alert to the signs of the end of the age, but above all, watchfulness means – readiness, being always ready for Christ's return. Being ready does not denote an intellectual attitude but a moral quality of spiritual readiness for the Lord's return: "you must be also be ready" (Lk 12:40). The uncertainty as to the time of the parousia means that men must be spiritually awake and ready to meet the Lord whenever he comes. Constant watchfulness is required. This watchfulness does not mean idle waiting, but requires the diligent use of our gifts in the service of Christ's Kingdom (Hoekema, 1979).

When Paul adds that his readers are not in darkness and that therefore the day of the Lord ought not to surprise them like a thief, he implies that if one is always spiritually ready for Christ's return, he will not be upset by that return, even though it comes at an unexpected time. A lively expectation of the parousia is found in the Ibibio Christian Church today, as it was found in the early Church. According to Hoekema (1979) the expectation of Christ's return should serve as an incentive to holy living. It is to motivate the Christians to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, to make no provision for the flesh, but to conduct themselves becomingly as in the day (Rom. 13:12-14). As a people expecting the Second Coming of Christ, Ibibio Christians are to renounce worldly passions and live sober, upright and godly lives in this present world. It calls for diligent pursuits of self control, obedience, holiness and godliness while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day. In various other ways, Ibibio Christians anticipating the Second Coming should holily uplift their quality of living. The future appearance of the Lord should move them to be faithful to the commission God has given them. They are not to utter premature judgement about people.

Being faithful and wise managers of whatever the Lord has entrusted to their care is another way of showing that they are ready for the Lord's return. In the parable of the ten talents and the Pounds, the point is made that readiness for Christ's

return means working diligently for him with the gifts and abilities he has given us (cf Matt. 25:14-30, 41-48; Lk 19: 17-27). The best way to be prepared for the Second Coming is to be continually showing love to those who are Christ's brothers/sisters. The expectation of the Lord's return should be a constant incentive to live for Christ and for his Kingdom seeking the things that are above, and not the things that are on earth. The best way to seek the things that are above is to be busy with the Lord's ministry here and now.

I have offered above Paul's view of the resurrection of the dead that had in the concept of eschatology undergone significant development. What is outstanding is that the debate has hermeneutical significance, and can perhaps be made to yield a hermeneutical lesson even in Ibibioland. Hermeneutics bears on the understanding of the texts. A basic feature of such understanding is the triangular structure of reader, text, and referent (Ukpong, 1994; 1995; 1998; 2002). The reader understands the text by understanding what it is about, and he understands what the text is about by understanding the text. If in form this circle is vicious, in fact it is broken open by acts of insight which, alternating between text and referent, spirals toward an ever clearer and firmer understanding of both.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975: 151) recalls Luther's statement of the issue: "Whoever does not understand the things cannot draw the sense from the words". There are more positive formulations of essentially the same principle: (a) "pre-understanding" of the text is given in independent access to its referent (not "the subject matter", but the referent in its integral relevant reality), and an appreciative understanding of the text supposes a "life-relationship" to the referent and hence to the text. In biblical scholarship the widespread use of the term "pre-understanding" is attributable to the influence of Rudolf Bultmann (1958: 234-261). It follows that there is nothing as futile as positivistic objectivism, with its "principle of the empty head" (Lonergan, 1972: 157), according to which the less the interpreter has in his head, the more likely he is to avoid "reading into the text" his own opinions and prejudices. To understand a lecture on colour, it is no advantage to be free of prejudices by having been born blind. On the contrary, the blind man finds discussion of colour obscure precisely because he lacks independent access to the referent, i.e., to colour.

It may be worth the while, then, to pause over the referent. And in the present instance this is—what? The resurrection of the dead, an event conceived as belonging to a climactic future, when the risen and glorified Christ will destroy the last enemy, death. What can be our access to an as yet nonexistent event? It is not empirical in the sense that our access to the everyday events of our lives is. Nor is it well exemplified by access to history, though history, too, intends events nonexistent in our own present. The access to history is through a reconstructive activity of intelligence working on data variously mediated to us, but we cannot construct the future as we reconstruct the past. The past, however, is not irrelevant here, for in the texts on the resurrection of the dead the past event of the resurrection of Jesus grounds the eschatological future: "Now the truth is that God has raised Christ from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen

asleep; for, just as through a man there came death, so the more surely through a man there shall come the resurrection of the dead; ... just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, so the more surely shall we bear the image of the heavenly man as well" (1 Cor 15:20 f., 49). What is the carrier of meaning here, if not the correlatives, promise and hope? In the light of the election-historical mission of Jesus, the promise is fused with his victory over death; he is accordingly the ground of hope. So the texts are expressions of hope, suffused with hope, an intelligent hope that insists on coherent claims to truth (1 Cor 15:12-34). Now, the ancients observed that interpretation belongs to the arts that do not impart wisdom, for the object of interpretation is not what is true but only what is said (cf. Altman, *Platonic dialogue of doubtful authenticity*: 975c). Formally, no doubt, this is true, but it is an ambiguous truth and can turn into a trap. For if the interpreter who wrestles with the truth of the text may easily find himself wringing from it just what he himself takes to be true, the interpreter who stands aside from the struggle over truth may just as easily, and perhaps more fatefully, trivialize the text, missing the drama of its depths.

VII. CONCLUSION

Coming to the end of this work, it should be emphasized that, as a pre-Christian theme, the resurrection of the dead was far more firmly rooted in the life of post-exilic and post-biblical Israel than has generally been acknowledged. With the Christian gospel, however, a new and unique hope was born in the world. It lay at the heart of the Christian movement, indissolubly bound to the Risen Jesus, a fundamental facet of the Christ-event. "Every historical event," wrote Heinrich Schlier in one of his later essays, "presses toward its text and has its text. Otherwise, it is not an 'event' in the full sense of the word. The complete text of the event we are considering—the resurrection of Jesus—is the New Testament". If the text corresponding to the resurrection of Jesus is the New Testament, this text has peak passages, where hope founded on the Risen Christ finds powerful and eloquent expression. Among them is chapter 15 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Though the past few generations have shown intense interest in the retrieval of Christian eschatology, this particular text has repeatedly proved to be among the most vexatious and opaque, for subjective reasons such as I have just evoked (Bultmann, 1964: 1-77, esp. 31-33). On the other hand, since the Second World War, the West has witnessed the flowering of a rich, if extremely diverse literature, psychological, phenomenological, philosophic, and theological, on human hope: its role in the establishment of personality, in effecting the transition from absorption with "having" to communion with "being", its reference to personal fulfillment, its irreducibility to the this-worldly, its final transcendent reference (Marcel, 1951; Johann, 1952: 21-30; Pierre de Chardin, 1959; Moltmann, 1967). This literature is a resource for finding access to preeminently unique messages including those on the resurrection of the dead. Among the striking ascertainments to emerge from contemporary explorations of hope is the linguistic distinction between "to hope to" or "to hope that" and "to hope" simply (cf. Pieper, 1969: 21-25).

Paul, for example, tells the Corinthians: "I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits" (1 Cor 16:7). Here is hope that belongs to a vast category of human hopes; it is not hope simply and absolutely, as in the words "if we have hoped in Christ for this life only, we are the most pitiable people of all" (1 Cor 15:19).

In one of his penetrating treatments of hope, Pieper (1969: 24-26) alluded to the phenomenological studies of Herbert Plügge, a clinical physician who observed among his patients that these two classes of hope: everyday hope and fundamental hope, stood in paradoxical relationship to one another. Fundamental hope that is not directed toward anything that one could "have", but bent on "being" and "selfness", on "salvation of the person", emerged at the very moment that everyday hopes collapsed. Indeed, "Out of the loss of common, everyday hope true hope arises". In Pieper's view (1969: 32), the test case was the situation of the martyr, for whom the last wisp of human hope was gone, for "we can hardly speak of hope, if none exists for the martyr". Indeed, this is precisely the level at which Paul pitched his passionate expositions and expressions of hope. He dealt with fundamental hope, having to do with being, with salvation of the person. What Paul added to the mysterious human phenomenon of such hope was reference to the gospel that is, to the news of God's act on behalf of every human being in the death and resurrection of Jesus, made Christ and Lord. This gave a unique grounding to "fundamental hope" and by adding certain dimensions to it through reference to Jesus' own resurrection, it gave this hope the profound and permanent form that it has in the Pauline letters.

If asked why recognition of fundamental hope trans-valued by the gospel was so fitful and dim in the tradition that began with Otto Pflleiderer's (2008; 2018) gratuitous guesswork, I firstly respond that hardly anything undermines interpretation more grievously than strict limitation to the stance of the outside observer. In the instance that we have been considering, this invited a too facile recourse to the heuristic category "development". Let me add that a deeper, more potent factor had been alienation vis-à-vis aspects of the text and its referent. Finally, I should remark that the fundamental hope of 1 Thess 4; 1 Cor 15, and 2 Cor 5 is among those "things of God" that according to Paul no one understands except by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11; cf. Mk 4:11; Mt 13:11; Lk 8:10; Mt 11:25-27; 16:17; Lk 10:21 f.; John 6:44; 15:5 etc.). This is more than a home truth repeatedly verified by experience. It is sheer hermeneutical realism, founded on a requisite proportion between the knower and the known. A proportion in this context signifies, first, a broad isomorphism of structures of knowing and structures of being (cf. Lonergan, 1958: 115,499-502); second, a narrower correlation of knowing and being, which evokes the related themes of horizons, conversions, connaturality (cf. Lonergan, 1958: 235-93). As the break with cognitional myth (or, in other words, intellectual conversion) is requisite to an adequate account of cognition, so "moral knowledge is the proper possession only of morally good men" (cf. Lonergan, 1958: 240) and real grasp of "the things of God" supposes religious conversion.

One possible interpretation would be to push the

expected eschatological happenings to a remote and indefinite future. The coming of the Son of man in glory, the judgement, the establishment of the kingdom; these things did not happen at once, as the first disciples had expected, so the first move toward a reappraisal might well be to suppose that it was all going to take longer. Since these events must one day happen, it is left for Ibibio Christians to be prepared and be on the watch. The biblical eschatological statements are very clear. Although the last things such as the coming of the Son of Man in glory, the judgement, the establishment of the kingdom, etc are yet to happen, one day, they must happen as has been designed by God.

In the beginning of this paper, it was stated that eschatology seems to be in the eclipse in this age. The preoccupation is to elaborate a little but on that point, and to look into the causes, and their evaluation eschatologically speaking. The Christian eschatology is becoming other worldly; many contemporary Christians could not see the relevance of it to their daily lives. Churches that emphasise breakthrough miracles and prosperity gospel which stress this worldly success tend to obliterate seeking the heavenly kingdom of God, to an alarming extent.

The general impression of one's perception is that many Pentecostals preach the faith in the light of realized eschatology ie that Jesus had come. The Pentecostal preaching, and indeed every narrow minded Christian, can be misleading, and dangerous to Christian faith, including the eschatological aspect of the faith. It should be noted that hardly can one find a Church that has not been affected by Pentecostalism, both in terms of seeking miracles and materialism. Modern society is seen to be summarized as seeking the kingdom of God here and not hereafter. While miracles of Jesus indicate that God is not opposed to earthly well-being, He is quoted as asserting that nothing can be more than the heavenly kingdom of God (cf Matt. 13:44-45). The Church must preach eschatology, thus preparing people for the "last things" that will take place at the close of the age.

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