

# 18<sup>th</sup> INAUGURAL LECTURE

## RE-ENTHRONING THEOLOGY AS QUEEN OF SCIENCES: GLOBAL MISSIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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The Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Other Principal Officers, Provost and Deans, academic colleagues, staff and students of Lagos State University, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I count it a great privilege to deliver this Inaugural Lecture, the first this session, the eighteenth in the general series, the third from the Department of Religions of this University, the second in the field of 'Christian Studies' but the first on 'Biblical Studies'.

My area of specialization is 'New Testament Studies' in relation to Christian Theology and Missiology. These intricately related disciplines reflect in the title and purpose of our discourse, that is, an exploration of how Theology, particularly Biblical / Christian Theology, can regain its historical pride of place after a long period of deliberate assault by variants of skeptical science, philosophy and hostile political ideologies. I have, through my numerous research work, spanning more than two decades of academic venture, adopted the approach of a functional or phenomenological application of theological enterprise, rather than the mere abstraction and theoretical argumentation, characteristic of western Biblical Studies.

The opening phrase of the Christian Scripture, the Bible is: "In the beginning, God..." (Genesis 1:1). This speaks of the fundamental place of Theology as source, not just of cosmic phenomena, but of man, the apex being of the total created order. Man, according to Rudolf Otto's theory on the origin of religion, encountered in the material world, an existent numinous of Godly spirituality and an inevitable dominant influence in his world, and reacted to this, through worship. Worship produced various shades of rational and intuitive reflections that occasioned theological discourse. Both theoretical and practical theologies (if such distinction really exists) grapple with the reality of God and His place and relevance in the ever-changing and problematic material world. From the outset, early man of virtually all cultures had an experience of God and took for granted His existence, powers, attributes and role as determiner of human destiny, not only in the material world but in the world beyond, a corporeal world in eternity, about which man continues to postulate. In the African context, as leading scholars of indigenous religions such as Bolaji Idowu, Omosade Awolalu and Ade Dopamu have rightly argued, Africans had a grand concept of God contrary to the erroneous claims of foreign scholars. They also have a remarkable theology, albeit preserved and perpetuated in oral tradition. Any honest African scholar, therefore, who attempts to do theology in Africa must appropriate

the wisdom of contextualisation, indigenisation and inculturation, all being roughly synonymous terminologies for the application of biblical concepts in local contexts. But in the last two centuries, rational and scientific man departed from this norm.

In New Testament studies, major scholars had launched attacks on the integrity of the scripture. The German scholar F.C. Baur and his Tübingen school, beginning in 1831, led this attack by questioning the authenticity of the component books of the New Testament. In doing this he imposed parameters of source, form, historical and redaction criticism, jettisoning the divine inspiration of the Bible. It was a follow-up to the western Old Testament scholars' documentary hypothesis which questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Baur rejected most New Testament books claiming that they were not of the dates and authors ascribed to them by tradition. Debates also raged on among English scholars such as Bishop Lightfoot who responded to W.R. Cassels' *Supernatural Religion*, published between 1871 and 1877. Cassels had argued that in the Victorian age, the authority of the Bible was irreconcilable with scientific truth and therefore could no longer be maintained. As consequence of this, there was a decline in Bible reading and church going, and as an inevitable sequence, a loss of standards and a shaking of principles, the harvest of which the western world is now reaping. Later, Adolf Harnack declared in 1897 that "in all main points and in most details, the earliest literature of the church is from literary-historical point of view, trustworthy and dependable...the assumptions of the school of Baur are now wholly abandoned"<sup>[1]</sup>. Theological debates raged between various contending schools, between the conservatives and liberal radicals. Rudolf Bultmann argued for the demythologizing the New Testament, while Albert Schweitzer, in his *Search for Historical Jesus* tried to naturally explain away his miracles, in a futile attempt to separate the 'Jesus of history' from the 'Christ of Faith'. It is noteworthy that Ernst Kasemann, one of the disciples of Bultmann later abandoned him, claiming that "we cannot separate the Christ of Faith from the Jesus of History, nor do away with the identity between the exalted Lord Jesus and the earthly Jesus without falling into docetism"<sup>[2]</sup>. D.F. Strauss, argued that the Gospels are unhistorical because of internal contradictions but especially because the modern scientific world can no longer believe in angels, demons, miracles such as walking on water and other stories of supernatural intervention with natural laws.<sup>[3]</sup> These debates formed major signposts of New Testament preoccupation in the last century. In the course of this, the search for, and intensive use of Biblical manuscripts, papyri, Codices and parchments of value intensified, as guinea pigs in the experiment for scriptural authenticity. The mind-set that science and religion cannot meet, has been the bane of the dethronement of theology from the public space in many parts of the world.

This is what informed our attempt to examine the decline / dethronement / abdication of theology from its historical, academic and ecclesiastical throne as the Queen of the sciences; both natural sciences and social sciences.

## **REIGN OF THE QUEEN**

Right from the outset of man's evolving civilization, God-consciousness had become paramount in every stratum of daily business of living. Religious revelations translated

to theocratic governance with God loudly determining various actions in human destiny. Major landmarks recorded by human civilizations from the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Hellenic and Roman eras had spiritual input. Archaeological evidence across the Middle Eastern world confirm the veracity of biblical claims, regarding events and topography related to the actions of God and the reactions of men. It remains a marvel, how fundamental issues of cosmic phenomena and human behaviour and physiology find plausible explanations in ancient biblical records. How did the world originate? To whom can humans across the racial divide trace their biological genealogy? What is sin? How did it originate and how can its effects be controlled? How come men speak diverse languages? In Nigeria alone, there are more than three hundred distinct languages, let alone other nations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Arab world. Scientists and philosophers have tried, unsuccessfully, to rationally prove the existence of God through cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments. The most baffling mystery to man is not just the sheer size, regularity and livingness of the *cosmos*, but the question of spirituality and the essence of life. Who is man? Why was he born? Where was he before birth and where will he go after death? What are the constituent components of man? The general perception of man is of a being composed of Body Soul and spirit. To understand man properly requires the study of his extra-physical components, which necessitate involvement in theology.

With due modesty, theology has made the greatest claim to understanding and providing explanations for the foregoing baffling questions within the limits of its scripture and the ramifications of its extended antenna, which include the inspirational and intellectual efforts of theologians, and Church historians. Early forms of modern education and societal engineering recognized the primacy of theology as a fundamental guide to every human endeavour. Using the nation of Israel as “guinea pig” of God’s direct intervention in human affairs, we find His dominant influence from creation, to the fall of Adam, the Noahic deluge, multi-lingual dispersion of men at Babel, Abrahamic covenant and racial development, the patriarchal adventures leading to Egyptian bondage of the Hebrews, their supernatural deliverance and subsequent wilderness journeys until their amphictyonic settlement in Palestine. The adoption of the monarchy, its wobbles and consequent *Diaspora* and assimilation of Israel among foreign cultures until the re-gathering of Israel and later establishment of a new Israeli state in May 1948, the ongoing Middle East crisis and indeed the origin of Islam and its attitude towards Judaism and Christianity, all have bases in biblical historiography. Indeed, theology cuts through the boundaries of rational human appropriation. Whereas almost every form of natural and social sciences, and technology deals only with the physical man, only theology deals with the total because it claims the most comprehensive appropriation of the essence of man - spirit, soul and body. Whereas scientific history tells or conjectures a part of man’s past (mostly composed of guesses and postulations), only theology boldly asserts the detailed processes of the emergence of the created order. It dares not only to explain the present but to also project into man’s future through a specialized part of theology, which is prophecy. It is common practice today to relate biblical eschatology and apocalyptic, to contemporary events, actions and trends in every part of the world. This suggests that behind some major world events, such as the complex globalization process, are supernatural master-minds, either divine or diabolical.

Gibson Winter in his *Social Ethics* asserts the fact that God is both the Creator and Ruler of all spheres of nature and of society. “These are temporal realities existing to serve God’s purpose for man; therefore they can and must be used and changed in line with the purpose. Throughout the Bible, there is a strong eschatological emphasis, which stresses the dynamic nature of God and the fact that his action in history is moving toward a goal”<sup>[4]</sup>. Issues in life are generally perceived by many people across cultures, as binary and a contest between two forces; God and of Satan; light and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell and flesh and spirit. St. Paul typifies the innate struggles of will in man by the following Greek submission:

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“For the good that I want to do, I do not, but the evil which I do not want to do is what I do” (Romans 7:19)

In the preceding verse (18), the phrase □□□□□□□□□□□□ do not find) is used to complement the inability of Paul (and indeed any man) to find answers to the overriding impulses to committing sin. However deeper than finding the answer is the variant rendering by some other ancient manuscripts such as the Codex Sinaiticus, Alaxandrinus and Vaticanus as well as the writings of Augustine and Origen who adopted the reading □□□□□□□□□□□□I do not know)<sup>[5]</sup>. The theological implication is that man, often does not know the answer to his spiritual and moral dilemma, talk less finding or realizing the answer.

May I, therefore, tentatively submit at this stage that man’s antagonism towards theology may have been borne out of innate ignorance of truth.. Pilate, during his interrogation of Jesus asked ‘What is truth?’ (John 18:38). What a person does not know, he is unlikely to find. The pioneer Russian astronauts to land on the moon were reported to have been asked by their colleagues on the ground whether they found God up there, to which they ridiculously responded, No ! Theological minds, not scientific eyes of satellite are more appropriate instruments to knowing or finding God.

In the above Pauline picture lie the veracity of man’s inevitable moral conflicts. In it also lie the necessity for man’s exercise of freewill and absolute responsibility and accountability for his choice. Always, God respects the choice of man, who must blame himself for the consequences of his wrong choice, if he makes one. The theology of Christian soteriology is anchored on God’s merciful intervention to personally save man and restore him. However, the battle between good and evil rages with eternal consequences. The battle grounds have shifted away from Eden unto the world and the mind of man. God or Satan must rule man, in a battle of choice in which there is no room for the political nuances of non-alignment. God told Israel,

See I have set before you today, life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life that both you and your descendants may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Earlier, in chapter 28: 1-27 is to be found a long list of blessings or curses that could be visited upon man (as represented by Yahweh-Israel relationship) depending upon his choice to obey or disobey divine laws that govern the universe and the moral and spiritual life of man. As it were, God is sovereign but man is absolutely responsible for whatever state he decides to shape the world, whether good or tragic, peaceful or violent, moral or immoral, sane or insane, selfless or selfish, upright or corrupt. To be sure, the degenerate global moral order today is partly due to man's wrong choice of a course against the dictates of positive theology.

The enthronement of theology as the 'Queen of the sciences' was due chiefly to her effective influence over the various disciplines in the natural and social sciences. Theology influenced history, medicine, geology, law, philosophy, politics and international relations, military strategies, astrology, environmental sciences, music, education, morality, family ethics, agriculture, accountancy, economics, government and various forms of engineering (including civil, mechanical and aeronautical). A new development in modern religious studies is 'religion and science', which recognizes that there is a substantial meeting point between the two to facilitate collaborative study and dialogue. Biblical foreshadows of science and technology may not have been recorded using contemporary languages of science, yet their emergence and roles were accurately depicted or suggested sometimes in prophetic or pictorial idioms. The ability to interpret biblical concepts in the local cultural context is the business of hermeneutics.

The Bible is a library of many books written by various authors from diverse places, over a long period of time. Some of them did not meet neither did they have access to the works of each other, yet they wrote about the same precepts of God among man. The harmony of the Bible supports its divine inspiration by a single super-mind. The canonized Old Testament of 90 AD and the New Testament of 397 AD, which constitute the Bible today, are reliable documents for faith, history and scientific study. The Bible's uniqueness may have been responsible for its survival in spite of persistent attacks against it over the ages. It suffered from heresies, apostasy, pagan Hellenization, Jewish anti-Christianity, anti-Semitism, Marxism, evolutionism, Freudianism and scientific cum philosophical rationalism which gave birth to systematic atheism. Like the allegorical hammer that persistently hits the anvil, many hammers are worn out, but the anvil remains.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, theology covers most spectrum of human knowledge, and if we go by the common elementary maxim that to be an educated person, is to know a little about everything in one's environment, then I make bold to postulate that of all knowledgeable people or professionals in the world, the theologian has the highest claim to be truly educated. Lawyers may come next, because by virtue of the multi-disciplinary legal diversities of their business, they have the right also to call each other 'My learned friend'. The theologian deals with every field of human endeavour. That is why in the church, (as it also applies to Muslims in Mosque) the politician, scientist, business people, Professors, the rich and the poor, gather to be ministered to by the ministers of God, who are theologians.

Theology refers to systematic study about God in its full ramifications. It derives from the Greek words *theos* and *logos*. It incorporates that which is thought, said, and believed concerning God, given in human terms by the Holy Bible itself as the divine revelation of God. Millard J. Erickson defines systematic theology as "That discipline which attempts to arrange the doctrinal content of Scripture in a coherent fashion, express it in a contemporary form, and relate it to issues of practical Christian concern"<sup>[6]</sup>. Theology is paramount to the church and society. As A.W. Tozer astutely states, "We being what we are and all things else being what they are, the most important and profitable study any one of us can engage in is without question the study of theology". According to C.H. Spurgeon,

In too many cases the sublime truths are held in abeyance under the pretence that they are not practical; whereas the very fact that they are revealed proves the Lord thinks them to be of value, and woe unto us if we pretend to be wiser than He<sup>[7]</sup>.

In years past, theology was known and described even by scientists as 'the queen of the sciences'. 'Science' in this context means 'an organized body of knowledge'. Why was theology given this title by scholars and saints in previous centuries? This was because they understood a basic truth which many intellectuals of our generation have either ignored or forgotten. The truth can be expressed in this way: Good theology, good everything else; bad theology, bad everything else<sup>[8]</sup>. In some ancient universities in Europe such as the historic Leuven University in Belgium, during convocations, theologians are given pride of precedence in the procession, and are given the privilege of adorning the red or wine colour hood, symbolically indicating royalty. This tradition influenced the choice by the Christian Studies Unit of the Department of Religions of this University to adopt red or Wine colour for the cover of its undergraduate students' Dissertations. Students of all fields in Leuven are compelled at undergraduate levels to take courses in theology and philosophy as necessary humanizing studies for all scholars, even in the sciences.

This may have influenced the recent vision of Mr. Vice Chancellor of Lagos State University to introduce into the General Studies Programme of this University, moral education. Religion and morals are related. To train students in sciences or arts without morals would only produce a bunch of clever devils. The failure of past designers of Nigeria's educational curriculum at all levels to enforce this aspect of fundamental educational training at all levels has been responsible for the systemic destruction of the youth of this country who are today at the mercy of the occult; a glaring manifestation of Satanism. It has become a barbaric emergent culture that our societies, schools and universities must have to deal with. As Director of the General Studies Centre of Lagos State University, I and my co-workers shall see to the effective infusion of theology and morals as complements to other disciplines that would now characterize the new General Studies of this University. We call for the appreciation of this vision by other Nigerian universities.

Therefore, theology should be accorded its pride of place and theologians should be utilized as experts who cross as well as join the boundaries of the sacred and secular, who

know the actions of God and interpret the reactions of man. In Biblical times, the Nathans, Samuels, Elijahs, Jeremiahs, Isaiahhs, John the Baptists and even Jesus himself were actively involved in changing their societies, challenging and divinely guiding the government, facilitating revolutions and acting as moral watchmen over the conduct and policies of rulers and peoples. On this pragmatic level, theology also reigned. This continued in many civilizations and indeed, during and after the era of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, when the State and Church were reconciled. The early church which was hitherto *religio illicita*, and the victim of horrific persecutions and massacres later became *religio licita*, and the state religion that ruled over the crown and society. In emergent Christendom, the church controlled government, education, politics, economics and the military. The golden age of this utilitarian involvement of theology in human society was during the Calvinistic era. Martin Luther and John Calvin, among other reformers, had to protest the perceived wrongdoings of the Roman Catholic Church which had, for instance, doctrinally regarded the scripture as *biblia sacrae* which lay people were forbidden to translate. Only the Latin Vulgate was permitted for use in the church. The Septuagint managed to survive as partial alternative. Translators of the Bible such as William Tyndale were executed. It was not until the English King James XIII, after seceding from the Roman Catholic Church, commissioned scholars to translate an English version, did the scriptural famine under the papacy subside. The Authorized King James Bible remains today the most popular Bible version of the people in spite of many emerging modern versions.

The Bible has been a most reliable source of human history. Not only does it contain facts about God's creation 'in the beginning', it also provides a sequential account of human genetic descent, the emergence of the three dominant races - Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid, the origin and alignment of nations, the development and mission of Israel in a global context and the genetic hostility between Arabs and Israelis (Genesis 16: 10-12). It records a long-drawn history of the subsisting Middle East crisis. It is interesting to note that the Palestinians that Israel engages today in an unending battle are descendants of the Philistines against whom the Israeli forefathers fought during the Davidic era. We should return to the Bible therefore to find meaning to the world's longest crisis and go further to peep into the future through the lenses of eschatology and the apocalyptic to conjecture what the future holds for humanity. If the Bible was true for the past as testified to by series of archaeological evidences on the plausibility of its claims about people, places and events, and it is true for the present for those who find in the world, fulfillments of its prophetic, spiritual and moral codes, it is not out of place to rely upon its precepts and predictions for the future. Men needs such scriptural illumination in modern societies that are bedeviled by confusion, despondency, terrorism, diseases, conflicts and insecurity.

Theology has been a source of geological explorations. Statements in the Bible about places that contained some mineral resources were believed to have led researchers, archaeologists and scientists to explore such areas. In some cases their discoveries confirmed biblical claims. A typical example was Moses' prophetic statement about the tribe of Asher: "Let Asher be blessed with children; let him dip his foot in oil (Deuteronomy 33:24). Oil was later discovered in that Israeli territory. The massive era

of knowledge in science and technology today facilitated by the information technology could also be interpreted to agree with eschatological prophecies (see Daniel 12:4). For example, reference was made in Ezekiel's eschatological prophecy to possibility of a medium by which the world at large would watch a particular event that would occur at a given place in the future. This proposition might be applied to the television today. The idea that an airplane would be a future means of human transport was also contained in biblical prophetic statements. Yahweh was to transport the Jews in *Diaspora* from other nations back to re-establish the nation of Israel. They were to be flown in 'on eagles' wings'. The prophet might have seen a revelation of an airplane but lacked the scientific language, which was recent anyway, to describe it. The airplane today is designed in the structure of a big bird. The automobile era may also have been suggested in the following statement by Nahum: "The chariots rage in the streets, they jostle one another in the broad roads, they seem like torches, they run like lightening." (Nahum 2:4) It may be a symbolic description of modern automobiles, with bright headlamps, racing with loud combustible engines, along wide motor ways.

Coming to the field of law, there is no gainsaying the fact that on the most parts, European and American legal systems, dictated elements of Common Law that were exported to African and other colonies all of which derived from Biblical laws. United States of America, as a peculiar case study, emerged from a religious background. English men who had no liberty to practise their brand of Christianity in England left for new lands where they could live independently and practise religious freedom complemented by other freedoms as dictated by their revolutionary philosophies. The US Motto is 'In God We Trust'. But America today, is morally and legally challenging her theological roots and may be witnessing a rapid decline in her fortune. If America continues to eliminate her godly heritage and to perpetuate injustice against oppressed peoples of other nations, she might fall. Theology is queen, because God its author is Sovereign. As the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar learned, "God rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He wills". (Daniel 4:24-25)

With respect to medicine, theology explains the intricacies and complexities of human physiology and prescribes numerous guides to its effective management. Dietary prescriptions, laws on environmental control, disease prevention and management, stress prevention, wise living, inter-personal relationships, family ethics and general medical guidelines are provided for. A story is told of the bubonic plague that once claimed the lives of thousands of people in old Europe from which only the Jews were exempted, just because, as investigations discovered, they complied with Yahweh's laws of hygiene contained in the Decalogue. Medicine is still baffled about the innate structure of man, the miracle of the human seed, the complexities of the workings of the human body, **science's many unanswered questions** about several incurable diseases that defy the superior claims of science and technology. Right from the outset of man's creation, God had been involved in medicine. He performed the first creative formation of man, infused him with living spirit, subjected him to anesthesia, personally executed surgery for the purpose of bone transplant and genetic mutation or cloning to produce from Adam, the female species. He continuously claims responsibility for man's general preventive and curative healthcare. "I am the Lord that heals you" (Exodus 15:26). The life and



ministries of major Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha and of Jesus Christ, witnessed series of healing, **nature**, exorcist and resurrection miracles, all of which demonstrate that there is a power beyond the limits of human comprehension, a power that the best of human ingenuity via science and technology cannot fully comprehend. So, science and technology deal mainly with the what's and not the why's of the cosmic *mysterium tremendum*.

Relating the foregoing to the African context, believers look unto God as the ultimate healer. In many hospitals, inscriptions are placed that 'Doctors treat but it is God that cures'. The search by many sick, barren, afflicted and oppressed people for divine has encouraged the proliferation of healing churches and various controversial evangelists across the denominational boundaries. Campgrounds, crusades and mega-churches are filled with people hungry for 'health and wealth' brand of prosperity as marketed by advocates of prosperity theology. The paradigm-shift from mission-Christianity to pentecostalism may have its advantages, such as reawakening of Christian self-empowerment personally and economically, but it must not be carried too far to produce a fake Christianity devoid of the cross, a life of power-demonstration to the utter detriment of character-building. Christianity today, especially in the Nigerian context, operates like a supermarket where buyers enter into the pentecostal mall, and carefully observe the competing wares on display and pick a number of items of their choice. Christian shopper in the mall could patronize various churches: He goes to the Catholic Church to fulfill traditional liturgical worship, to the Anglican Church for his wedding, to the Deeper Life Bible Church for a dose of holiness teaching, to Apostolic Faith for classical church music, to Winners Chapel for prosperity, to Christ Embassy for healing, to Cherubim and Seraphim Church for prophecy, to Celestial Church for ritual cleansing, to Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries for prayer and deliverance from real and imaginary enemies and is at the Redeemed Church's Holy Ghost Night for teaching, words of knowledge and miracles, etc. This prevailing culture tends towards denominational syncretism. Camp evangelism has facilitated this. Along Nigeria's busiest expressway, the Lagos-Ibadan expressway can be found not less than twenty of such camp grounds which are melting-pots of all sorts, often constituting terrible traffic nuisance when they hold their periodic meetings. Examples of the major ones are MFM Prayer City, Deeper Life Camp, Redeemed Christian Church of God's Redemption Camp, Assemblies of God Camp, and Methodist Church Camp.

The electronic media have also brought the church to the family living room such that the emergent phenomenon of spiritual prostitution is greatly enhanced. No church today can lay exclusive claim to any person as her member. The typical Nigerian Christian today has many pastors, more than one church and many theological mentors. He accesses them through literature, compact discs, television, radio and internet. In essence, Christianity has been globalized and the church has itself become a global village. A typical example illustrates this. One day, as I drove alone, along Ibadan-Ilesha road, a policeman stopped to check the particulars of my car. The car sticker read 'Clergy', and I wore 'clerical collar'. Yet he asked – 'Are you a pastor?' I answered 'Yes'. 'Which church?' he continued to probe. I responded, 'Anglican Church'. I was shocked at the level of current affairs of this haggardly-dressed law enforcement officer who was barely literate, as he

commented: ‘Is it not your church where they are ordaining homosexuals as bishops and pastors?’ Efforts to convince this critic that it was a problem for American Anglicans and that African Anglicans were opposed to it, was to no avail. He dismissed me with - ‘You are all the same thing!’ What this simple encounter means is that the Church and her theology are an organic whole. A misbehaviour by one part of the body affects the whole. The Nigerian Church must find ways of calling her materialist and erring members to order, else her mission would be jeopardized and, as in Europe, our youths may later lose faith in the Church and in Christianity altogether.

In the last twenty years in Nigeria, theology has transformed from its suspicious treatment, from the early fifties to the seventies, by conservative pastors who believed that because of inherited critical Western-type literary-historical approach, it was injurious to faith. It has today become the bride and darling of the masses. Many other professionals fish in theological waters and are serving in churches as part-time ordained pastors. The popular attitudinal *cliche* about theology was ‘The letter kills’. Today, the same letter and its audio–visual translation and dispensation via the electronic media and from the pulpits of mega-churches have become resourceful mine fields for spiritual, economic, social and political empowerment. Early Nigerian indigenous churches and their ministers lacked a profound sense of theology and discouraged their clergy from **undertaking same** until they were challenged by neo-pentecostalism that re-enthroned theology as admirable bride not only to the *academia* but the *ecclesia*. Today in Nigeria, mushroom theological institutions abound, some of which are fictitious and sub-standard, issuing degrees up to the doctorate level in a game of deceit, egoistic flattery and commercial exploitation of the greedy ministers who eagerly desire unmerited honorific titles. By and large, the pentecostal form of Christianity continues to make the greatest global impact in the growth of Christianity in the modern day. It is a safe and comfortable haven for hordes of youths who have become tired of a cold, life-less brand of western-type conservative churches where spiritual gifts, lay participation in service and vigorous music, with vibrant praise and worship are not allowed. Incidentally, due to the rapid loss of their younger generation these churches have been forced to adopt charismatic renewal. The impact of pentecostalism as the current harbinger of Christian theology and spirituality is so profound that the former boundary between one church being pentecostal and others not, has broken down. All churches today are by and large pentecostal churches. We should speak no more of pentecostal churches but the pentecostal movement, which transcends exclusive denominational boundaries.

Allan Anderson comments that, quite apart from the efforts of North American Pentecostals, Pentecostalism continues to expand in the Third World in many different forms. Taken as a whole, the Pentecostal movement is the fastest growing section of Christianity this century, one of the most remarkable occurrences in Church history. Almost a century after Azusa street, there is an estimated 524 million Pentecostals/Charismatics or 26% of the world’s Christian population”<sup>[9]</sup>. According to the Church statistician, David Barrett, “there were an estimated 74 million Pentecostals/Charismatics or 6% of the world’s Christian population in 1970. In 1997, this figure had reached 497 million or 27% of the Christian population, more than the total number of Protestants.

According to the present trend, the figure is likely to rise to 1,140 million or 44% of the total number of Christians by 2025. <sup>[10]</sup>

Theology today is one of the biggest money-making industries in Nigeria. It is a major employer of labour, generating so much wealth that is unfortunately not being sufficiently plowed back into issues of social concerns. Rather, rich churches seem to enhance the materialist empire-building of the founders, their wives and children who are positioned to succeed them. Recently, the attention of hoodlums has turned to robbing churches. The church was once respected as holy grounds. It was also a harbinger of societal rights serving as active alternatives or complements to government, in the provision of social services such as education and health care. Today, the church seems to have abdicated that responsibility, by conspiring against the general interest of the *proletariat and other marginals* as agents of exploitation.

## ASSAULTS ON THE REIGN OF THEOLOGY

The relevance of theology was not vigorously questioned until the Renaissance when the paradigm shifted to rational philosophy. Man jettisoned revelation in favour of humanism. Modern societies emerged, questioning the right of religion to control the public space. God was chased out of schools. The discipline of children along religious precepts was banned; in some societies, deviants such as homosexuals were granted recognition by legislation, secularity was produced as ideology and concerted efforts were made not only to dethrone theology but also to exile it or kill it out-right. The battle moved from the multi-dimensional assault by science, political ideology, rational enquiry and moral liberalism, to internal disputations by theologians themselves who took the lead eventually in applying scientific procedures and methodology in doing theology. The result was the rapid denial of biblical claims and long-cherished truths. Western theologians in Europe and America and Church leaders themselves no longer have confidence in the Bible and the faith they profess. They regard Christianity and the Church as just a job like any other job, rather than a divine calling to minister curatively to souls. Little wonder, Christianity which used to be the religion of western nations has declined so worrisomely that these countries today pride themselves as post-Christian and post-modern. Church attendance has dwindled by more than 30% in Britain since 1980. Over the same period, the percentage of the population claiming membership in a religious denomination has dropped more than 20% in Belgium, 18% in Netherlands, and 16% in France <sup>[11]</sup>. It is a sad history that Europe that sent missionaries to the so-called dark continent of Africa has become so irreligious today that they are now an emergent mission field themselves, whom African missionaries are trying to re-evangelize. This is a tragic irony of fate and history.

I was told a story of a young English boy to who was told about Jesus. His question was - 'Who is Jesus? What team does he play for - Manchester United or Arsenal?' This shows the total ignorance of almost a whole generation of western citizens about the person, story or mission of Jesus Christ, a figure that was some centuries past dominantly central in the building of the civilizations of their fore-fathers. A generation has emerged who do

not know or care about God, neither prayer, nor spirituality and who make entertainment and sports their religion, consumerism its indulgence, who sees in the wonders of science and technology the fulfilment of their ultimate dreams and the hopes of its future. Bolaji Idowu, the doyen of Christian Theology in Nigeria, delivered his inaugural lecture at Ibadan University in February 1976 entitled “The Obituary of God”. Therein he responds as an African theologian to the cry for the death of God in western theological scholarship. Those who claim that God is dead are yet to tell us how, when and where he has been buried. The TIME magazine raised this persistent question with the header, ‘Where is God?’ It says “Churches are half-empty, and God can’t get a mention in the new European Union Constitution...the Christian establishment now sees and accepts itself as a minority force - an underdog, where in centuries past, it literally ruled Europe...The influence of Christianity in shaping the face of Europe was so enormous that one used simply to speak of western civilization as Christian civilization”<sup>[12]</sup>. Even the non-Christian world mistakes the west today as Christian. Sadly, during religious crisis in northern Nigeria, following the military attacks by USA against Afghanistan and Iraq, violence was visited upon innocent Christians in the North who are not in any way connected to the American adventures. When the West acts, more often than not, the motivating interest is not religion but economics.

Three dimensions of the *Coup d'état* against theology came from Charles Darwin’s evolution theory, Sigmund Freud’s moral liberty and Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin’s communism. Darwin’s evolution theory denies God’s primary responsibility as the Creator of the universe and man. His scientific argument of the origin of species claims that man evolved from one stage to another. Along the chain, he transited from Ape to man. The cosmic order is said to have been created by a big bang of atomic elements that metamorphosed into the evolutionary process. The theory is as nonsensical as it is nebulous. It leaves many questions to be answered. Who caused the first bang? If apes transited to man, why are there still apes around that have not evolved? Why has man not transit to something else since the evolutionary process is continuous? What accounts for the orderly and organized system of the universe and the intricate nature and components of man and the animal kingdom, and so on? Does this not suggest naturally that man and the world were products of deliberate creation by a supernatural mastermind? However, this evolutionary theory was the foundation of science, which in times past was a product of theology. The child is now questioning and ruling its parent. Darwin concluded his arguments on this note: “Although I am fully persuaded of the truth of evolution, I by no means expect to convince Naturalists. But I look forward to the future naturalists who will be able to view both sides with impartiality”.<sup>[13]</sup> In the same vein, the respected scientist, Albert Einstein, an atheist, stated:

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own - a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbor such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotisms... I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures

of his own creation. I cannot do this in spite of the fact that mechanistic causality has, to a certain extent, been placed in doubt by modern science<sup>[14]</sup>.

Einstein contrasts sharply with Isaac Newton, who remained deeply religious in spite of his unparalleled scientific achievements.

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian psychologist and founder of psychoanalysis, produced theories that find in man the sexual desire, the *libido*, as the expression of his ultimate goal of pleasure. He argued for liberalization of sex, as means for the ego, the key to human psychological self-fulfilment. Man is just an higher animal who should not fear to account to any deity on the moral laws guiding his behaviour. Freud by his theory, gave liberty or license for the sex explosion and its accompanying diseases. He encouraged the emergent loose culture of sexuality that heroically pervades the entertainment and social life of Western societies, a culture that is fast invading Nigeria and other African public and private spaces as a fallout of the globalization process. It soon affected family life and the marriage institution. The newfound concept of moral freedom leaves man as not accountable to God in his use of his will and sexuality but unto himself. Albert Einstein, commenting on morality and ethics, stated that “There is nothing divine about morality. It is a purely human affair...if people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed”<sup>[15]</sup>. Legally, legislative acts took precedence over God’s moral precepts. Soon, divorce rates rose alarmingly such that three out of ten weddings in Europe and America today are likely to end in divorce before the wedding is five years old. Abortion rate has gone very high. Incest and homosexuality have become acceptable not only by law but by the Church. In October 2004, African Anglican Bishops met in Lagos to respond to the ordination of a gay bishop, Gene Robinson, by the Episcopal Church in America, a controversial act of moral and spiritual defiance to all that the Church stood for in morality. It is worrisome that even the highest echelon of the Church hierarchy, the Archbishop of Canterbury, recognizes the homosexuals. In my address to the African Bishops I charged them as follows:

The conference should revive the African church to her pride of place as a beacon of light in a dark secular world. People are asking questions about God and spirituality, about culture and family, ethics and morality, death and afterlife, religion and governance, religion and terrorism, poverty and diseases and the relevance of scriptural authority over people’s lives. North Africa may have been lost while the Church was intellectualizing on theological debates, America may have lost her Christian foundation to legalistic liberals, the church must recover and reaffirm her role as watchdog of the society<sup>[16]</sup>.

Communism used to control about a third of the world’s population. Karl Marx and his fellow comrades evolved Topian concepts of a socialist system where man acts absolutely as master of his life and destiny. Religion or theology was seen as ‘opium of the people’; a fallacy that distracts people from coming to grips with the realities of their

existential responsibilities rather than entrust these to an unseen and unreal supernatural deity who is made the object of worship. Atheism was engendered and enforced. Man is to jettison theocracy and rule himself, controlling the means of production which include labour and capital. Powers resided in a sovereign state represented by the communist party that ruled, giving to each person equally, the distribution of the central wealth. It sought to eradicate capitalism and enthrone the proletariat, wiping away the gap between the rich and the poor. Communism was meant to run without God. Stalin's pogrom in labour camps witnessed about sixty million deaths, people who were wasted in a futile attempt to suppress or subvert the individual commitment to truth as they perceived it. In Nazi Germany, under Adolf Hitler, the holocaust of about six million Jews. Today the USSR, like Nazi Germany, has disintegrated. The major surviving communist countries in the world today are China and Cuba. China is one of the world's leading capitalist nation. Chinese products are driving underground, American and European markets globally. Even in the so-called free capitalist countries, the popular elementary definition of democracy as 'government of the people, by the people for the people' leaves little or no room for God. The concept is fundamentally secular except when the practitioners find it necessary to use God as a tool to achieve political ends. It is noteworthy that today, Russia and her allied nations have opened up liberally to various forms of religious activities.

## **MISSIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, and my distinguished audience, you may have observed from my analysis that we are interested in the socio-political dimension of theology and its application to pragmatic contexts. Although I specialize in New Testament Studies, I have found related to this disciplines which are needed for a functional and hermeneutical interpretation of theology. Hermeneutics, derived from the Greek *hermeneutikos*, meaning 'interpretation', which in turn derives from Hermes, the divine messenger of the gods and patron of eloquence in Greek mythology. Hermeneutics therefore assumed the meaning of science and art of interpretation, especially of ancient writings which contain divine truths. Later, new hermeneutics emerged, stimulated by the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann and his school. In the words of Gerhard Ebeling, "The hermeneutic task consists for theology in nothing else but in understanding the Gospel as addressed to modern man. It is not sufficient to demythologize the gospel; it must be made to speak in terms of the existential situation of the men of today" <sup>[17]</sup>. Emmanuel Obeng has argued rightly that "it is possible to use historical critical tools without succumbing to its reductionist tendencies" <sup>[18]</sup>.

'Missiology' derives from the Greek words *missio* (mission) and *logos* (word). It refers to missionary science, doctrine of mission, missionary theory and missionary theology. Giuseppe Buono defines it as "the systematic study of the evangelizing activity of the church and the means with which to implement it" <sup>[19]</sup>. This includes Liberation Theology which attempts to find in the Bible, teachings that can be used to argue the liberation of oppressed peoples in the form of racial, class or gender discrimination. Missiology, deals with mission studies in theory and practice. It also demands the tools of biblical exegesis

and its twin sister, hermeneutics. As Abogunrin has rightly observed, African biblical studies transcends mere abstractions characteristic of the literary-historical approach, to the application of biblical studies to realities of the African worldview:

But what is the state of contemporary Christian Theology in the West today? Is theology speaking to contemporary society any longer? Who is it that fired what can be described as the fatal shot at Christian orthodoxy in the West? The modern Christian Theologian it is that fired the shot, and in so doing, he killed himself by eliminating the Bible, the sole reason of his existence and has, therefore in effect committed suicide. Contemporary liberal Western theology is incapable of offering any firm advice to modern secular society <sup>[20]</sup>.

Local cultures, according to Lamin Sanneh are adequate bearers of the divine revelation. “For God who preceded the missionaries was at work already in the African culture” <sup>[21]</sup>.

This is what informed the prevalence of contextual biblical studies. Samuel Abogunrin (of Ibadan School), Ade Dopamu (of Ilorin school), David Tuesday Adamo (of Delta State School), Chris Ukachukwu Manus (of Ife school), Dapo Asaju<sup>[22]</sup>, (of LASU School), Justin Ukpog (of Uyo School) and Teressa Okure (of Port Harcourt School) have complimented the works of fellow African scholars such as David West in South Africa, Emmanuel Obeng of Ghana and Jesse Mugambi in Kenya in the academic strivings to reconstruct theology in Africa. In the words of Mugambi, “The theological metaphor of re-construction challenges African scholars to discern new insights to inspire a new movement that can help the people of this continent to regain their self-esteem and integrity, as they contribute towards the creation of a global community<sup>[23]</sup>. The phrase- Theology of Reconstruction was coined by a meeting of All Africa Conference of Churches, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, as Africa entered a new historical period ushered in by the end of the vicious systems of apartheid and colonialism following the release from life imprisonment, of Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990.

My research and publications have been in the foregoing direction, of using biblical theology to address emergent problems in the African context. My background as an academic unionist, being a former Chairman of the Academic Staff Union of Universities of this prestigious University, and one who led Nigerian Universities in several struggles against the dictatorial military regimes of the Babangida and Abacha eras, I share the philosophy of biblical prophets and radical Christian theologians, particularly Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Fr. Don Camara, that theology is a veritable tool for socio-political and economic well-being of society.

The various speeches of Dr King were laden with biblical theology. Many know him as the undisputed leader of the Black Civil Rights Movement that emancipated the African American in the USA, in the era of the “colour Line” by whose resultant efforts a Black, and a woman at that, Condelissa Rice, like General Colin Powell before her, could serve today, at the exalted level of Secretary of State. Not many people remember that Luther

King was a full minister of the Southern Baptist Church. He fought against the syncretic cult of conformity with evil, by the church, rather than stand for truth in a practical sense that emancipates the oppressed from all forms of human degradation and exploitation <sup>[24]</sup>. His struggles were non-violent resistance, the type that Mahatma Gandhi employed to demonstrate the British colonialists that the strength of will and principles outweigh the sophisticated instruments of coercion and oppression. Things are changing. If in war-torn Liberia, Africa could produce her first woman president, one day, a black man or female could be president of the world's leading nation.

Back home, 'Ethiopianism' was used to contribute to Nigerian independence from the British. It utilized theology and the platform of the Church to the fight against colonialism. Herbert Macaulay, James Johnson, Mojola Agbebi and the next generation made up of Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo were influenced by Christian theology. Awolowo, in particular, admitted in his writings, that his political ideologies were largely influenced by his Christian convictions and his writings reflect portions of biblical theology, just as he also modeled Ghanaian philosophy. There was an era in Nigeria when Church leaders such as Olubunmi Okogie (of the Catholic Church) and Abiodun Adetiloye (of the Anglican Church) led society to cry against the evils and excesses of the military dictatorship. The point we are making is that, insofar as Bolaji Idowu's assertion that Nigerians are in all things religious' is accepted, theology would remain Queen, not only in Europe but parts of Africa.

In our various studies, we have used applied theology as missiological challenges to Church reformation, moral reformation, inter-religious dialogue, church and politics, eschatological studies and theological responses to emergent issues on local and international scenes. I belong to the school of dynamic biblical hermeneutics that relates theology to the functional, analytical and prescriptive needs of societies. In this direction, in my pedagogy and research activities as well as doctoral external examinations, in European universities, I have had to clash with biblical scholars over methodology and functionality of abstract and negative biblical studies that detract from, rather than add value to, the integrity, potency and relevance of theology. Theologians are still killing theology in the West but African biblical studies is headed in the direction of resuscitating the efforts of early Biblical scholars who used their literary tools to develop biblical knowledge, applying their teachings to the current situations.

There are some challenges to biblical hermeneutics in African context. The first missiological challenge of African biblical hermeneutics is the recovery of the African identity, values and morals. Andrew Walls, commenting on the literature of African theology, stated:

No question is more clamant than the African Christian identity crisis. It is not simply an intellectual quest. The massive shift in the center of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the empires are dead and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does



this leave the African Christian? Who is he? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us - without it like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is this: what is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa's old religions and her new one <sup>[25]</sup>?

The Ghanaian theologian, Kwame Bediako observes that "To the extent that African theology's effort at rehabilitating Africa's cultural heritage and religious consciousness has been pursued as self-consciously Christian and theological, it may be said to have been an endeavour at demonstrating the true character of African Christian identity."<sup>[26]</sup> Two schools of thought are at cross currents on this issue. One, led by Bolaji Idowu and supported by John Mbiti, Gabriel Setiloane, Samuel Kibicho and Christian Gaba, postulates Christian continuity with the non-Christian African past, a process of indigenisation of Christianity. The other, led by Byang Kato and the 'Association of Evangelicals of Africa' school, argues for discontinuity of Christian witness, from the primal religions and cultures of the African past <sup>[27]</sup>.

Missiology attempts to explore ways of doing mission work particularly in cross-cultural contexts. This is a valid tool for Christian witness in a plural society such as Nigeria, where religious diversity intercepts ethnic and geo-political interests as co-determinants of public policy and governance. The evil chickens of the West have come home to roost on our land. Nigerian youths are faced with new challenges which border on their very identity. Most of our young generation are born outside their home villages, detached from their cultural roots and the very elements that define Africanness. City children grow with city mentality. Political and economic power resides in the city. The consequent rural-urban drift has dealt heavy and sometimes fatal blows to the future of African identity. When the aged ones die, who will succeed them at grass-roots levels? Already, market economy has replaced the dominant agrarian preoccupations of the African villagers. We are, as it stands, being disconnected from our African source. Where other means fail to mobilize people for re-integration, religion serves as a veritable tool for all times. The people are in the church. They hear their pastors, whether good or bad. The hope they can get to resist the stressful pressure of the debilitating economic hardships is got from their religious leaders. And when they fall sick or eventually die, the Church caters to their needs and rites. From birth to the death, theology encapsulates the total life of the African man. This fundamental realism, has coupled with the fact that Nigeria has integrated with the global village, subjects her to the whims and caprices of globalization. Western fashion, sports, music and mannerisms, with moral laxities have been imbibed by Nigerian youths. Only recently, universities joined religious bodies to campaign against nudity on the campuses. Mission has shifted from the rudimentary inter-personal evangelism to the sophisticated, city-oriented, and mass media infused form which dictates new ways of responding to the emergent generation. Here Biblical Hermeneutics comes in handy. In South Africa, hermeneutics was a strong tool of theology in the struggle against apartheid, a struggle that creditably saw the involvement of the Church, via leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The second challenge is the use of theology for decolonization of Africans. Colonialism is still rife in Africa. We are yet to gain full independence economically, culturally, linguistically and even politically. We still hang on to the former colonial powers for aid, training and when we produce professionals, they desert their homelands to serve the foreign lands even under substandard working conditions. How can biblical studies contribute to the decolonisation of the mind? Adamo argues for the reorientation of African biblical scholars away from the western training:

Most African Biblical scholars are trained in the West. Those who are even trained in African higher institutions are still trained in the western tradition. After going back to Africa, those of us who were trained in the western tradition soon discovered that the very western methodological tradition to which we were well schooled did not satisfy the need in Africa. The result of this is to find other satisfactory ways or methodologies that will meet the need and the understanding of African people at home and abroad...in these African biblical methods, there are various methods employed to achieve this purpose... several terms then appear synonymous to the method of African biblical studies: inculturation hermeneutics, liberation hermeneutics, contextual hermeneutics, Africentric hermeneutics, and vernacular hermeneutics...African biblical studies is not done in absolute exclusion of western biblical methodology. It can be complementary<sup>[28]</sup>.

In my research I have used the above hermeneutical methodologies complementarily with western type literary-critical approach<sup>[29]</sup>. Abogunrin describes an African biblical study as “The biblical interpretation that makes African socio-cultural context a subject of interpretation. Specifically it means that analysis of the text is done from the perspective of African world-view and culture”<sup>[30]</sup>. Justin Ukpong sees inculturation as a most fundamental process of decolonization:

I define inculturation as a dynamic on-going process by which people consciously and critically appropriate the Bible and its message from within the perspectives and with the resources of their cultures. It is a hermeneutic process of appropriation which, in the case of Africa, is concerned to make a specifically African contribution to biblical interpretation and actualize the creative power of the Bible in African society. Its focus is on Africa’s anthropological empowerment and cultural identity<sup>[31]</sup>.

At the 2003 Berlin conference on the impact of the Berlin conference’s partition of Africa on African churches, I rhetorically raised some questions which I believe are still relevant for a successful mission of theology.

What is wrong with African form and delivery of biblical studies at every level, including sermons and public preaching? Why are there many churches and crusades yet the moral and spiritual lives of most people who vow to be Christians have not changed? Why have crime and corruption not abated? Are there no Christians joining the current fray to exploit poor masses in Nigeria? Is there something wrong with the Christianity we received? Are we on the right course trying to decolonize the Bible when the Bible itself evolved from a long historical process of decolonization? Have we not over-shouted at these issues of decolonizing Christianity with all our efforts on inculturation theology since the 1960s? Are there no more urgent emergent issues such as the HIV/AIDS, continued corruption in so-called democratic dispensation, ethnic militarism, collapsing morals of society, emergent secularization amidst our so-called church growth?<sup>[32]</sup>.

The third missiological challenge is to reform the language and theology of the church in a way that can make her relevant to the priority needs of the people. Modern pentecostalism which is globally making great strides across denominational boundaries has come with a heavy dose of North American materialism. Foreign preachers now flock African mega churches, not to convert the masses in the line of Billy Graham or Reinhard Bonnke, but to advance the prosperity theology, which although biblically rooted, shifts primary attention of many people from the very reality of Christian life. A proper grasp of the vagaries of human existence, of the sovereignty of God, of sacrificial endurance in Christian service and the need to comply with the model of Jesus global evangelization commission, should form the primary message of the church, not just how to get wealthier, how to do it yourself, and how to command God to perform miracles, and how to enjoy the good material things of life. This tendency drives away truth from the Church and from the individual Christians who ought to be the light to the world. Abogunrin states:

In a situation where biblical scholars are failing to reach the church, and in a world where communication has broken down between it and theologians, theologians need to ask themselves whether they are being bogged down by modernism, or they are being actuated by the living dynamic incarnate Christ. In a changing world, the Christian affirmation is that God is unchanging....Biblical scholars must serve the society, the church, and the changing world. Biblical scholars must not allow the findings of science and history of religion to become a snare in their confrontation with the world. As long as the source of the message is the living God, it cannot be out of date. The biblical scholar must see himself, first and foremost as an apostle of him who is the truth and must, therefore, face all the facts about the Bible as we have them today<sup>[33]</sup>.

Clive Calver addresses the ever reverberating question - What is truth? He says that "A defective view of truth undergirds so many of the evils that have afflicted the modern world. It has always been possible to find a good reason for doing the wrong thing. In a

society which reduces objective truth to 'shades of grey', it has always been possible for 'wrong' to masquerade as 'right' with tragic consequences....The situation becomes even more problematic when theology is brought into the picture! Scriptural support has often been claimed for practices which others would view as totally unbiblical. Here again, truth is at the mercy of interpretation. One vivid illustration of this is the use of the Bible to justify racism and slavery".<sup>[34]</sup>.

It is chiefly this last observation that scripture had been misused to perpetrate evil in the social systems that fuelled Afro-centric Biblical studies. This approach to biblical hermeneutics affirms, against the wrong western biblical manipulations, that Africa and Africans are not underdogs in the evolution of the Christian religion, the Church and its theological traditions. One of the methodologies used to advance this is that popularized by Adamo, which is 'Africans in the Bible approach' <sup>[35]</sup>. A few examples suffice to drive home the point here. Africa was located as one of the original places to which one of the rivers that flowed from Eden, went (Genesis 2:12-14). That means Ethiopia in Africa, is connected to the Garden of Eden, the source of man. Egypt in Africa is the home of original human advanced civilization. The Jews, from whom Judaism and Christianity originated, were historically slaves in Egypt in Africa. Moses married an African lady and was criticized for this by his brother Aaron and sister, Miriam, with dire consequences which indicate that God favoured the Africans as in-laws to Moses, the greatest patriarchal leader of historic Israel.

The Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon, had a child for him; this child became the father of the *Falashas* in Ethiopia, from whose lineage the late Emperor Haile Sellasie (whose *cognomen* was the Lion of Judah) derived. That means that Africans, from early times, were related through Solomon, to the very royal court of Israel. It is reported that the original Ark of Covenant produced by Moses during the wilderness journey was given to the Queen of Sheba by King Solomon for keeps, and is resting in a special museum in Axum, Ethiopia today. <sup>[36]</sup>. When Jesus' life as a baby was threatened by King Herod, it was to Egypt in Africa that he was brought for refuge. Africa saved and protected Jesus. He spent his earliest childhood as an African child, with African upbringing. The Harry Sawyer, the chief theologian of Fourah Bay, Sierra Leone could, on this basis, describe Jesus' as 'My Black Brother'. Simeon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus cross was an African. At Pentecost, when the Church was officially commissioned, Africans were present from Libya, Ethiopia, among others (Acts 2:9-11). Africans, through the Ethiopian Eunuch, were part of the earliest beneficiaries of Christian evangelization. It was in Carthage in North Africa that the New Testament Bible was canonized. Really, Africans formed the cream of the church's most grandiose theologians. These include Tertullian, Anthony, Origen and Augustine of Hippo, who actually became the first Bishop of the church in England. Till date, any Archbishop of Canterbury would have to be enthroned on the Seat of St. Augustine. What this means is that long before the British and other Europeans brought Christianity back to Africa during the missionary era, Africans had been original participants in its evolution and they ruled over the European church. It is therefore erroneous and incorrect, Mr. Vice Chancellor, to claim that Christianity is a White Man's religion. It is as generic to Africa and Africans as it is to the Jews. After the Jews, no other race, not even the white can

claim precedence over Africans over matters of Christianity. This type of hermeneutics breeds confidence in the pursuit of indigenous forms of African Christianity and to explain why providentially Christianity is thriving in African societies and African immigrant communities in Europe, whereas it is declining among the so-called white Christians. As noted by Adogame, we must appreciate the contributions of “West African scholars who championed the cause of cultural nationalist historiography”. These include Jacob Ade Ajayi, Emmanuel Ayandele and Bolaji Idowu<sup>[37]</sup>.

The second approach is to defend African interests and image from wrong hermeneutical manipulation. The Bible was for long used by white slave owners to claim that because of Paul’s admonitions that slaves should be subject to their masters, and should serve them faithfully as they would, God, therefore God supports the institution of slavery. This is wrong reading of the Pauline admonition. Another popular scriptural misuse is the application of the Hamitic theory against Africans, claiming that they were the descendants of Ham, whose son, Canaan was cursed by his father Noah, to live in perpetual servitude to the descendants of his brothers. This was used to explain African underdevelopment and leadership problems and tendency to be subservient to the Europeans. But in reality, this theology is as fake as it is false. I do not know of any genetic curse that could prevent Africans from coming to grips with their leadership and development challenges; afterall, they are among the best professionals outside this country wherever they find themselves in the *diaspora*. Indeed, the person that was cursed was Canaan, who was a Canaanite, not an African. It is biblical hermeneutics that can respond to such issues in defense of the Africans against the superiority complex of the whites.

The fifth missiological challenge is for theology to respond practically to the emergent problems which confront the African people. These include the HIV/AIDS pandemic, ethnic conflicts, violence and looting of public treasury, hunger and poverty, political instability, stress due to failure of governance corruption and at the international level, militarism, unilateralism and reification of cultural conflicts as the new terrain of global struggle. Ron Elsdon rightly observes that “The things which are flourishing amidst our prosperity are venereal diseases, mental disorder, bad debts, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, strikes, bankruptcy, suicide and crime. And these signs of the end-times are world-wide. We seldom love our present possessions. We must have more. We adore the things we do not own and look down on them as sources of happiness.” <sup>[38]</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

I propose to conclude that whereas the Bible in modern scholarship has witnessed significant damage from the excesses of the literary-critical approach, which has produced through various schools, a damage to the fortunes of the Bible itself, of theology and the Christian missiological task, African biblical hermeneutics remains the chief key to reverse this trend, to sustain the high tempo of Christian resurgence in Africa and to use African biblical theology as a new launching pad for the reverse mission to the West, in a manner that can place Africa in the centre of global missiology in this eschatological era. As Gerald West rightly argues, in the encounter between Africa and

the Bible, the trend of studying the bible to see what it says to Africans should be reversed to studying Africa to see what she says to and on the Bible:

Further developments in African Christianity will test the depth of the impact that the Bible has made upon Africa”, says Kwame Bediako. This statement points to the significant role the Bible has played in the formation of African Christianity. Unfortunately, however, this formulation perhaps gives the impression that the encounter between the Bible and Africa is in one direction: from the Bible to Africa. The Bible, in this formulation, is the subject and Africa is the object. It would seem that as subject, the Bible is static and has an essential and self-evident message that has had a certain series of effects upon Africa. What if we make Africa the subject and the Bible the object? We would then have the following formulation: “Further developments in African Christianity will test the depth of the impact that Africa has made upon the Bible. This statement points to the role that Africa has played in the interpretation and construction of the Bible.” Africa is no longer acted upon, but is itself an actor. The Bible is no longer the agent, but is the object of the actions of (African) others <sup>[39]</sup>.

The Bible, through the exegete and hermeneutic, should speak to the needs, the problems and the life of man in all its ramifications. Although, “In a previous age, theology might have boasted of being Queen of the Sciences and now Ideology, the science of ideas was to claim the capacity to explain our society and social behaviour” <sup>[40]</sup>. I am convinced that theology should give light again to direct the mind and ways of contemporary man globally, to reconcile ‘man’ of all nations with his Creator and give God space again, after ‘expelling’ Him from the public space and from the world he created, in the guise of secularity and post-modernity. I believe theology should intervene again in politics, in economics, in healthcare, in education, in international relations, for the pursuit of global and local peace and in the salvaging of our morals, in rescuing our youths from cultic Satanism, in arresting the drift of our churches, in recovering our genuine spirituality and in providing to hopeless man of all nations a new hope for the ultimate good. I believe in this project and hope that African biblical hermeneutics can serve to achieve this project

I believe in God, I believe in Africa, I believe in Nigeria, I believe in Lagos State University to which I have committed twenty two years of my professional life. I believe in Christianity and in the Church of which I am an ordained clergyman. I believe in God and in His son Jesus Christ. I believe in the Holy Bible. I believe in myself, by virtue of which I stand before you this day to profess, I believe in my beloved wife, and compelling friend Harriet Oluwaseun, a theologian, Librarian and Lawyer. Harriet is God’s best gift to me, she stood consistently by me from the outset of my academic career till now, I believe and am inspired by my children, Olubanke, Oluwafikayomi, and Samuel Oladapo Jr., and, with eternal gratitude I believe in my late parents who formed, moulded and propelled me in the course of life. Both would have wished to see their son attain the height of the academic ladder, However, God’s sovereign will permitted them to have joined the saints triumphant. It is jointly to them, His Royal Highness, Oba Michael Bolorunduro Asaju and Olori Alice Oladepe Asaju of blessed memory, that this

Inaugural is dedicated. I see this both as a token of appreciation and celebration of their lives.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, other Principal Officers, my teachers, Prof. S.O. Abogunrin, Prof. Ade P. Dopamu and Prof. Raphael Akanmidu, my academic colleagues of many years, friends and comrades with whom we have been involved in the struggle for a just social order in Nigeria, my dear students and disciples, my brothers and sisters in Asaju, Ajinihi and Olumakaiye families, Bishops and fellow clergy, the Press, distinguished audience, I thank you all for your patience. God bless (Amen).

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