Introducing ESCHATOLOGY in the African Context

VOLUME 1

FREDERICK MAWUSI AMEVENKU & ISAAC BOAHENG

Foreword by Samuel B. Adubofour

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We dedicate this book to all African Christians, especially students and scholars in the field of Systematic Theology.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 7

CHAPTER 8

Foreword

The central theme of the teachings of Jesus is the Kingdom of God, as indicated by the parables he used as illustrative materials. A careful study of His teachings indicates that the Kingdom of God which Jesus came to establish would be fully realized in the future. The future element of the Kingdom makes the issue of eschatology very relevant. The Christian hope (also known as the blessed hope) is the second coming of Jesus which will culminate in the full realization of the Kingdom of God. Christians are therefore to live in anticipation of the second coming of Christ.

Yet we observe that the blessed hope, and eschatological ideas associated with the consummation of the Kingdom of God are woefully missing in contemporary preaching in African Christianity. The over-emphasis of prosperity in Pentecostal and Charismatic preaching and its convergence with the African worldview and moral order has resulted in the "this worldly" orientation of contemporary African Christianity. Although the Kingdom of God, with its values, principles and standards are not denied, they do not feature prominently in African Christian thought and practice today.

The question is, what really accounts for the dearth of concepts of heaven and hell in contemporary Christian preaching? Who really cares about the end-time now? The contemporary expression of African Christianity is more "this worldly" than "other worldly" partly due to the convergence of some neo-Pentecostal concepts and values with some prevailing African traditional ideas of life and socio-economic realities. The advent of prosperity preaching in Ghana, and for that matter Africa, has discounted by and large the interest in eschatology, that is, ideas about the 'end time'. The current Christian pre-occupation is with the here and now.

The issue of 'immediacy' is endemic in traditional African religions and constitutes an enduring predisposition of African Christians. The moral order for Africans is believed to be sustained by various spiritual powers who prosper the just, reward the good and punish the wrong not in some future afterlife but in the here-and-now. As Lewis observes, "the notions of heaven and hell thus seem not to be strongly emphasized, or to be absent altogether; and particular misfortunes and illness, and death itself, are regarded, at least in part, as a reflection of epiphenomenon of the process of moral life in society."

Against this background, the book, "Introduction to Eschatology …", written by Rev.Dr. Amevenku and Rev. Boaheng serves as a valuable corrective to the imbalance in contemporary African preaching by projecting critical 'end time' ideas and raising the banner of Christian hope. This is not intended to make African Christians so heavenly-minded that they become of no earthly use.

The book, Introducing Eschatology in the African Context - Vol. I, is quite comprehensive in coverage. It provides the contextual background for understanding eschatological ideas and imageries from both Western and African points of view. The exposition of African thought and existential realities makes the discussion of eschatology exciting and relevant to both students and lay readers. The book is a good introduction to eschatology as the title indicates. It makes a valuable contribution to the theological discourse about eschatology.

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Preface

Death and its aftermath, the end of the world and what happens thereafter are subjects of ultimate concern for everyone. Almost all religions have something to say about what lies in the future. As society becomes more concerned with the future of the world, the study of the Christian doctrine of future things (Eschatology) becomes increasingly pertinent. From the biblical perspective, Eschatology must both trigger fear and panic in unbelievers because of God's impending judgment and motivate believers to be resilient in their faith because of the divine glory and rewards that await them. Eschatology should, therefore, not frighten but comfort believers. Unfortunately, for some decades now, most (academic and non-academic) eschatological discourses (in Africa and elsewhere) have tended to overemphasize end-time cataclysmic events such as torment, hardship, famine, and bloodshed, causing fear and panic among Christians instead of giving them hope. The main purpose of *Introducing Eschatology in the African Context* (consisting of two volumes) is to offer contemporary Christians a balanced biblical and theological view of Christian Eschatology from an African perspective, to empower believers to be faithful to Christ at all times (even in their trials and sufferings). It is also to call the attention of unbelievers to the divine judgment that awaits them so that they may be encouraged to respond to the call to repent and be saved.

This volume, consisting of eight chapters, begins with a chapter on the scope of Eschatology. The first chapter gives a socio-cultural framework within which the book is located. It highlights African perspectives on future things to show how African Christians might make sense of Biblical Eschatology based on their own socio-cultural and religious worldviews. It also serves as a background against which Western Christian concepts of eschatology may be evaluated. Chapter two explores the meaning and scope of the subject of Eschatology. In chapter three, the book considers various principles required to interpret biblical texts related to the subject

of Eschatology. The fourth chapter is a historical survey of eschatological discourses that have taken place in the Church from the patristic era down to the twenty-first century. By reviewing how different people (at different places and at different times) have responded to questions pertaining to the future, the chapter not only serves to guard contemporary Christians against eschatological heresies but also seeks to foster the right beliefs in readers. Chapter five examines the subject of "The Kingdom of God" as both a present reality and a future expectation. The in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into human history goes back to Christ's First Advent but its full consummation will take place during the Second Advent.

The reality of death, the biblical view of death, the importance of death in the life of the believer and the right Christian attitude towards one's own death and the deaths of others are some of the key issues considered in chapter six. Chapter six serves as a foundation for discussing the controversial doctrine of the immortality of the soul/spirit in chapter seven. The major contention in chapter seven is that the human soul is in no way intrinsically immortal; the human spirit continues to live after death because God, who breathed the spirit into humanity, is immortal. Chapter eight discusses how the doctrine of the intermediate state has been developed through various epochs of Church history. We reject the extremes of preterism (which claims that resurrection, occurs immediately at death and hence there is no such thing as an intermediate state) and "soul sleep" (which holds that the dead are unconscious between death and resurrection), and adopt the position that after death, the spirit lives consciously and temporarily, separated from its body, awaiting its reunion at the resurrection at Christ's return.

Each chapter is organised into various sub-themes with summaries and conclusions at the end. There are questions at the end of each chapter to offer the reader the opportunity to have a deeper reflection on major issues discussed. Universities, Seminaries and Bible Schools can use this book for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Eschatology. The approach used makes the book relevant for scholars as well as non-scholars who desire to know God's plan for the future of the universe and relate it to their context.

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Chapter 1

THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND FOR AFRICAN ESCHATOLOGY

African Traditional Religion[1] is not an exception among the religions in which eschatological ideas and beliefs play a central role in the articulation or expression of the faith of the adherents. Here, eschatology simply refers to the study of what is to come in the future. In this chapter, the book takes a look at the African eschatological articulations in relation to such issues as death, after-life, immortality, destiny, judgement and reward. This serves as a contextual framework for the rest of the book. There is no denying the fact that the idea of "Africa" is complex. It is almost impossible to give a precise definition of what "Africa" is. Therefore when we talk about Africa in this book, we are mainly referring to people of West Africa, resident or non-resident at home, who share many traditional religious beliefs. Many of those beliefs are furthermore shared by much of Sub-Saharan Africa, for whom we also write to a large extent.

Some Preliminary Observations

We begin with a brief comment on the African hermeneutical framework. Every theology is contextually informed. An African eschatology must therefore be informed by existential realities in the African continent. In this regard, the meaning of biblical texts related to eschatology (and any other subject) needs to be applied to the African setting in light of its meaning to its first audience. African Christian Eschatology therefore involves the

[1] We are aware of the debate that there is no single "African Traditional Religion". We respect the view that we should be speaking about African Traditional Religions or African indigenous religions but we do not wish to go into that debate in this book. We write from our context as West Africans. In most of West Africa, the main concepts of the various expressions of traditional religious are fairly similar. This is why we maintain the expression "African Traditional Religion."

contextualization of Biblical Eschatology to serve the needs of the African continent. To this end, African culture becomes a very important partner in the process of theologising. The Christian faith cannot be purely and simply separated from the culture into which it was first introduced (that is, the biblical world); neither can it be separated without serious loss, from the culture in which it is introduced. In response to the question: "Why should the Church be concerned about cultures?" Luzbetak provides the following answer: "We are concerned about cultures so that the Church may be as perfect a channel of Grace as possible, as worthy an instrument in the hands of God as possible, as good, wise, and faithful a servant as is humanly possible—this, and this alone, is our aim and our theological justification for a Church-related applied science of culture that we have called 'missiological anthropology.'"[2] The African Christian community must interpret the Bible in response to their respective cultural context.[3]

Interpreting Time and Eschatology: An African Perspective

What is the African view of time and history? This question has engaged many scholars over the years. Reflecting on African cosmology, John S. Mbiti declares that "in traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving 'forward' towards a future climax, or towards an end of the world."[4] Thus, in Mbiti's opinion, Africans, like Greeks, hold a cyclical view of time and history, a timeless understanding of time. In African Traditional Religion, the beginnings of human beings and their end are inseparable. There is no end to life, just like matter decays in science to nourish another cycle of life. Death in African Religion does not put an end to life. This idea is reflected in the everyday experience of the African. Africans "expect the events of the rain season, planting, harvesting, dry season, rain season again, planting again, and so on to continue forever,"[5]

[2] Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 397.

[3] Hendrik Bosman, *All Past and Present but Little Future? African and Old Testament Concepts of Time and History* (Oxford: Lang, 2001), 101.

[4] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 11th ed. (London: Heinemann, 1985), 23.

[5] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 21.

"and there is nothing to support that this rhythm shall even come to an end; the days, months, seasons and years have no end", just as there is no end to the ontological rhythm of human life.[6] Interpreting Mbiti's concept of time, Kwame Bediako identifies three main features of time.[7] First of all, time is two-dimensional, with a long past, a present, and virtually no future. Secondly, the African concept of time relates to concrete and specific events that are not mathematically verifiable. Finally, African time relates to history; it always moves from the present into the past. Life is a religious drama involving a five-fold division of reality: God, spirits, humans, non-human animate and non-human inanimate creations.

The cycle of African belief in end-time concepts comprises birth, life lived, death and return to the abode of the ancestors from where the cycle begins again. In view of this, I. W. C. van Wyk writes, "Africans look backward to the past and not forward to the future."[8] In support of this, Mbiti asserts that, in traditional African thought, "The notion of a messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in the traditional concept of history."[9] There is no eschatological consciousness in terms of the final end or destruction of this earthly world. In the African worldview, a permanent end is actually non-existent and meaningless. There is no permanent end in African Eschatology. Africans view and feel time as an endless rhythm, and the cosmic "future as an empty slide screen."[10] However, Africans are very aware of the brutal fact that their time on earth is limited. The Akan of Ghana therefore say "*onipa mmerɛ yɛ tia*" (meaning "humans have limited time [on earth]." The Eʋe of West Africa say *Amegbetɔ dzɔ na ku, dzɔ na agbe* (the human person is born to live, born to die). African cosmology, which does not understand time and history as God's purpose moving towards God's *telos* (end goal), is incompatible with Bible teaching. How then should Africans make sense of eschatology from the perspective of the Bible? To answer this question,

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6 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 24.

7 Kwame Bediako, *John Mbiti's Contribution to African theology* (New York: De Gruyter, 1993), 22-23.

8 Ignatius W. C. van Wyk, "The Final Judgement in African Perspectives", *HTS,* 62(2) (2006), 709.

9 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 23.

10 Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology.* Translated by J. Matthew Ashley (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 162.

one needs first to examine anthropology from an African perspective.

African Anthropology

Africans subscribe to the idea that the human body is made up of both the material (the body), which is tangible and visible and the immaterial parts. Kwame Gyekye proposes a somewhat unified dualist view of the Akan concept of a person as consisting of "the *ɔkra* (which he interprets as soul) and *nipadua* (body)."[11] Kwame Appiah, perhaps, gives a clearer summary of the Akan concept of a person in his tripartite analysis of such in the Asante tradition when he says:

> … a person consists of a body (*nipadua)* made from the blood of the mother (the *mogya*); an individual spirit, the *sunsum,* which is the main bearer of one's personality; and a third entity, the *ɔkra.* The *sunsum* derives from the father at conception. The *ɔkra*, a sort of life force that departs from the body only at the person's last breath; is sometimes as with the Greeks and the Hebrews, identified with breath; and is often said to be sent to a person at birth, as the bearer of ones *nkrabea,* or destiny, from Nyame. The *sunsum*, unlike the *okra*, may leave the body during life and does so, for example, in sleep, dreams being thought to be the perceptions of a person's *sunsum* on its nightly peregrinations…[12]

Like Appiah's tripartite division of the human person, the Yoruba concept of personhood is one that is tripartite. The three elements are *ara* (body), *emi* (vital principle) and *ori* (destiny).[13] Similarly, the Eʋe subscribe to a tripartite human constitution of *ŋutilā* (body), *luvɔ* (soul) and *gbɔgbɔ* (spirit). The three components are woven into a framework of being to give the living human person *dzɔgbese* (destiny, literally "law of one's birth/existence). This *dzɔgbese* is declared in spoken form as *gbetsi* (spoken destiny) at *bome* (place of human origin) or *amedzɔfe* before the individual enters the world. If a person's life turns out to be miserable, it is attributed to the wrong

[11] Kwame Gyekye, "The Akan Concept of a Person," in Richard A. Wright (ed), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1984), 200-208.

[12] Kwame Appiah, "Akan and Euro-American Concepts of the Person" In Lee M. Brown (ed), *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28.

[13] Elvis Imafidon, "The Concept of Person in an African Culture and its Implication For Social Order" in *LUMINA*, 23(2), (2012), 5.

gbetsi and attempts are made through divination to reverse it by means of *gbetsiḍeḍe* (removal of *gbetsi*). This amounts to changing the person's destiny, a practice that is common with many African ethnic groups, which has found its way into African Pentecostalism in "Christianised" form.

Life in African Thought

Africans believe that the visible world in which human life takes place was created by the Supreme Being. African traditional life is composed of families, and is led by a chief or an elder. Villages consist of families that become clans, and clans that become tribes. Africans are aware of human limitedness so they consider God as the one who can address the challenges to which they find no solution. As J. R. Gehman said: "When people reach their limits, having first sought the assistance of the *mundu mue* without finding help, they reply: 'Now the remaining part is for God to play". While the ordinary problems were resolved, the incurable diseases and inexplicable catastrophes were brought to *Mulungu* for divine intervention.'[14] Africans also believe in the existence of cosmic forces which can bring fortune or misfortune to humans.

Francis O.C. Njoku[15] summarises the African concept of life in the following points. Firstly, Africans believe that God is the originator of life, the creator of the universe, everything in the universe (of which human beings are a part), and the sustainer of all creation. Secondly, Africans believe that their ancestors play an important role in their communal life. The ancestors are considered a part of the life of the society. In the African worldview, the dead are not cut off from the living, for they may still reveal themselves in dreams or appear to their living relatives to guide or correct them.[16] For this reason, meals could be kept in the kitchen with the belief that ancestors would come for them in the night. Thirdly, life is meaningless without land, which includes land and all other properties that make life worth living. This makes sense economically. Fourthly, Africans hold a

[14] J. R. Gehman, *Ancestor relations among three African Societies in Biblical Perspective* (Ann Arbor: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985), 41.

[15] Francis O. C. Njoku, *Essays In African Philosophy, Thought And Theology* (Owerri: Clacom, 2002), 167–168.

[16] Kofi A. Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: Feb Ltd, 1978), 137.

communal view of life, involving a relationship and communion between human beings, God, ancestors, divinities, other humans and the land. Mbiti adds that life is seen as a rhythm or cycle comprising birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and finally an entry into the company of the spirits.[17] For BaKongo life is a continuum, and the sign of the four moments of the sun symbolized spiritual continuity and renaissance through a spiral journey (they point out four stages that make up one's life cycle): "rising (birth, beginning, or re-growth), ascendancy (maturity and responsibility), setting (death and transformation), and midnight (existence in the other world and eventual rebirth)."[18]

Death in African Thought

As mentioned earlier, Africans believe that there are both material and immaterial components of the human person. In African thought, death occurs when the soul/spirit and the body separate. Confirming this, Abbah noted that; "the belief amongst Africans is that while the body is still alive, the soul and the body are indivisible. Separation occurs only after death."[19] Beyond the above statement, all other facts about death vary from one group to another due to differences in worldview, culture, and conceptions of humanness among these groups. The Buchwa of Congo believe that, death is the exiting of the soul from the body through the pupil of the eye.[20] Thus, the eye breaks at death and provides an exit point for the soul. For the Akamba and the Bambuti of Congo, the soul is carried to God by bees or flies after it has exited the body through the nose.[21] The Bari of South Sudan are of the view that it is God who takes away the soul at death while the Ingassana (who live in the Tabi Hills of Sudan, near the Ethiopian border) similarly believe that it is God who kills.[22] The Vugusu of Kenya are of

[17] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 24.

[18] As cited by Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* second edition, edited Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 166.

[19] W. Abbah, "African Notion of Immortality and the Hereafter" in *Bulletin of Searchers' Delight*, Vol.1 No. 1 (MKD: P.I. Press, 2010), 34.

[20] John S. Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1982), 253.

[21] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 253.

[22] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 253

the view that death comes because God permits it to kill people so that they (the dead) can live with God. This means that the dead are believed to be in God's presence. The Barotse of Zambia hold that God calls people to himself and no one can refuse to respond to this call, that is, death. For the Yoruba, death was part of God's creation for the purpose of recalling people after they have lived up to the days God gave them to stay on earth.[23] For the Eʋe, death coexists with life. Life and death are two sides of the same coin and can hardly be separated. This is why one Ewe proverb says *amegbetɔ dzɔ na ku, dzɔ na agbe* (The human being came into being for life and for death). The idea that death is a divine way of calling away old people is held by the Nuer of Sudan. God calls old people for them to find their way back to heaven. It is believed that the link between heaven and earth was broken by a hyena and so death is meant to allow old people search for this path and go back to heaven. Death is therefore considered as God's will for old people.

Africans explain the origin of death in various myths. There is no universal myth for the origin of death. Different concepts of the origin of death have been given by different African societies. The following myth about death is popular among the Ngambai people of southern Chad:

> The Creator, one day entrusted the chameleon to go and tell death that men [humanity] will die and come back again to life, and that the moon will die forever. The lizard intercepted the message and hurried to go and tell death the opposite: men [humanity] will die forever, but the moon will die and come back to life again. The chameleon, which was very slow, came to the village of death very late. He transmitted the true message to death, but death treated him as a liar and believed the first message delivered by the lizard. Since that day, men [human beings] have died forever and the moon has died and come back to life again.[24]

For the Ngambai of Chad, death is one of the five major phases in life, the others are birth, initiation, marriage, and life after death. This myth is suggestive that the Creator did not want the death of humans in the beginning. He wanted humans to be immortal. In this myth, death is not

[23] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 255.

[24] Ngarndeye Bako, "Eschatology in African Folk Religion" (Doctor of Theology Dissertation: University of South Africa, 2009), 82.

the result of human action but the result of the inversion of the message by a creature.

Pervasively in the myths or stories of the origin of death in African cultures, is the claim that in the beginning there was no death. This belief compares with the biblical position that death was not present at the beginning of the universe. Some myths suggest that immortality was lost through flaws such as greed, curiosity, stubbornness or arrogance. Some people think of mortality as a monster, others as an animal, and many others as a kind of treacherous spirit. Thus, death disrupted the original human paradise and brought many agonies upon people.

To the African, death is a dreaded natural thing and it is characterised by agony. At the same time, Africans acknowledge the inevitability of death. As Awolalu and Dopamu assert, "Africans hold that sooner or later, the inevitable phenomenon called death will come upon them in whatever age."[25] Thus, the concepts of life and death are not mutually exclusive concepts. That death cannot be escaped is betrayed by the saying *owuo atwedeɛ ɔbaako mforo,* meaning, "Everyone will climb the ladder of death" or "death is inevitable." Despite the inevitability of death, Ghanaians distinguish between "good death" and "bad death."[26] An individual who lived a decent life and died "naturally" is said to have had a "good death", while the one who died through an "unnatural" cause such as accidents, suicide or a woman who dies during childbirth is considered to have had a "bad death*"* C. Seale and S. van der Geest posit that: Good death is "a death occurring after a long and successful life, at home, without violence or pain, with the dying person being at peace with his environment and having at least some control over events."[27] Dying a good death is a requirement for one to qualify as an ancestor.

As stated earlier, Africans hold a cyclical conception of time in that

[25] J.O. Awolalu and P.A. Dapomu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, 1979), 253.

[26] K. Agyemang, "The Impact of new medical technology upon attitudes towards euthanasia among Akans, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change." Accesed April 25, 2021. http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-5/chapter_ix.htm

[27] Clive Seale and Sjaak van der Geest, "Good and bad death: Introduction", *Social Science & Medicine* 59 (5), 2004, 885.

one age may end while another will always begin. As such, the cycle of birth, growth, death, decay and renewal at the individual level finds its echo in the cosmic order of all things. This equally finds expression in the period the dead exists in the living memory. Against this backdrop, Mbiti posits that death is a process rather than an event. It is the process which removes a person gradually from the *Sasa* period to the *Zamani*.The *Sasa* period means the time of physical existence on earth and the period after death within which the departed is remembered by relatives and friends who knew him or her. *Zamani* which is complete death refers to the time when no one remembers the dead after several generations but the memory is kept in collective immortality and remembrance.[28] It happens gradually, starting from the time of one's departure from the earth physically, to the time when the last person who knew the dead person physically, dies off. Whatever the case, the dead are remembered and kept alive even if the body and soul/spirit have separated. Thus, for the traditional Africans, death is regarded as one of the cycles of life which begins with the birth of an individual; that despite all precautions to prevent death it will inevitably come at the end of it all. For the African, then, death does not end it all; life continues to exist after death. The afterlife in the understanding of African belief does not sever the dead from the living since social and religious interactions take place between the living and the dead. Therefore "the present life is seen as a preparation for the afterlife where the dead continue to live after they have completed this life."[29] This fact points to the African recognition of immortality of the soul/spirit, a belief held by the Greeks as well.

Immortality of the Soul/Spirit

Unlike the Euro-American view where life is seen as consisting of discrete stages, starting with conception and ending with death, Africans understand death as an integrated and continuous developmental life process which is inseparable from the interwoven connections between the visible and invisible ontologies. In Africa, there is the belief that the human soul/spirit is immaterial and survives after death. Africans do not doubt the

[28] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 25.
[29] Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 137.

immortality of the soul/spirit. Abbah writes, "the question of immortality of the soul is not a controversial issue in African reality scheme. It is taken as a truism."[30] For those who hold a tripartite view of humanity, the soul must be kept with the spirit as constituting the immaterial part of the human person. This immaterial part is what is immortal. The belief in life after death carries practical implications with respect to the care of corpses. Therefore, for Africans, no one dies in the sense of being totally annihilated, and every community of the living includes the spirits of the dead. Based on the cyclical nature of the African view about history, there is the possibility of the immortal soul/spirit returning to earth in the form of another person. The idea is that a person who could not complete his or her life on a sound note and failed to enter perpetually into the world of the spirits and ancestors is made to return to earth to complete the cycle. This point however contradicts the Judeo-Christian worldview. For the African, immortality of the soul/spirit implies that the soul/spirit moves into another being or something and continues its life there whereas, in Christianity, the soul/spirit is believed to depart from the body and is kept by God until the resurrection or judgement day.

It may well be that the African expressions of the Judeo-Christian concepts of heaven and hell, the resurrection of dead bodies and eternal reward and punishment, respectively point to the eternal abode of the spirits and reincarnation, life and death as two sides of the same coin and qualification for ancestorship and failure to become an ancestor respectively.

The Hereafter in African Thought

In Africa, the afterlife is also referred to as "life after death", the "hereafter", the "underworld" or the "next world." What happens to the soul/spirit after death? Africans believe that the human soul/spirit is immaterial and survives after death. Africans believe that death is only a transition. Thus, Opoku rightly observes that death is not the end of life, but a transition from this world to the land of the spirits. One Eʋe proverb says, *amegbetɔ mekuna o, ɖeko woɖoali efe nɔnɔme* (human beings do not die, they only change

[30] Abbah, "African notion of immortality and the hereafter", 33.

their form). Death does not sever family connections, but the dead become ancestors.[31] In this sense, death is a journey to the underworld rather than "a break with life or earthly beings."[32] The idea of the perpetuity of life through time, space, and circumstance is common to Africa.

Africans believe in the existence and survival of life after death. For this reason, Africans refer to the souls/spirit of dead persons as the "living dead." Death is therefore a transition from this world into another world (called *Asamando* in Akan, *Tsĩefe* in Eʋe), the world of spirits or ghosts. This belief is rooted in the concept of the immortality of the soul/spirit. Death is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementation of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. Even though Africans believe in the afterlife, in the "invisible world", in the "village of ancestors", there is no belief in a future resurrection of the bodies, only the recognition that life leads to death and death to life. There is an inseparable link between life and death and it is impossible to speak of one without the other.

According to some Africans, the world of the spirits is located somewhere in the deep of the earth (underworld, underground or netherworld). The Abaluyia or Luyia of Kenya call the home of the dead "the country of the dead", while the Banyarwanda of Rwanda call it the land "ruled by the one with whom one is forgotten." They regard burial as an entrance into the land of the departed; thus, the grave serves as the doorway to the home of the departed ones. Other African views about the home of the dead are that it is located in woods (eg. the Akamba), bush (eg. the Ngoni people of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia), rock (eg. the Teita of Kenya, Gisu of Uganda), wilderness or forest (eg. the Bambuti and Lele of Congo).[33] The Bamilike of Cameroon, the Bemba of Zambia, the Shona of Zimbabwe and the Ndebele of South Africa believe that the land of the departed is anywhere "around the home of human

[31] Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 133.

[32] Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* second edition, edited Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 166.

[33] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 257.

beings." Considering the variety of ideas about the location of the home of the dead, one cannot be certain where it is. However, a common African belief is that the inhabitants of the land of the departed are spiritual. The Chagga of Tanzania, according to Mbiti, conceive of the journey to the next world as long, dangerous and terrifying which requires the soul/spirit to move through a hot desert for eight days.[34] On the ninth day, the soul/spirit arrives and is admitted after paying a bull of admission.[35] The Eʋe and the Ga tribes of Ghana believe that the dead cross a river to the other world and for the Ga, once the dead cross over their noses are broken so that the dead speak in nasal tones.[36] The Akan believe that the one who takes care of the other world and gives entrance to this world is a male person called *Amokye.*[37] This person, it is believed, punishes those who were wicked in their lives on earth as soon as they get to the entrance.

This belief that the deceased journeys to the otherworld reflect in the kind of preparation made for the burial. For example, the Bono people of Ghana bury their dead with everything they might need for their journey through the spirit world, including money, food, a mat, blanket, pillow, handkerchief jewelry, and the bucket, cloth and soap used to wash the body before burial.[38] For the Eʋe, money is the last item the family drops in the casket before it is closed because it is believed that the departed family member would be required to pay to be ferried across the river to the other end. In the underworld, it is believed, people retain the positions of their earthly hierarchy.[39] The Banyarwanda of Uganda consider life in the hereafter as being similar to this life, and people retain their names, but do not eat, drink or mate, and class distinctions are dissolved.[40] For the Ngambai of Chad, there is no suffering in the land of the dead, but from their vantage point, they may inflict suffering on those who are still in the land of the living. For many Africans, in the past, a dead chief was buried with slaves to attend to his needs in the other world. Similarly, at the death

[34] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 255.
[35] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 255.
[36] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 256.
[37] Ampomah Mary, Interview with on 28th March, 2016.
[38] Ampomah Mary, Interview
[39] Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture*, 166.
[40] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 262-263

of Luapula kings (of Zambia), as Mbiti reports, "their wives and slaves are sacrificed. This is done to provide them with full households similar to those they had in this life."[41] The earth burial method, practiced in Ghana and many parts of Africa, involves enclosing the corpse in a casket or coffin and placing it in a grave six feet deep with attendant ceremonies. Traditionally, cremation is not the norm. It is the wicked person, the witch/wizard whose corpse may be burnt to serve as a deterrent to others.

The belief in life after death informs African dying, death and funeral rites. Thus, Mbiti says that "Some African peoples make preparations for the journey to the land of the departed. This is done mainly in the form of funeral rites. Among many, however, there are no special preparations, probably because the land of the departed is thought to be close and similar to this."[42] Veneration offered to the dead is centred on the belief in an afterlife, the continued existence of the dead and their ability to influence the fortunes of the living. The following observation about the Bonos[43] of Ghana betrays this assertion. The Bono people, like other Akan, subscribe to the idea that ancestors visit them in their homes during the night, so food is sometimes reserved for them to come and eat. For this reason, mashed yam is prepared for the ancestors to eat during festive seasons. Though the food is not actually tampered with, the living believe that the dead spirits eat it. During the burial rite, the legs of the dead person always point to his/her home. This practice, as revealed in an interview by Mary Ampomah, "will enable them [the ancestors] to walk home and not into the bush when they wake up."[44] Believing that the world of the dead is located in the north, the Herero of Namibia bury their dead facing north.[45] The dead are as well called upon during naming and marriage ceremonies, funeral rites and other functions. Such a practice is to acknowledge that the dead are still part of the larger African family.

The COVID-19 pandemic with its associated restrictions has

[41] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 256. Mbiti notes that the practice is presumably prohibited now.

[42] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 255.

[43] The information about the Bono people was obtained in an interview with Mad. Mary Ampomah, a member of the Busunya royal family. Busunya is in the Nkoransa North District of Bono East Region of Ghana. The interview was conducted in Sunyani, where she resides, on April 10, 2016.

[44] Mary Ampomah, Interview.

[45] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 256.

changed dying, death, mourning and funeral rites in many parts of the world. The practice of laying corpses in state, organising elaborate funerals and sitting at funeral grounds for many hours to receive sympathisers have been affected by the pandemic. It is a tragedy for an African to die alone without relatives present, the same way it is tragic for a dead African not to be mourned or honoured with an elaborate funeral. These and many changes in African funeral rites could however be temporary; when the pandemic is over the belief system may inform Africans to go back to their traditional ways of handling issues related to dying, death and funerals. At the same time, there is the tendency that the "new-normal" will define the way forward for African funeral rites such that the changes that the pandemic has brought will become part and parcel of post-COVID-19 African society. Whatever the case may be the pandemic will have some lasting effects on African funerals, the effect however will vary from society to society. The relatively short time spent on funerals nowadays is something that many people will like to maintain in the post-COVID-19 era. The covid-19 pandemic is thus, a big blow to African beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife.

Reincarnation

Most African societies generally have no expectation of a resurrection, even though they believe that death does not annihilate life. The dead person is not resurrected in African indigenous religion, even though life leads to death and death leads to life. Yet, the notion of resurrection is preserved in some myths and stories. There is a dilemma regarding the concept of reincarnation. Mbiti observes as follows: "human[kind] has neither the hope nor the promise to rise again – he [or she] lost that gift in the primeval period, and he [or she] knows of no means to regain it."[46] On the other hand, Africans believe in reincarnation. The Akan name Ababio, (Eʋe, A*ƒ*etɔgbɔ, Yoruba, Babatunde) meaning "one who has returned" is given to a child who is believed to have reincarnated. The name in Akan consists of two root words: *ba* (to come) and *bio* (again). The Eʋe and Yoruba share the sense of "man/father" (Baba/*Afetɔ*) "come back/return" (tunde/gbɔ). In each case, it is understood that the person has returned to the world.

[46] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 265.

Literature on reincarnation in African worldview reveals three kinds of rebirth: (a) the "return" of a revered "ancestor" in the form of a child to a member of the ancestor's family, (b) the serial rebirth of a specific child to a specific couple, and (c) the reincarnation of some souls/spirits which could not be admitted to the spirit world. A key problem with the first kind of rebirth is how to reconcile the idea that ancestors are living permanently in the land of the dead and that they can be reborn. Osovo makes the following observation: "It does not stand the rigor of logic to have the same person existing in two different spheres … when a person dies he remains in the afterlife and that what is believed to be reincarnation is… that there are certain dominant lineage characteristics which keep recurring through birth and ensuring the continuity of the vital existence of the family or clan."[47] Mbiti defines reincarnation in the literal sense as the belief "that certain traits of character, personality or physical marks of the departed are reproduced in a child generally born in his immediate family."[48]

The idea of partial reincarnation, which holds that a child may have the characteristics of his/her ancestor without carrying the soul of the ancestor, may serve to clarify the seeming contradiction. Therefore in partial reincarnation, it is the dominant characteristics or afflatus of the spirit of the dead that find their way into the baby. In the case of (b) above, it is believed that a child who died comes back to the same couple as their next child. The Akan call this phenomenon (the serial birth and death of a baby to a specific couple), *awomawuo* (Eʋe, *dzikudzikui*). The Akan term is from the expressions *wo* (to give birth [to]), *ma* (give), and *wuo* (death); that is "the act of giving birth to babies for them to die." The Eʋe term is from *dzi* (give birth) and *ku* (die), implying serial births and deaths. When for certain reasons the spirit of the dead fails to enter the land of the dead, it becomes a wandering ghost which is dangerous to the living. Such a spirit may come back into the world in the form of a newborn baby, and this constitutes the third kind of rebirth.

It is believed that a person improves his/her status from incarnation to incarnation. Therefore the concept of reincarnation comforts one who is

[47] Osovo cited in Bako, *Eschatology in African Folk Religion,* 90.
[48] Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa,* 265.

about to die and could not attain high social status; such a person has hope that in the next incarnation, he/she can make it. The African worldview considers reincarnation as a temporary judgement on departed persons who could not complete their lives in honour. Some families tend to perform rituals to permit their departed to join the ancestors so that their dead relatives could be allowed to permanently enter the world of the spirits. There is no hell fire and there is no heaven in African cosmology.

Conclusion

While it is not easy to define Africa in precise terms, it is possible to speak of continental Africa in some general terms and move to more specifics when speaking about sub-regions of the continent of Africa. In the same way, it is valid to recognise that one can hardly discuss African Traditional Religion without acknowledging that there are actually many traditional or indigenous religions of Africa. Be that as it may, we have avoided those debates in this book in our quest to discuss eschatological beliefs in African cosmology. Rather, we have discussed death and the afterlife and their associated beliefs from mainly the West African context and partly from the perspective of Sub-Saharan Africa. We have, however, not neglected examples from other regions of Africa. In all the discussions, it has been shown that Africans believe that death is a transition into the spirit world and that it does not annihilate people. Dead people go to the world of the spirits and remain in connection with their living compatriots. Africans believe in the immortality of the immaterial soul/spirit component of a person. Sometimes, the one who lived an unfulfilled life returns to the world in reincarnation. If their lives were fulfilling, they join the ancestors permanently in the spirit world. In the next chapter, we shall examine eschatology from a biblical perspective.

Review Exercise

1. How does the concept of the immortality of the soul/spirit compare with the worldview of your society today?
2. What happens to the soul/spirit as it journeys to the underworld? How

does this reflect in funeral rites in your community?

3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected dying, death and funeral rites in your society?
4. How does the African idea of the hereafter shape African morals?
5. Examine the debates surrounding the concept of time in African cosmology.
6. How does the idea of reincarnation fit into your traditional belief system?

Chapter 2

DEFINING ESCHATOLOGY

The Biblical doctrine of eschatology is a very important and broad area in Christian theology. The idea that the world and time have a definite end seems so obvious and self-evident in the Bible that one wonders if we can conceive of an alternative. The prayer "Thy kingdom come", the part of the Church's Creed which says "He [Christ] shall come again in his glory to judge the quick and the dead" and the declaration at the Lord's table that "as often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" are statements that express our hope in eschatological events. Eschatological events can be generally described as events that are ahead, and specifically those that are at the very end-time of history. Some of these events are clearly explained to us; others remain mysteries.

No one therefore can claim to have all the answers to questions about the future. For this reason, we need to be modest in our claims and tentative in many details of the doctrine of the future. This fact does not however mean that we cannot know enough about the future. God has clearly revealed to us, in the Bible, all that we need to know about the future for our salvation to be complete. The material presented in this book is intended to demonstrate this fact.

Eschatology Explained

Eschatology derives from two Greek words— *eschatos* (last) and *logos* (discourse or study). By way of definition, Biblical Eschatology is the study of the teachings in the Bible concerning the end times or of the period of time dealing with the return of Christ and the events that follow. Christian Eschatology is the study of the end of history from the Christian

perspective. Simply put, eschatology refers to the study of the last things. These "last things" in Christianity include the end of an individual life, the end of the age, the end of the world, and the nature of the Kingdom of God. Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner defines eschatology as the doctrine about human beings insofar as they are beings who are open to the absolute future of God.[49] By this definition, Rahner draws attention to the theocentric (God-centred) nature of Christian Eschatology. It is about God's kingdom, God's redemption of humanity and God's final conquest of Satan and so on. In addition, Christian Eschatology is Christocentric (Christ-centred). Christian Eschatology is about Christ who is to come to judge the living and the dead, permanently put an end to the devil's wickedness and comfort the faithful among other things.

The Greek word *eschatos* has been used in a number of ways in the New Testament. It has been used to designate the last days (Acts 2:17, 2 Tim. 3:1, Heb. 1:2, James 5:3, 1 Pet. 1:20, 2 Pet. 3:3), the last hour (John 2:18), the last time (1 Pet. 1:15) and the last day (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48). Also, the New Testament refers to Jesus as *eschatos.* In 1 Corinthians 15:45 he is referred to as the last (*eschatos*) Adam. In Revelations 1:17, 2:8 and 22:12-13, Jesus refers to himself as the first and the last (*eschatos*).

Eschatology: A Neglected Discipline

For almost 2000 years now the church has been expecting the return of Christ. Yet, the doctrine of eschatology has not received much attention in Christian discourses. Eschatology, therefore, seems to be a young field of theological study and research in that it has not been profusely and vigorously studied the way other fields or theology have been given attention. Philip Heinrich Friedlieb, in 1644, became the first person to use the term "eschatology" in scholarly discussions.[50] Even though Friedlieb used the term in the 17th century, it was not until the 19th century that it

[49] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity,* Translated by William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 431.

[50] Kenneth L. Gentry Jnr, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillenial Eschatology*, Third Edition: Revised and Expanded (Draper, Virginia: Apologetic Group Media, 1999), 6.

became a common theological term.[51] When Klieforth wrote his *Eschatologie*, in 1941, he lamented that "there had never yet appeared a comprehensive and adequate treatise on eschatology as a whole."[52] In this work, Klieforth readily acknowledged that eschatology was the least developed of all the Christian doctrines.[53] Feinberg also notes that eschatology is a much neglected field of theological study and research.[54] In like manner, Erickson asserts that scholarly attention given to the broader field of eschatology is nowhere near that given to other doctrines like the nature of the sacraments and Christology.[55] Today, the story is not so different. The amount of literature devoted to eschatology is nowhere near those devoted to other doctrines, particularly Christology and soteriology. Sermons from the pulpit hardly touch on the end times. It seems the church is too much engaged with issues of this world that it has paid less attention to the world to come. Reflecting on this dilemma, Samuel Adubofuor has noted curiously as follows:

> Contemporary expression of African Christianity is more "this worldly" than "other worldly" because of the convergence of some neo-Pentecostal concepts and values with some prevailing African traditional ideas of life and socio-economic realities. The question is, what really accounts for [the] dearth of concepts of heaven and hell in contemporary Christian preaching? Who really cares about the end-time now?[56]

Holding together the challenges of contemporary life and being focused enough to pay attention to the end times is indeed a dilemma. This is particularly more so in Africa where traditional beliefs suggest that time is cyclical in nature and human life and existence will never come to a perpetual end. However, there is a sense in which sensitivity to the end times ought to serve as a motivation for the quality of life one lives in the

[51] Gentry Jnr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, 6.
[52] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology (Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 2005)*, 664.
[53] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 664.
[54] As cited in Gentry Jnr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, 8-9.
[55] Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* 2nd edition, edited by L. Hustad (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing House, 2001), 1156.
[56] These comments were made as part of the review of the manuscript that was eventually turned into this book. The comments were made in May 2021.

present. This is because eschatology has both personal and cosmic implications.

Categories of Eschatology

Scholars generally divide eschatology into two categories. The first category, dealing with the condition of the individual between his/her death and the general resurrection, is referred to as **individual** (or **personal**) eschatology. Individual eschatology focuses on the destiny of the individual at death. The events considered under this category include physical death, immortality, and the intermediate state (the state of the individual between death and the resurrection). The study of personal eschatology may purpose to deal with a question like, what happens to a person when he/she dies?

The second category comprises those events connected with cosmic changes, especially the return of Christ and the end of the world. In other words, it deals with the future of humanity and the entire creation. This is called **general** (or **collective** or **cosmic**) eschatology because it concerns all people and involves cosmic activities. It involves the study of biblical data regarding the providentially-governed flow of history as it develops towards its foreordained consummation. This focuses on the unfolding of God's kingdom in history, the return of Christ, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, the judgement of believers, the nature of the millennium, the nature of the great tribulation, the timing of the rapture and the fate of unbelievers and eternal destinies (Heaven and Hell).

Earlier, the point was made that Africans consider time as an endless cycle. This means that the traditional African worldview has no place for a permanent end of time, something that the Judeo-Christian Scriptures point to. Therefore, African primal worldview does not give any eschatological conscieousness in the sense of a messianic expectation and in the perspective of a cosmic apocalyptic marking the final and permanent end or destruction of the present world. Nonetheless, African Traditional Religion gives room for personal and existential "eschatology", that is, eschatology considered as the end of the individual's historical human journey. Africans see death as ending a phase of a person's existence. Even

if the person will be reincarnated, death is an end to one of the cycles of his/her existence in this earthly world. In the case of those who have no chance of reincarnating, death is the end to their historical human and cosmic journey, and the beginning of a new life, a life which is more enhanced than life in this world and lived in the invisible world of the "living dead."

Approaches to the Study of Eschatology

Scholars have identified two main approaches to the study of eschatology, namely, the **eschatomania** and **eschatophobia** approaches. In the eschatomania approach, there is a radical preoccupation with the study of end times to the extent that detailed theological schemes and chart maps become the litmus test for orthodoxy. Those belonging to this school put so much emphasis on eschatology that they tend to have sensationalistic and unbalanced theology.

The eschatophobia approach refers to a radical fear of or aversion of or the avoidance of the study of end times[57] by people who believe that making any positive or detailed observations concerning the end times is radical, sensational, and unnecessarily divisive. This approach to the study of eschatology may be considered as a reaction against those who have a definite interpretation of all Bible prophecies and identify every significant historical event with some Bible prediction.[58] It may also be the result of the difficulty and obscurity of issues related to eschatology.[59]

Robert L. Millet considers these two extreme approaches to eschatology as extremely dangerous. He notes that eschatomania may lead to "an unhealthy obsession with signs of the times" while eschatophobia may lead to "an unhealthy fear of what lies ahead."[60] The dangers inherent in either side of the two extreme positions of preoccupation with and avoidance of eschatology make it proper for us to stand somewhere between these two extremes in order to have a sound and balanced theology. This

[57] Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 374.
[58] Erickson, *Christian Doctrine*, 374.
[59] Erickson, *Christian Doctrine*, 374.
[60] Robert L. Millet, *A Different Jesus?: The Christ of the Latter-day Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 165.

balanced point can be found if one keeps in mind the fact that eschatology is intended to comfort and reassure believers.

Relationship Between Eschatology and Soteriology

Eschatology and soteriology are intertwined. Eschatology may be considered as the entire teachings of the Bible about God's redemption of humanity.[61] From such an idea comes the concept of "eschatological salvation." Eschatological salvation means entering into life or into the joy of the Lord that has no end (Matt.25:21, 23). Writing about the Pauline concept of eschatological salvation, Geerhardus Vos observes as follows:

> …not only Christology but also the Soteriology of the Apostle's teaching is closely interwoven with the Eschatology, that, were the question put, which of the strands is more central, which more peripheral, the eschatology would have as good a claim to the central place as the others. In reality, however, there is no alternative here; there is backward and forward movement in the order of thought in both directions.[62]

This future salvation means two things: deliverance from suffering which has to do with this evil world and perfect fellowship with God when Christ shall come to set up his eternal kingdom. M.O. Oyetade adds that eschatological salvation includes "immortal resurrection life of the age to come (Luke 20:35), the evils of the physical weakness, sickness, and death will be swallowed up in the life of the believers in the kingdom of God (Matt.25:34, 46)."[63] He argues further, saying, "eschatological salvation means not only the redemption of the body but also the restoration of communion between God and humanity that had been broken by sin."[64] The pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8) and enter into the joy of their Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23). This eschatological consummation is usually described in pictures drawn from daily life. As we shall see later (See discussion on judgement in chapter 5, volume 2), the harvest will take place and the grain

[61] Willem Van Gemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 458.

[62] Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1930, reprint 1991), 29.

[63] Michael O. Oyetade, "Eschatological Salvation in Hebrews 1:5-2:5" *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies,* Vol.3 No.1, 2013, 69-82, 73.

[64] Oyetade, "Eschatological Salvation in Hebrews 1:5-2:5", 73.

will be gathered into the barns (Matt. 13:30, 39; Mark 4:29 cf. Matt. 3:12; Rev.14:15). The sheep will be separated from the goats and brought safely into the fold (Matt. 25:32).

Basic Guiding Principles for the Study of Eschatology

Following Erickson, we encourage readers to keep in mind certain truths as we embark on the study of eschatology.[65]

1. Eschatology is one of the major divisions in systematic theology. Systematic theology is generally divided into the following categories: (a) Prolegomena (Introduction); (b) Bibliology, the study of Bible; (c) Theology Proper, the study of God; (d) Anthropology, the study of human beings; (e) Harmartiology, the study of sin; (f) Soteriology, the study of salvation; (g) Ecclesiology, the study of the church; (h) Eschatology, the study of the last things. This means that eschatology cannot be neglected if theology is to be studied fully. Yet, since it is but only one of the topics in theology, it should not be enlarged to take the place of all other doctrinal issues.
2. While acknowledging that the truths of eschatology deserve careful, intense, and thorough attention and study, the results of such study must, in no way, be used to satisfy our curiosity. We must do away with undue speculation and recognise the fact that biblical sources vary in clarity so our conclusions will vary in degree of certainty.
3. Eschatology is not concerned only with issues pertaining to the future. The kingdom of God predicted by the Old Testament has been inaugurated by Jesus. Again, Jesus has already won the victory over the powers of evil. Eschatology is concerned with these issues as well.
4. Yet, there are elements of predictive prophecy (even in Jesus' ministry) that simply cannot be regarded as already fulfilled. We must live with an openness to and anticipation of the future.
5. Eschatological passages in the Bible are far more than an existential description of life.

[65] These guidelines were gleaned from Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 374-375.

6. Human beings have the responsibility of playing a part in bringing to pass those eschatological events which are to transpire here upon earth and within history. To some people, this role can be fulfilled through evangelism. To others, it is social action. Whatever the case may be, it is important to note that human efforts cannot usher in the kingdom of God. It needs the supernatural work of God.
7. Eschatological truths should arouse in us watchfulness and alertness in expectation of the future.
8. Eschatological matters do not have the same significance. Agreement on basic eschatological matters such as the Second Coming of Christ and life after death is very essential. On the other hand, it is not of primary importance for all to subscribe to a particular position on less central and less clearly expounded issues like the millennium or tribulation. Such issues should not be used as a test for the orthodoxy of Christian fellowship. In this sense, emphasis must be placed on points of agreement rather than points of disagreement.
9. The study of eschatology must put more emphasis on the spiritual significance and practical application of its outcome.
10. The study of Christian Eschatology can never be separated from the context in which the study is carried out. The eschatological Word must become flesh (John 1:14) in the lives of those studying the subject to be meaningful.

Why Study Eschatology

First of all, eschatology is vitally important to a proper understanding of Biblical Revelation. The study of eschatology improves the church's teaching ministry on the subject. Berkhof puts the significance of Christian Eschatology in proper perspective regarding its relation to the other branches of systematic theology when he writes:

> In theology [proper] it is the question, how God is finally perfectly glorified in the work of His hands, and how the counsel of God is fully realized; in anthropology, the question, how the disrupting influence of sin is completely overcome; in Christology, the question, how

> the work of Christ is crowned with perfect victory; in soteriology, the question, how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God; and in ecclesiology, the question of the final apotheosis of the church.[66]

Eschatology is therefore the capstone and crown of systematic theology in that it sheds light on every other doctrine and answers questions that every other theological subject raises. As such, Michael Horton observes: "Eschatology should be a lens and not merely a locus. In other words, it affects the way we see everything in scripture rather than only serving as an appendix to the theological system."[67] Therefore, it is only when eschatology is studied that the church will be well informed about what it offers.

Secondly, the study of eschatology enhances our worship of God. The study of the end of all theological discourses, but more especially eschatological discourses, is to improve our relationship with God and with other humans and the environment. Thinking of the resurrection, the defeat of Satan, the final and perfect judgement, the new heavens and the new earth, and eternal fellowship with Christ and his church must certainly enhance our worship of God. It must lead believers to a more intimate relationship with God.

Thirdly, eschatology helps us to serve with zeal. The study of the imminent return of Christ and the accompanying rewards for believers puts in us the zeal to serve God so that we shall receive the reward promised. Such was the zeal of the first century Christians who thought of Christ's Second Advent as forthcoming and hence could readily die for the faith. An appreciation of the great hope, the eternal blessedness of heaven, and the great need of fellow sinners should give us a greater passion for lost souls and the glory of God.

Fourthly, the study of eschatology helps us to have hope in the midst of trouble. In the midst of trials, disease, pain, and injustice, it is vital to have a lively hope of a life after death. Eschatology should, if nothing

[66] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 665.

[67] Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama (*Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 5.

else, demand that we change our manner of living. That alone will fuel faithful endurance to the end. This is only possible if eschatology is well understood.

Fifthly, it helps us to prepare for judgement. Judgement is inevitable from the perspective of Judeo-Christian Eschatology. In African Christian Eschatology as well people are judged. The study of eschatology makes us aware of it and prepares us adequately for it. It also motivates us to help others get ready too. While the obsession with the last things is dangerous, its omission is even more dangerous.

Reasons for the Rise in the Study of Eschatology in Recent Times

Erickson mentions some possible reasons for the rise in interest in eschatology in recent times. We have adapted and slightly modified his thoughts.[68]

1. The other divisions of theology are fairly well set, and the area of the end times is fairly open to new study and development.
2. The contemporary world (especially the West) has a futuristic mindset-everyone is interested in the future. Corporations engage in futurism studies and predictions so they can plan and market accordingly. Their continued existence is based on knowing what to do in the future. Indeed, churches are realizing that they should be doing this so they can minister adequately in the future. The interest in the future will naturally create an interest in the far future. Hence eschatology becomes a field of relevance. In African Christianity, concerns about the future are usually related to being able to take appropriate action in the present to ensure that life is better in the foreseeable future.
3. In much of the non-Western world there is "gloom and doom" and nothing to look forward to in this life, thus many are interested in what the future may hold. There is a hope that things will become better. The third world church is also interested in the future times to know what is about to happen. It is a growing church and for the most part, the end-

[68] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1156ff.

time information is new and exciting for its members to explore.

The Holy Spirit and Eschatology

The Holy Spirit plays an important role in unlocking the meaning of eschatology in the New Testament in particular. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is directly connected to almost all major eschatological themes found in the Old Testament prophecy and consequently in the New Testament. This connection can be seen in at least three ways. The Holy Spirit, by certain prophetic signs, prepares the grounds for the ultimate eschatological age. In Joel 2:28, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is predicted to be associated with a time referred to as "afterwards." At the Pentecost day experience in Acts 2, the apostle Peter declared that what had happened to the 120 who were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4) was the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy that "in the last days...I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 2:28). By so doing, Peter interpreted Joel's "afterwards" as the eschatological age. The Holy Spirit's outpouring, therefore, signals the ushering in of "the last days." Again, it is predicted that the Holy Spirit will descend upon the Messiah and bestow on him the gifts he (the Messiah) needs for ministry (Isa. 11:1-2). The Holy Spirit is directly connected with Israel's future life of both material blessings and ethical renewal. (Isa. 44:2-4, cf. Isa. 32:15-17)

In the New Testament, Jesus points to himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Messiah on whom the Holy Spirit rests (Luke 4:17-19). In Matthew 12:28 Jesus implicitly teaches that his use of the power of the Spirit in casting out demons points to the arrival of the new age. Again Jesus is referred to as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), pointing to the power of Christ to give the Holy Spirit to those who belong to him.

The Spirit is playing a central role in the current pre-parousia reign of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the second paraclete, comforter and advocate, guide and teacher who lives in and among believers to empower them for ministry while Christ is in heaven as the High Priest who gives believers unrestricted access to God. Nothing involving the end time could

be completed without the Spirit, hence the apostles were told to wait for his presence before beginning the preaching of the gospel. Having been empowered through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) the disciple began the proclamation of the good news. It was the Holy Spirit who gave them courage and wisdom even to endure the persecution that came their way soon afterwards. It is clearly stated that one of the results of being Spirit-filled was the boldness to stand firm in witnessing the gospel: "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). Further, Jesus had said that all who followed him would endure persecutions, noting, "when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11).

According to Jesus, it is this universal preaching of the gospel that precedes his final coming: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Strategies, programmes, human devices are all insufficient, especially in this time of increasing secularism to carry out that task. It is the Holy Spirit alone that can energize the witness in such a fashion as to break through the barriers. It is the Holy Spirit who enlivens our mortal bodies so that with the coming of the Lord we shall be raised from the dead. As the Apostle Paul states, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). So when the Lord comes back and summons the dead in Christ to be raised, the great event will occur by the inward power of the Holy Spirit.

More so, the Holy Spirit intensifies our yearning for the Lord to return. The New Testament speaks of "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13), and "waiting for and hastening (or 'earnestly desiring') the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:12). This has continued to be the stance of true believers in Christ who, grateful for the salvation Jesus has wrought, look forward to his return in glory. This very anticipation is vastly brightened by

the presence of the Holy Spirit-who is none other than the Spirit of Jesus - making us all the more eager to behold our Lord in glory.

Further, the Holy Spirit leads us into understanding. Eschatology, like any other doctrine, can only be understood when the Holy Spirit aids us. That the Holy Spirit is our teacher is taught in Jesus' words: "When the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

One of the great empirical facts of the Christian life is that every true believer is indwelt by God's Spirit. When we become children of God by faith, the Holy Spirit becomes the inner reality of our being— "because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6). This privilege of being God's children has an eschatological dimension (see v. 19). This eschatological dimension can also be seen in Romans 8:17, where after linking God's children with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14-16), Paul says that those who are the children of God are co-heirs with Christ into the eschatological kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit is the sanctifier who seals (Eph. 4:30) and prepares the believer for the coming of the Lord. We need, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to "strive...for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The true believer in Jesus Christ constantly looks forward to the Lord's return in glory, and in so anticipating that return he or she wants to be prepared. So does Paul pray: "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Some are very keen about the coming of the Lord, the rapture, and other eschatological events, but unfortunately seldom seem to think about their state of preparedness. The author of I John urges us to "abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming" (1 John 2:28). It is the Holy Spirit who prepares us, purifies us, molds us, enables us more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness, and to be like Jesus at his coming.

Conclusion

The chapter has brought to the fore the scope of eschatology. Among other things we discussed the meaning of the term eschatology; we also looked at personal and general eschatology, the factors that have led to increasing interest in eschatology as well as the role of the Holy Spirit in eschatological discourses. In the subsequent chapters, we shall discuss most of these topics in greater detail for better understanding. The next chapter discusses how to interpret biblical prophecies.

Review Exercise

1. What is eschatology?
2. Examine four reasons for the rise in interest in eschatology in recent times.
3. Explain the terms eschatomania and eschatophobia.
4. To what extent is the Holy Spirit our help in the study of eschatology?
5. In what three ways can the study of eschatology be useful to the church?
6. To what extent is the statement "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's prayer an eschatological statement?
7. Discuss the assertion that "Biblical Eschatology is Christocentric."
8. What is the role of the Holy Spirit with regards to the eschatological hope of believers?
9. Why, in your opinion, has the church paid little attention to the doctrine of last things?
10. Is it important to discourse eschatology in the public space? Explain your answer.

Chapter 3

INTERPRETING BIBLICAL PROPHECY

One of the major challenges facing studies in eschatology has to do with the question of the hermeneutical approach to the Prophetic Literature in the Bible. The use of different methods of interpretation has led to variant eschatological positions and divergent views. The basic differences between the premillennial and amillennial schools and between the pretribulation and post-tribulation rapturists, for instance, are hermeneutical, arising from the adoption of divergent and irreconcilable methods of interpretation. This chapter will thus focus on some of those issues by discussing the interpretation of Prophetic Literature.

Four Major Views about New Testament Prophetic Literature

The book of Revelation is an apocalypse, a writing that uses visions, dreams and symbols to communicate God's plan towards the defeat of evil in the world. There are many prophetic passages in this book of Revelation. The book of Revelation has been subjected to various forms of interpretation. The first method is the preterist method. It holds that some or all of the prophecies in Revelation concerning the Last Days refer to events which took place in the first century after the incarnation of Jesus, especially associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The view that some of the events of the tribulation (Matt. 24; Rev. 1–20) all occurred in 70 AD. when Christ came in to pronounce judgement upon Jerusalem is a partial preterist view. Full Preterism holds that all of the eschatological events of the Bible, including the Second Coming, have been fulfilled in the past. By this method, the eschatological dimension of the book of Revelation is completely denied.

The second method is the futurist method which argues that most of the major eschatological events of the book of Revelation (e.g.,

millennium, tribulation, and the Second Coming), while foreshadowed by events in the past, are yet to be fulfilled in the future. It also argues that symbols and imagery used in Revelation may be interpreted as literal or symbolic, or a combination of both. From this viewport, it is argued that the events related in Revelation chapters 6 to 19 in particular and others in 20 and 21 specifically belong to the future and are yet to be fulfilled.

According to the third method, the historicist method, the fulfillment of the events in Revelation which appear to be predictions in the book point at any time between the first century, when the book was written and the end of the world. They refer to this period as the church age, in which case the future events in Revelation started being fulfilled from the first century since the church was founded and continue to be fulfilled throughout the existence of the church Jesus founded.

The fourth method, the idealist method, holds that major eschatological events of the Bible and for that matter the book of Revelation such as the millennium, tribulation, and the future judgement are symbolic principles of the timeless struggle that the world will go through until Christ returns. Thus, for them, Revelation points to the ideal situation in which the ongoing struggle between the good (represented by God) and evil (represented by Satan) will definitely end in God's favour and evil will be finally and perpetually defeated. The primary future hope is that of the Second Coming of Christ and this will be fulfilled literally.

For most African Christians, the thought that one must wait until God's *telos* (the end) to see a final and definite blow to evil is a distressing one. It may well be, they reason, that some evildoers of the present life may escape punishment. Besides, the thought does not motivate them enough to experience hope in the present which is their foremost concern. They would like to see life improved in a literal sense in the present since they have been reconciled to God and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Literal Interpretation of the Bible

Literal interpretation describes the normal or plain meaning of a text. It is an interpretation that does not spiritualize or allegorize biblical texts as non-dispensational interpretation may do. It is based on the explicit and

primary sense of words in the Bible. "Literal [interpretation] affirms that the meanings to be interpreted are textually based. This premise sets the framework for the system. All the other premises are derived from and developed within the scope of what the literal interpretations affirm."[69] In this method, each word is assigned the same basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking. The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy affirms the following:

> WE AFFIRM the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text. WE DENY the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to its meaning which the literal sense does not support.[70]

Noted inerrantist (one who believes that the Bible is inerrant), Norman Geisler, in his commentary on the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*, states:

> The literal sense of Scripture is strongly affirmed here, to be sure the English word literally carries some problematic connotations with it. Hence the words normal and grammatical-historical are used to explain what is meant. The literal sense is also designated by the more descriptive title grammatical-historical sense. This means the correct interpretation is the one which discovers the meaning of the text in its grammatical forms and in the historical, cultural context in which the text is expressed.

Literal interpretation is the method used by amillennialists. Floyd Hamilton, an amillennialist, said that:

> the literal interpretation of the prophecy is to be accepted unless (a) the passages contain obviously figurative language, or (b) unless the New Testament gives authority for interpreting them in other than a literal sense, or (c) unless a literal interpretation would produce a

[69] Adapted from Elliott Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 21-22.

[70] Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Bible in Theology and Preaching* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1986), 24.

> contradiction with truths, principles, or factual statements contained in non-symbolic books of the New Testament.[71]

It is true that figurative language is not to be understood in a literal sense. However, a literal interpretation of scripture should not be abandoned because of the presence of figurative language. The author who uses figures of speech or even poetry still intends the meaning willed (desired, intended) by the symbols and context shared with the reader. Thus, the figure of speech ought to be recognised and interpreted as such, but that should not imply the abandonment of the literal sense of the text. The true meaning of the figure of speech employed is as well the literal sense of the text. Indeed, sensitivity to historical, grammatical, and cultural matters is the only way to arrive at the meaning intended by the figure of speech.

Allegorical Interpretation of the Bible

Allegory may refer to a kind of literature or a method of interpretation. As a literary genre, allegory refers to a literary unit that has a hidden, figurative, or symbolic meaning.[72] Angus-Green notes as follows:

> Any statement of supposed facts which admits of a literal interpretation, and yet requires or justly admits a moral or figurative one, is called an Allegory. It is to narrative or story what trope is to single words, adding to the literal meaning of the terms employed a moral or spiritual one. Sometimes the allegory is pure, that is, contains no direct reference to the application of it, as in the history of the Prodigal Son. Sometimes it is mixed, as in Ps. 80, where it is plainly intimated (verse 17) that the Jews are the people whom the vine is intended to represent.[73]

To say that a prophecy is to be interpreted literally means that what the prophecy intended to communicate will actually and historically come to pass. To say that a prophecy is allegorical is to suggest that its fulfillment should not be expected in a literal sense. As a method of interpretation, usually called allegorical interpretation, allegory refers to the method of

[71] Floyd Hamilton*, The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1942), 53-54.

[72] Philip V. Miller, "A New Hearing for the Allegorical Method*," Perkins Journal*, (Winter 1976), 26.

[73] As cited in Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010).

interpreting a literary text that considers the literal sense of a text as means of arriving at a secondary, more spiritual and more profound meaning.

Weaknesses of Allegorical Interpretations

One weakness of the allegorical method is that it contrasts with the grammatical-historical method, which first determines a passage's meaning by reference to its language, context, and background before attempting to interpret it. Fritsch observes about the allegorical interpretation that, "According to this method the literal and historical sense of Scripture is completely ignored, and every word and event is made an allegory of some kind either to escape theological difficulties or to maintain certain peculiar religious views…"[74] Another weakness is that allegorical interpretation is inherently subjective, as different interpreters may discover different non-literal meanings in the text and as such, there is no objective external control over such interpretations. Therefore, "[t]here is…unlimited scope for fancy, if once the principle be admitted, and the only basis of the exposition is found in the mind of the expositor. The scheme can yield no *interpretation,* properly so-called, although possibly some valuable truths may be illustrated."[75] More so, it is functionally unconcerned with the intent of the author, which is expressed in the words he or she uses, because in this kind of interpretation, it is assumed that the author meant something entirely different from what he or she wrote. Furthermore, allegory obscures the true meaning of the word of God by pulling the text into the world of the reader, instead of taking the reader into the world of the text.

Not only the prophetic passages in the book of Revelation but biblical Prophetic Literature in its entirety must be interpreted historically and grammatically. The literal approach ought to be the default method of interpretation until otherwise required. For instance, since Revelation is an apocalypse that contains epistolary sections as well as prophetic passages we should not read every part of it as apocalyptic, containing visions, dreams, symbols and word pictures. If a portion demands that we read it literally as

[74] Fritsch cited in David A Swincer, *Let God Speak: His Word Is Authority: Inspiration, Interpretation, and Exegesis of the Word of God* (South Australia: Integrity Publications, 2015), 62.

[75] As cited in Pentecost, *Things to Come,* 5-6.

an epistle then that is what we should do. We should adopt a similar approach to Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament, the prophetic books contain narrative, prophetic oracles and lots of figurative, non-literal language as well as poetry.

Foundational Principles for the Interpretation of Prophetic Literature

1. The fulfillment of Israel's prophetic hope as portrayed in the Old Testament is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the church. That is, the focal and terminating point of all prophecy is Jesus and his church. For example, the temple of the old covenant was a type or foreshadowing of the glory of Christ. Jesus fulfills the Old Testament feasts, sacrificial system, prophecies and the Law. For this reason, the centrality of Jesus Christ must be kept in mind in all prophetic interpretations.

2. Whereas the Old Testament saw the consummation of God's redemptive purposes in one event, the writers of the New Testament portray it as coming in two phases. Even though the consummation of the redemptive plan of God has started in Christ, there is the need to still abide in the present evil age. There is therefore the "inauguration of the end". Let us consider these examples: Salvation is now, but also future (Eph. 2:8 / Rom. 5:10), justification is now, but also future (Rom. 5:1 / Rom. 2:13). We have been adopted into God's family as God's children, but our adoption as children of God is also yet to come (1 John 3:1; Rom. 8:23). The above observation leads to the principle that "when reading the [OT] one must reckon with the placement of events in close proximity, as if they happen simultaneously or in quick succession."[76] Both the New Testament and history have proven that events are usually separated by significant intervals of time. This is called prophetic foreshortening, in which events far removed in time and events in the near future are spoken of as if they were close together. Prophetic foreshortening refers to a variety of future events being viewed together (without strict

[76] Sam Storm, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Rosh-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2013), 29.

chronological sequencing). Donald Garlington gives this example:

> The classic illustration is that of the advent of the Messiah. The Prophets saw only one coming, with no distinction made between two phases of that coming. Thus, what is represented by the Prophets as transpiring once-for-all in "the latter days" is realized over an expanse of time which is already virtually two millennia in length. Therefore, it is in light of the New Testament we discern that Messiah's coming is in two stages, corresponding to the inauguration and consummation of God's eschatological purposes.[77]

3. Essential to this interpretive perspective is that "the [New Testament] serves, as it were, as the 'lexicon' of the [Old Testament's] eschatological expectation."[78] Certain Old Testament concepts have meanings which are unknown to their writers and become known only after the Christ-event. Indeed, "biblical texts can 'grow in meaning.'"[79] This means that realities in the Old Testament are unpacked and explained by the New Testament writers through the lens of the salvation-historical realization in Christ.[80] Jesus is himself the inspired interpreter of the [Old Testament] and his identity, life, and mission serve as the framework within which the Old Testament must be interpreted (see especially Luke 24:25-27 and 1 Peter 1:10-12).[81] This however borders on the progressiveness in the revelation of biblical truth. G. K. Beale gives this insight:

> the progress of revelation reveals enlarged meanings of earlier biblical texts, and later biblical writers further interpret prior canonical writings in ways that amplify earlier texts. These later interpretations may formulate meanings of which earlier authors may not have been conscious, but which do not contravene their original organic intention but may 'supervene' on it. This is to say that original meanings have 'thick' content and that original authors likely were not exhaustively aware (in the way God was) of the full extent of that content. In this regard, fulfillment often "fleshes out"

[77] Donald Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium," in Reformation and Revival Journal, vol. 6, no. 2, 1997, 60-61.

[78] Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium," 56.

[79] Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 377.

[80] Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium," 56.

[81] Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 30.

prophecy with details of which even the prophet may not have been fully cognizant.[82]

4. The fourth principle rests on the idea that prophecy must be interpreted historically. As readers of today, we are so far removed from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel that it is almost impossible to understand the words of the prophets in our context without doing any contextual study. The reader may ask: who wrote the prophecy, when, and under what circumstances? This will help the reader to understand what the prophecy meant to the original audience. It will also help the reader to distinguish between literal passages and figurative passages.This principle is based on the fact that: "Prophecy can only depict the future in terms which make sense to its present."[83] Biblical writers normally describe future events, which they have not experienced, in terms of common language and imagery from the present. Authors spoke of the future in terms, images, and concepts borrowed from the social and cultural world of their time. By so doing, they teach the unknown through the use of the known. To make this clearer, Brent Sandy says that "our ideas about things we have never experienced are largely controlled by things we have experienced."[84]

   Consider 2 Peter 3:10: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." How literal is this prophetic utterance? Does the apostle Peter mean to suggest that the earth, in the end times, will literally or physically be burnt? Or does he mean that the earth will be transformed through purification or purging from sin? As we shall prove later in our discussion on Final Judgement, the latter is a more likely interpretation even though it may appear non-literal. If that is true then this passage is not to be taken literally, meaning that it will not be a historical event. The author uses a metaphor. Let us also consider Isaiah 65:17-25. In this passage, we read that in the new heavens and new earth "No more shall there be an infant who lives but a few days or an old man who does

[82] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 381.

[83] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 450.

[84] As cited in Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 31.

not fill out his days, for the young shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed" (v. 20). Verse 23 seems to suggest that women during that time will bear children: "They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them." Are we to understand this passage literally? It seems to us that since Christ has made it clear that there will be no marriages in heaven, the passage is not intended to be literal. Besides, the context of the passage points to peace and security in the Messianic age without intending to be literal. Otherwise, how can the wolf and the lamb feed together, the lion eat straw like the ox and the serpent eat dust at this time (v.25)? It must be said that, in the case of literal interpretation, "one-to-one "physical" equivalence between the words of prediction and the event of fulfillment" must not be given a primary role."[85] The authorial intent is what the interpreter needs to determine and use as his/her interpretative key. One more word needs to be added, that not all prophecies are predictions; in fact, most are not and this has to be borne in mind as well.

5. The next principle is to i**nterpret the unfulfilled prophecy in the light of fulfilled prophecy.** Feinberg says, "in the interpretation of prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled, those prophecies which have been fulfilled are to form the pattern."[86] This means that the way God will fulfill a prophecy in the future is informed by how God has done it in the past. This, however, should not be taken to be an absolute rule but only a general guide, since each prophecy is unique, even if predictive.

Interpreting Symbols

Prophetic and apocalyptic literature frequently use symbols. Most eschatological passages are full of symbols. Mickelsen's guidelines for the interpretation of symbols are helpful for consideration here.

1. Note the qualities of the literal object indicated by the symbol.

[85] Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 32-33.
[86] Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, 39.

2. Try to discover from the context the purpose for using a symbol.
3. Use any explanation given in the context to connect the symbol and the truth it teaches. If the symbol is not explained, then use every clue found in the immediate context or in any part of the book where the figure occurs, to interpret it.
4. If the symbol, which was clear to the initial readers, is not clear to modern readers, state explicitly what the barrier is for the modern reader.
5. Observe the frequency and distribution of a symbol (how often it is used and where it is found), but allow each to control the meaning. Do not force symbols into preconceived schemes of uniformity.[87]

Interpreting Types

Typology is also a feature of Prophetic Literature. Typology is found also in many different genres of the Bible. A careful study of typologies in both the Old Testament and the New Testament shows that there is always a natural and historical correspondence between an event/person and its/her/his type. Only such historical correspondence warrants typological reading of any given text. The following guidelines may guide the process:

1. The interpreter must give due recognition to the historical place and purpose of the event, personage, or institution under discussion before typical elements are presented. Particular attention must be given to the local setting of the type as it must properly form the basis of its typical meaning. By so doing, the interpreter is saved from the danger of allegorizing the text.
2. The antitype, though analogous to the type, is essentially different from it. In other words, a type presents a general though genuine resemblance of its antitype. For example, Melchizedek was a king and a priest, and he was superior to Aaron. In at least these two ways he typifies Christ since Christ is a King and a Priest and in priesthood Christ is superior to Aaron. This does not however mean all of the details of Melchizedek's

[87] Adapted from Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible,* 278.

life and ministry were typical of Christ. For this reason, details should not generally be pressed for typical meaning. The interpreter must take particular notice of the major points of similarity, not the incidental and trivial.

3. The interpreter must ensure that the analogy between the type and the antitype is not sustained beyond the point or points which Scripture warrants. For instance, Adam was a type of Christ only in reference to Adam being a representative of the human race. However, his disposition, conduct and character, have no concern with the typical relation he bore in the one part of his history (his sin which brought condemnation to all humanity). In fact persons are not a type of Christ in their personal private characters. They are only types of Christ with respect to their official capacity (Eg. prophets prefigured Christ the Great Prophet) or public position (Eg. Joseph in the leading circumstances of his outward history, his trials, deliverance, and exaltation, prefigured the life of Jesus).[88]

4. No fundamental doctrine should be formulated solely from a typical analogy.[89] Types illustrate and confirm biblical doctrines (eg. the doctrine of salvation), showing that they were taught in a certain way to the Israelites in the Old Testament.[90] Yet they do not reveal them exclusively.

5. Seek for the literal meaning embodied within the typical item, finding out what was the original intention of the author.[91] Ascertain the purpose and function for which the Old Testament items were given in order to decipher the typical elements.[92]

6. In interpreting types we must not attempt to find antitypical meanings of those accessories of the type which are required by its physical

[88] Thomas Hartwell Horne, Samuel Davidson and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures Volume 2-Part I: The Text of the Old Testament Considered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 445.

[89] Douglas Friederichsen, "The Hermeneutics of Typology" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1970), 436.

[90] Horne, Davidson and Tregelles, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures,* 446.

[91] Friederichsen, "The Hermeneutics of Typology", 418-419

[92] Friederichsen, "The Hermeneutics of Typology", 433.

constitution, such as the grate of the brazen altar, which was required probably to make the fire burn well, the rings and bars on the ark by which it was transported, or the snuff-dishes by the golden candlesticks. If we keep this in mind, we are not liable to go too far wrong in explaining the details of these ritual types.

Conclusion

We have introduced the various principles required to do a proper interpretation of prophetic texts. Prophetic Literature is mainly an Old Testament phenomenon but the book of Revelation in the New Testament, an apocalypse also contains prophetic materials. In addition, other New Testament texts also include prophetic texts. In interpreting prophecies, we should be careful to follow the literal rule, avoid allegorical interpretation and admit typical interpretation only if a natural correspondence exists between a type and its antitype. When we examine prophetic materials in Revelation, we must not forget to handle symbols, visions, dreams and word pictures appropriately. This will go a long way to enhance our formulation of eschatological ideas. The next chapter gives a historical overview of the subject of Eschatology throughout the period of the existence of the church.

Review Exercise

1. How are biblical symbols to be interpreted?
2. How are we to understand John's description of Christ as "having a sword in his mouth" according to Revelation 19:15?
3. Explain why allegorical interpretation is often not a suitable approach to the interpretation of a Bible text.
4. How are we to understand Revelation 13:1-5 today?
5. Why should the literal sense of a text be given priority?
6. In what four ways have prophecies been interpreted? Explain each method.

Chapter 4

ESCHATOLOGY IN CHURCH HISTORY

This chapter is a review of eschatological thoughts expressed throughout church history particularly dealing with what the church and the spokespersons of Christianity have taught and believed regarding the subject from the patristic era down to the modern era. We shall discuss how different people have responded to questions pertaining to the future since the early history of Christianity.

The Apostolic/Patristic Era

It is no exaggeration to say that the eschatological consciousness of the first-century church is incomparable to that of any other period in church history. According to J. N. D. Kelly, scholars generally agree that the early church was dominated by four main eschatological concerns: the return of Christ, the resurrection, the judgement and the catastrophic ending of the present world order.[93] Berkhof adds that there was a perfect understanding and acceptance of the fact that "physical death is not yet eternal death" and also that "the souls of the dead live on."[94]

The early church's belief in bodily resurrection was based on the reality of Jesus' resurrection. In other words, the early church regarded Jesus' resurrection as the "prototype" and proof of the believer's resurrection. This idea was closely linked up with the *parousia*, Christ's return— the people had a strong expectation of the Lord's glorious appearance. This is evident

[93] John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 5th rev. ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1977), 462.

[94] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 590. cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 662.

in the writings of Paul, especially 1 Thessalonians. and 1 Corinthians 15. In the face of the Roman persecution, it was natural that such a theology emerged as "an unfailing source of comfort and strength."[95] The resurrection of the body and life everlasting was part of the early baptismal creeds of the church. The Apostles' Creed, formulated in this era, betrays this belief when it says "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." In addition to the belief in the resurrection, the Nicene Creed points to the belief in "the life of the world to come."

The early church also held on to the idea of a universal future judgment, where all would be judged by their deeds and the righteous would be separated from the unrighteous. The former will be crowned with eternal rewards in the form of eternal joy and bliss in heaven, and the latter condemned to "perish eternally." The Apostles' Creed reads, "He [Christ] shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The liturgy of James says Jesus shall come "to render to everyone according to his [or her] works."[96]

The early church also expressed their belief about the intermediate state. Justin the Martyr was of the view that the soul retains its sensibility after death. For him this position was crucial and anything different will lead to the bad soul having an advantage over the good one.[97] In this era, the idea of soul sleep (*psychopannychia*) evolved but was strongly rejected by Tertullian. According to Eusebius, some people also believed that the soul died with the body and will be recreated at the resurrection.[98] Despite these views, the opinion that prevailed was that the soul lived consciously, though disembodied, by virtue either of its own immortality or of communicated immortality.[99] Both Iraneaus and Justin deny "the necessary and intrinsic immortality of the soul, and make it dependent on God for continuance in life as well as for life."[100]

Whilst the early church had no controversy concerning the righteous, who shall inherit eternal life and enjoy an everlasting fellowship with God,

[95] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 590.
[96] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 598.
[97] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 599-600.
[98] As cited by Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 600.
[99] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 600.
[100] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 609.

there was disagreement over the final state of those who die in their sin. Three opinions were expressed namely, everlasting punishment, annihilation and restoration (after remedial punishment and repentance). Justin the Martyr speaks of eternal punishment, Ignatius, of "the unquenchable fire" and Hermas, of some "who will not be saved" but "shall utterly perish."[101] (We will discuss each of these views later in this book).

The millennial view that prevailed in at least the first three centuries of Christianity is that of chiliasm (premillennialism) which distinguishes two resurrections, one before and one after the millennial reign.[102] Landa argues that "in varying degrees, all were exponents of the millenarian, or chiliastic, doctrine."[103] Barnabas was the first Apostolic Father to expressly teach a pre-millennial reign of Christ on earth. Philip observes that Barnabas "considers the Mosaic history of the creation a type of six ages of labor for the world, each lasting a thousand years, and of a millennium of rest; since with God 'one day is as a thousand years.'"[104] Barnabas further thought that "the millennial Sabbath on earth will be followed by an eighth and eternal day in a new world, of which the Lord's Day (called by Barnabas "the eighth day") is the type."[105] Finally, the early church believed that the present creation and world as they knew it would be transformed into a realm fit for God's people to dwell in for eternity.

The philosophy, culture and geography of the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries had a great influence on the eschatology that was developed. These fields influenced, to a large extent, the hermeneutical approach of Christian scholars of the time, which in turn shaped their eschatologies. Origen (ca. 185 – ca. 254) is a good example of this. Being heavily influenced by Platonic philosophy, and approaching the Bible with an allegorical hermeneutic, Origen placed spiritual interpretation over literal interpretation. In the view of Origen, the resurrected body will have the same "form" as our present body. The only difference is that it will not

[101] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 608.
[102] We will deal with this issue in volume two of this study.
[103] Paul J. Landa, "The Advent Hope in Early Christianity" in *The Advent Hope in Scripture and History* ed. V. Norskov Olsen (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 73.
[104] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 615.
[105] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 615.

be fleshly but spiritual. Concerning the coming of Christ, he contended that "the Savior will not appear in any given place, but will make himself known everywhere."[106] Regarding judgement and hell, he believed that all things would be restored, including unbelievers and the devil himself.[107] McGiffert helpfully summarizes Origen's doctrine of the last things in these words:

> Origen had an elaborate eschatology. He believed in or at least hoped for the final restoration of all rational creatures, not only [humans] but also demons, including even the arch-fiend himself. The pains of hell are disciplinary in purpose and will be temporary only, not everlasting. When the present world has come to an end the material substance of which it is composed will be employed for the formation of another world in which the spirits of men not yet perfected will be still further disciplined and so it will go on until all have been redeemed when the matter being unredeemable will be finally destroyed. The future life will be a life of the spirit; the flesh will have no part in it. The joys of heaven and the pains of hell will be mental, not material.[108]

According to Daley, in 553 AD, Origen's eschatology was generally branded heretical in both the Eastern and Western churches.[109]

Four main interpretations for the kingdom of God emerged during the patristic era[110]:

1. In the 1st century, apocalyptic or eschatological interpretation prevailed. According to this interpretation, the kingdom of God was solely dependent on God's merciful love towards humanity. This means that God will redeem his people in the future through the judgement of worldly kingdoms, destruction of God's enemies and the reversal of the present world order. This view was dominant in the first century.

[106] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 473.
[107] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 473-474.
[108] Arthur McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought Vol.1* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 227
[109] Brian E. *Daley*, *The Hope of the Early church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (1991; reprint ed, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, *2003*), 190.
[110] Severian Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi: Ideal King of Christian Transformation for a Deeper Evangelization* (Nairobi: epubli, 2010), 103ff.

2. The second is the spiritual-mystical current view. This view, proposed in the 2nd century by Irenaeus, identifies the kingdom either with heaven or with Christ himself, or with the immortal soul, or with grace and charity in the soul.[111] It was first propounded by Ireneus (c. 115-202 AD).

3. The third view, the political view, which emerged in the 4th century considers the establishment of a Christian Roman Empire under Constantine as the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy about the kingdom of God. For Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-331AD), God established his kingdom on earth through the Empire. In this sense, the emperor was the son of man who possessed the power to rule both the state and the church. In the East, this view prevailed until 1453; in the West, it prevailed till 1806.[112]

4. The fourth view was the ecclesial view according to which the church represents God's kingdom on earth. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) initiated this thought saying that the kingdom of God is the visible church.[113] For Augustine "the kingdom of God was a supernatural entity whose presence can dimly be perceived in the time between the first and the second comings."[114]Though Augustine's view was prominent, others like Irenaeus of Lyons would disagree, arguing for an earthly kingdom.

In the fourth century, the church's focus on the future gradually decreased and chiliasm gradually became unpopular. Augustine held a strong anti-chiliastic view. Up to this point what was regarded as orthodox was widely known but lacked a systematic formulation as we have now. The idea that the millennium is non-futuristic but already with us started in the fourth century with the donatist movement and dominated eschatological thinking throughout the Middle Ages. Augustine, while rejecting other teachings of donatism, found the basis for its non-futuristic eschatological view in

[111] Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi,* 104.
[112] Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi*, 104.
[113] David Dilling, *The Kingdom of God: A Guide for Small Group Bible Study* (Indiana: Lulu.com, 2013), 13. https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=GbWfBQAAQBAJ&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq
[114] Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi*, 105.

Mark 3:27. According to Augustine's understanding, this text signifies that the binding of Satan took place during the first Advent and as a result, the preaching of the Gospel is highly successful because Satan cannot deceive anymore. Augustine through his *City of God* promoted amillennialism. His contribution was so huge that, it has been claimed that he "single-handedly sounded the death knell of chiliasm."[115] Augustine's amillennialism prevailed from the fifth to the fifteenth century and represents the official Roman Catholic view.

Further, Augustine effectively found the fulfillment of prophetic and apocalyptic passages in the past rather than eschatological fulfillment in the gradual unfolding of history, rather than in a final moment of eschatological crisis. He expounded an eschatological tension that was reminiscent of Paul, and that linked the present existence of believers and the church, with the future. Further, he maintained in common with earlier church Fathers, on matters related to the coming of Antichrist, the resurrection and the destruction of the world. He had a bipartite view of time and history which treated the period of the church as that era separating the First Coming (or Advent) and returning (or Second Coming') of Christ.[116] Augustine considers the church to be in exile in the "city of the world."[117]

The Medieval Era (AD. 430 – 1500)

In the medieval era, just like the patristic era, the general belief in life after death, in the return of the Lord, in the resurrection of the dead, in the final judgment, and in a kingdom of glory prevailed, even though very little reflection was made on the manner of these events. The kingdom of God was thought of as that of eternal life and the future salvation than a material and temporal kingdom. With the start of the Medieval Period (around 1500 AD), there remained a steady stream of the Eschatological Gospel of both Comings and premillennialism through the continuance of the ordinances/ sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and recitation of the Lord's

[115] Richard K. Emmerson, "The Advent Hope in the Middle Ages" in *The Advent Hope in Scripture and History*, ed. V. Norskov Olsen (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 97.
[116] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 467.
[117] McGrath, *Christian Theology,* 467.

Prayer and the Creeds. Both personal and general aspects of eschatology were recognised.

Augustine's view prevailed during this time when a literal interpretation of eschatology was promoted. Concerning time and history, medieval thought held a tripartite view of history—history has a beginning, middle and an end. In the same way, medieval scholars had the idea of three advents of Christ— "at the beginning as Creator, at the centre of history as the God-incarnate Redeemer, and at the end as Judge."[118]

The period was characterized by many apocalyptic expectations. Werner Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen accuse researchers of over concentrating on the apocalyptic works without acknowledging that traditional eschatological ideas may influence a much wider variety of documents.[119] Biblical commentaries on apocalyptic books such as the book of Revelation were written, which contained a lot of chronicles and universal histories, the use and development of the liturgy. In addition, many medieval visual arts depicted the return of Christ and the attendant resurrection, judgement and new world. Eschatological thoughts were also put into poems and hymns. From the Eastern Church, Romanus (d.c. 560), to whom Petra ascribes 25 hymns, wrote the poem on the Second Coming of Christ*,* which was traditionally sung on the Sunday of "Farewell to Meat," eight days before the beginning of Lent. This poem depicts, with great dramatic power, the trials of the Last Days and the *Parousia* and judgement of Christ. In this poem, Romanus gives a comparison between Jesus' First and Second Comings.

As time went on, the church developed into a hierarchical, sacramental and sacerdotal system which was identified with the Kingdom of God. The church was considered as a training ground for the future and hence without it there was no salvation. It was within this context that the doctrine of purgatory emerged (593 AD). Purgatory refers to "a sort of reformatory school for baptized Catholics who are not good enough at death

[118] Emmerson, "The Advent Hope in the Middle Ages," 97.

[119] Werner Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (eds), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages (*Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 404.

to go directly to heaven."[120] On many occasions, chiliasm was revisited to protest against this ecclesiasticism.

By the end of the 6th century, the atmosphere of Christian expectation had become darkened a bit "mainly because of the strong sense of eschatological crisis that penetrated the writings of the Western Church's most prominent and eloquent spokesman of the age, Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)."[121] Gregory did not have much desire for secular science and Philosophy. His explanation of history was based on natural causes. Gregory "was convinced that the *Parousia* and judgment were not far off, and considered it one of his chief pastoral responsibilities, as bishop of Rome, to communicate this sense of impending crisis to his hearers and the wider Christian world. . .. and with whom, Latin Patristic eschatology reached its final form . . . and became a principal source for Latin eschatology in the centuries to come."[122] Gregory considered the final day and the Second Coming as imminent and this led him to ponder over all human affairs. The concept of the antichrist gained popularity in eschatological discourses in the 7th century due to the birth of Islam and its rapid rise against the Christian Church.

According to David Olster the period that followed was characterized by apocalypse:

> The period extending from the seventh into the ninth century constitutes the golden age of Byzantine apocalypses, when the formative texts and models were created. . . . The most important text . . . the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* . . . originally written around AD 690 . . . can be divided into two sections: a "historical" section, which narrates the history of Rome and Byzantium; and an "apocalyptic" section, which narrates the Arab invasion (as still in the future), the invasion of the "unclean races" and Gog and Magog, and the final defeat of the Antichrist.[123]

He also states that the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem* was the only

[120] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5, 760.
[121] Daley, *The Hope of the Early church*, 211.
[122] Daley, *The Hope of the Early church*, 211.
[123] *David Olster*, *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, edited by Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, John (New York: The International continuum Publishing Group, 2003), 263-264.

Byzantine apocalypse to mention the Book of Revelation, as compared with using Daniel 2, 9 and Ezekiel 38-39.[124]

After this period of *Byzantine apocalypse*, much was not recorded about apocalyptic eschatology until the time of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), a monk from Italy, who—after experiencing several visions concerning the Trinity, the future of the church and the end of the world—taught that history must be understood in terms of the activity of the Trinity.[125] He revived interest in the premillennial belief through his new prophetic interpretation of eschatology in three ages or dispensations. According to Fiore, the Old Testament represents the age/dispensation of the Father, the New Testament, including the church, represents the age/dispensation of the Son and the age/dispensation of the Spirit which is yet to be developed out of the Old Testament age of the Father and the New Testament age of the Son. For Joachim, the dawning of the age of the Spirit was literally on the doorstep. Consequently, he predicted the end of the dispensation/age of the Son at 1260.[126] This prediction equates each age/dispensation and covers forty-two (42) generations of thirty (30) years. The dispensation of the Father was from Adam to Jesus (characterized by the obedience of humankind to the rules of God), the dispensation of the Son was from Christ's First Advent to 1260 (represented by the New Testament, when humanity became the son of God) and that of the Holy Spirit (a new dispensation of universal love) was to begin afterward to bring about the final consummation.[127]

This prediction (which was based on Revelation 11:3 and 12:6, which mentioned "one thousand two hundred and sixty days"), raised eschatological expectations and rekindled the eschatological fire that had been dampened by Augustinian amillennialism. Schaff describes Joachim as "the millenarian prophet of the Middle Ages."[128] Joachim's premillennial

[124] *Olster*, *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism, 256.*

[125] Stephen Brown, Jim Bell and David Carson (eds.) *Marketing Apocalypse: Eschatology, Escapology and the Illusion of the End* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 28.

[126] Brown, Bell and Carson (eds.) *Marketing Apocalypse,* 28. See also McGrath, *Christian Theology,* 468.

[127] Brown, Bell and Carson (eds.) *Marketing Apocalypse,* 28.

[128] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 5, 378.

eschatology was advanced by the Franciscan monks, some of whom saw themselves as part of the 144,000 male virgins in Revelation. Commenting on this, Laughlin states that Joachim's eschatological thought "was taken up by the Spiritual Franciscans, that is, the Joachimites, mixed with ideas from the Apocrypha, and carried far beyond Joachim's intentions."[129] The enthusiasm with which the Franciscans propagated Joachim's eschatology eventually led (in 1254) what Brown describes as to "the most notorious incidents in medieval Christendom,"[130] when an over-enthusiastic Joachite, Gerardo de Burgos, declared that the contents of the [Old Testament and the New Testament]— had been utterly abrogated. Henceforth, all scriptural authority resided in the Third Testament— the so-called Eternal Evangel (or everlasting gospel—made up of the teachings of Joachim de Fiore."[131] This pronouncement attracted much attention and the resulting debates further publicized the teachings of Joachim, hence fanning the flames of Joachite-induced apocalyptic expectation. Eventually (in 1263 AD), the Synod of Arles declared Joachim's theories as heretical.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD) had a five-fold view of the unseen world of the spirits: heaven (whose bliss, according to Aquinas, consists of immediate vision of God), hell (the place of eternal punishment), purgatory, the *limbus partum*, or the temporal abode of Old Testament saints (this corresponds to Abraham's bosom), and the *limbus infantum*, or the abode of children who die without being baptized, a place where Aquinas thought was a little lower than the *limbus partum.*[132]

A more poetic approach to eschatology is found in the works of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321 AD) who was based in the city of Florence. Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* was written, "both to give poetic expression to the Christian hope, and to make comments on the life of both the church and the city of Florence of his own days."[133] In this work, Alighieri gives us an insight into the late Medieval era's view of eschatology, with its acceptance of purgatory, and its fearful illustrations of hell: "souls of the departed pass

[129] Laughlin, "Joachim of Fiore."
[130] Brown et.al, *Marketing Apocalypse*, 29.
[131] Brown et.al, *Marketing Apocalypse*, 29.
[132] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 761. We deal with this issue in volume two.
[133] McGrath, *Christian Theology,* 468.

through a series of purifying and cleansing processes, before being enabled to catch a glimpse of the vision of God – the ultimate goal of the Christian life."[134]

In the second half of the fourteenth century in England, John Wyclif (1324-1384), a master at Oxford and the Morning Star of the Reformation, emerged as "a patriot, a champion of theological and practical reforms and the translator of the Scriptures into English."[135] He became the first person to openly criticize the hierarchical system of the Catholic Church.[136] His interpretation of scripture was more political than apocalyptic. In most cases, he used the term "Antichrist" to refer to the Roman *crucia* and the Pope. This way, he considered the papal office of the Catholic Church as the Antichrist.[137] For him, the Antichrist was the Pope, "the latter seen not as a specific figure but rather the highest expression of an institution,"[138] are synonyms. He rejected any apocalyptic and millennial allusions.

John Huss (1371-1415), a professor at the University of Prague, even though accepted the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, followed the lead of Wycliff in identifying the Pope with the Antichrist. Clearly, eschatology in the medieval era often challenged the papacy. For challenging other doctrines of the church such as the idea of justification by works and the sales of indulgence, Huss was burnt at the stakes. He also had a belief in a coming day of judgment. In about 1388 Thomas Wimbledon in his preaching pointed to two judgements—"the first an individual's death and the second for all persons after the general resurrection."[139] In the late 15th and early 16th century, Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) published the *Book of Prophecies* which basically was a compilation of texts from the Bible, Church Fathers and other various medieval authors. His main purpose was to show that his voyages to the "New World" or West Indies were part of the divine plan to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims, to

[134] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 468.
[135] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 6, 315-316.
[136] Bernard McGinn, John James Collins and Stephen Stein (eds.), *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism* (Bloomsbury: A and C Black, 2003), 308.
[137] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 6, 332.
[138] McGinn, Collins, Collins and Stein (eds.), *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, 308.
[139] Verbeke, Verhelst, and Welkenhuysen (eds), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, 406.

rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (with gold from the New World) and begin the millennial age of Spanish rule and worldwide conversion.

The Reformation Era 1500 – 1650 AD

To set the present discussion in the right context, Jaroslav Pelikan observes as follows:

> To be sure, ever since the transformation of the apocalyptic vision in the early church, the component elements of that vision had remained present in Scripture and in the creeds of the church. They may have seemed more or less quiescent for long periods, but repeatedly they had erupted when a historical crisis found a prophet to sound the alarm and issue the ancient summons: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." For some medieval believers (though perhaps not, it would seem from the sources, for as many of them as modern writers often suppose), one such apocalyptic moment had been the end of the first Christian millennium. Such a reawakening of the apocalyptic vision in the tenth century-or in the fourteenth and fifteenth would not of itself belong to the history of the development of Christian doctrine, since, strictly speaking, the doctrine of the last things had always been on the books and apocalypticism was merely the application of the doctrine to a particular epoch. What made late medieval apocalypticism important doctrinally was the growing belief in this period that "the man of sin, the son of perdition," the Antichrist whose coming was to be the principal sign of the end, was not some emperor (Nero or Frederick 11) nor some false prophet (Arius or Mohammed), but the noble head of Christendom himself.[140]

The dominant issue in the Reformation was about the application and appropriation of salvation. The Reformation insisted that salvation comes only through faith, rather than by works. The Reformers sought to develop eschatology mainly from this understanding of salvation for which reason eschatology was seen as part of soteriology. Reformation eschatological thought was also informed by the discovery of the identity of the antichrist and his subversions.[141] As we discussed concerning the medieval era, many people had (before the Reformation) suggested that the Pope was the

[140] Pelikan, as cited in Winfried Vogel*,* The Eschatological Theology of Martin Luther Part I: Luther's Basic Concepts *Andrews University Seminary Studies, Autumn 1986, vol. 24, No. 3 (1986), 251.*

[141] Le Roy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers,* vol.2 (Washington, DC*.,* 1948), 241 -265.

antichrist. It must therefore be noted that the Reformers were not the first people who in that general period came out with apocalyptic news.

However, in the case of Martin Luther (1483-1546), his view became conspicuous due to how he related the symbolic language of apocalyptic passages in Scripture as applying to figures and forces of his time.[142] The corrupt practices in the church and also in the world made Luther conceive that the coming of the last day was near. Luther's eschatology is closely linked with justification because justification must set "in motion an eschatological process which finds its final culmination in the resurrection to eternal life."[143] Asendorf has remarked in a forthright manner:

Justification is at first the anticipation of the Last Day and this insofar as the judging and saving decree of God is being received today as well as at the end of time. Besides this eschatological present, there is the eschatological future of the consummation. In view of the latter, our justification is only a beginning... The strong emphasis on the *simul* in the Luther research of the past must not be set up as something absolute. *Simul* and *initium* belong directly together.[144]

The Reformers had views respecting the return of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgment, and eternal life and these were not different from those of the early church. They, however, rejected "the crass form of Chiliasm which appeared in the Anabaptist sects," and the Catholic concept of purgatory.[145] They protested against the Roman Church's claim of having the "keys" of heaven and purgatory through indulgences. Luther questioned how the Pope could claim the ability to free people from purgatory but would not free them from all.[146] The Reformers identified the Pope as the antichrist, and central to the Roman Counter-Reformation was the Jesuit effort to propound an eschatological dogma that would relieve the papacy of that stigma.

Luther thought that the study of last things permeates all aspects of

[142] Vogel, "The Eschatological Theology Of Martin Luther Part I", 251.
[143] Vogel, *The Eschatological Theology Of Martin Luther Part I",* 253.
[144] Wlrich Asendorf, *Eschatologie Bei Luther* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 42.
[145] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 663.
[146] Martin Luther, "The Ninety-nine Theses" in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doybleday, 1962), 498.

theology. The Reformation did not develop Christian doctrine in the area of eschatology very strongly. In part, this was because, the Reformers accepted the long-standing, amillennial eschatology of Augustine outlined in c. 400 AD. An exception to this was the chiliast error (literal millennialism, i.e., the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth) that arose again in the church, this time in the Anabaptist camp which was rejected by the Reformers.

The Modern Era (A. D. 1650 – Present)

Millennial Debates of the 18th and 19th Centuries

Scholarly debates about the millennium and the nature of God's kingdom characterized the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jonathan Edwards (1703-58 AD) is noted for the great awakening God used him to bring to the American colonies. Edwards' thinking on unfulfilled prophecy, on missionary interests, on revivals, prayer, the papacy, false religion, history, and the Jews were coloured by eschatological ideas. He contemplated at length the issues related to the latter-day glory, heaven and hell. Edwards was a postmillennialist as he demonstrated in his *Work of Redemption.*[147] He believed that history's end would be preceded by a "latter-day" age of the Spirit to be ushered in by the proclamation of the gospel and the progress of the church. Consequently, Edwards interpreted this First Great Awakening (1735-1743) as a signal that "the latter day' millennium, which involved a weakening of Satan's power, was dawning and which would be followed by the general judgement, eternal hell and heaven. He predicted that the antichrist will finally be destroyed in about 2000 AD after which the millennial reign will begin.

Edwards pointed out that the great whore of Revelation 17, represented also as Babylon, was the same as the Church of Rome. Concerning verse 18, he states "this verse is spoken the plainest of any one passage in the whole book."[148] He rejected ideas such as the infallibility of the Pope, delivering from purgatory, the pardon of sin, dispensations,

[147] Christopher B. Holdsworth, "The Eschatology of Jonathan Edwards" in *Reformation and Revival Journal* 5, (1996), 119-147: 119.

[148] As cited in Jonathan Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings,* ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977), 120.

indulgences and so on. Edwards understood the forty-two months of the antichrist's reign (Rev. 11:1-2) as twelve hundred and sixty years of the papal domination, a period from 606 AD (when universal episcopacy was established) to 1866 (when the papacy would be dethroned).[149]

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a minister of the Plymouth Brethren (in the 19th century), invented a system of eschatological interpretation known today as Premillennial Dispensationalism. His teachings were further popularised in the United States in the early 20th century by the wide circulation of the Scofield Reference Bible published in 1909 by one of Darby's converts, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield.[150] Dispensational theologians recognise the ages of innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law grace and the millennial kingdom as the seven dispensations in which God re-examines human commitment anew.

Liberal Approach to Eschatology: Modernized Eschatology

Liberalism represents that facet of theology that emerged from the rationalism and experimentalism of the philosophers and scientists. It emphasises individual freedom, reason and the findings of science. Consequently, liberals do not accept anything that disagrees with reason and science. Liberal theology from the start entirely ignored the eschatological teachings of Jesus and placed all the emphasis on his ethical precepts.

The eschatology of the Liberal theologians of the 19th century, Albert Ritsch and Adolf von Harnack (the foremost German proponents of a liberal theological programme), minimised the apocalyptical eschatological elements contained in the teaching of Jesus Christ to a "crust" which hides the ethical core of his teaching, and the kingdom of God became a simple social organisation, to which humanity may reach through the continuous ethical progress of human efforts. Therefore, liberal eschatology contends that the kingdom of God which Jesus preached was an ethical ideal that would be progressively realised now rather than to be established in the

[149] Jonathan Edwards, "Notes on the Apocalypse," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* 9 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 5:129.

[150] For a detailed discussion of Dispensationalism, consult our second volume on eschatology.

future when he returns.[151] Advocates of this position find support in Jesus' words in Luke 10: 9 where Jesus pointed out to the disciples that "The kingdom of God is near." From this statement, liberal theologians argue that the kingdom Jesus referred to cannot be "something far removed, either spatially or temporary. It is near, something which humans can enter."[152]

Demodernised Eschatology

The liberal idea of the kingdom of God (and for that matter eschatology) was challenged by John Weiss and Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). Weiss "reacted to the liberals' view that the kingdom of God was both imminent in individual experience and realized as an ideal society in history."[153] Weiss "held that the kingdom of God was an apocalyptic and eschatological sphere which only God could establish."[154] That is, "[t]he Kingdom will be altogether God's supernatural act, and when it comes, Jesus will be the heavenly Son of Man."[155] Humans could pray for its coming but could not do anything to establish it. Erickson observes that Weiss considered Jesus as one who was thoroughly eschatological, futuristic, and even apocalyptic in his outlook. For him, Jesus intended to introduce the kingdom of God dramatically rather than spreading it gradually as an ethical rule in people's hearts.[156]

Following Weiss' lead, Schweitzer defended "a thoroughgoing eschatology realized not through human effort but by supernatural intervention."[157] He proposed the consequent eschatology, which acknowledges the importance of Jesus' use of apocalyptic elements in his teaching and yet describes him as a fanatic Jew who died for a crazy

[151] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1162.
[152] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1163.
[153] Frederick M. Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, "Theological Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount: Making an old Sermon Relevant for our time" in *Trinity Journal of Church and Society* Vol. 18. No. 5 (2016): 69-89, 81.
[154] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Theological Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount", 81.
[155] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Donald Alfred Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 55.
[156] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1164.
[157] Clarence Bauman, *Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for its Meaning* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 114. Google books assessed at https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=RAqgLGbZ9AUC&pg.

apocalyptic dream. In *The Quest of the Historical Jesus,* he insisted on the urgency of the first Christians' eschatological expectations and argued that the whole of Jesus' ministry was founded on the belief that the end of the world was imminent. . Thus, according to Schweitzer, Jesus preached an eschatological kingdom that would be radically supernatural, sudden in its arrival and be introduced through a cosmic disaster.[158] However, "Jesus was mistaken failing in his attempt to introduce his contemporaries to this cosmic kingdom and thus was destroyed"[159] As Suggs expresses it: "Schweitzer's own answer to that question [of the relevancy of the eschatological proclamation] was a simple religious commitment inspired by his mistaken hero [Jesus] and the development of a philosophy of reverence for life which has only tenuous connections with the historical faith."[160] For Schweitzer, Jesus' eschatological teachings are not an afterthought but basic and central to his ministry.

Realised Eschatology

In the mid-1930s C. H. Dodd (1884-1973) espoused a "realised eschatology" as a necessary reaction to the futurist eschatology propounded by Schweitzer and others. The essential element of Dodd's view was that the arrival of the eschatological period had taken place fully in the ministry of Jesus.[161] In other words, Dodd contended that the kingdom of God which Jesus preached was already present in his ministry and so it was incumbent upon his audience to make their own judgement about whether it had arrived or not. While Dodd attempted to show that such realised eschatology underlay the message of the Synoptics and even Paul, the prime presentation of realised eschatology appears, in his view, in the Gospel of John. The term "realised eschatology" describes the idea that the eschatological passages in the New Testament do not refer to the future, but instead refer to the ministry of Jesus and his lasting legacy. Thus, Dodd argued that Jesus' coming would not occur in the future, for it is already realised.[162] In Jesus, the transcendent

[158] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1164.
[159] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1164.
[160] M. Jack Suggs, "Biblical Eschatology and the Message of the Church," *Encounter*, XXIV (Winter, 1963) 4-5: 5.
[161] McGrath, *Christian Theology,* 470.
[162] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 56.

"wholly order" has entered history.

Dodd's position is similar to Schweitzer's eschatology in that both see "eschatology as a major theme permeating Scripture, particularly Jesus' teachings."[163] Yet, Dodd differs from Schweitzer because, as stated earlier, the former "insisted that the content of Jesus' message was not a future coming and a future kingdom; rather, with the advent of Jesus the kingdom of God had already arrived."[164] Instead of looking ahead for future fulfillments of prophecy, one should note the ways they have already been fulfilled. This approaches eschatology from the preterist viewpoint.

Dodd's eschatology was characterised by his interest in the concept of the "Day of the Lord." In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord is an event to come in the future. However, in the NT, it is portrayed as a present reality.[165] It is based on the fulfillment of the Day of the Lord in the New Testament that Dodd adopted the term "Realised eschatology." Thus "instead of looking ahead for the future fulfillment of prophecy," realised eschatology looks for ways in which it has been fulfilled.[166] For example, God's triumph over Satan was realised in Luke 5:24, when the judgement has already taken place in John 3:19 and eternal life was already in the possession of all who believe in Christ (John 5:24). One scholarly review of Dodd's influence on modern eschatological thinking posits as follows:

The discussion concerning eschatology, however, has to be seen in the larger context of the rise of neo-orthodoxy which tended to limit the effect of Dodd's influence on liberal theology as a whole. Suggs has summarized this as follows: "The fact that the church at large was not driven to Schweitzer's position is traceable to a number of factors, only some of which are academic. First, there was the discovery by R. Otto and C. H. Dodd of the element in primitive Christian eschatology which is usually spoken of as 'realized.' Secondly, there was the appearance of a new historical skepticism in European scholarship which focused attention on the Christ of faith rather than upon the embarrassingly Jewish Jesus of

[163] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1165.
[164] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1165.
[165] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1165.
[166] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1165.

history. Thirdly, there was the rise of a new theology which formed a more positive place for eschatology because of a negative anthropology which demanded a transcendent rather than an imminent hope.[167]

In spite of all this, Dodd's position has been criticised for minimising the futuristic dimension of the kingdom of God.

Transcendental Eschatology

Karl Barth was the major proponent of transcendental eschatology. His theology places emphasis on God's freedom and transcendence. Transcendental eschatology is the product of reflection on the transcendent 'self' of God. It refers to the approach to eschatology which stresses the alienness of the kingdom and locates eschatology within the framework of God's eternal otherness (transcendence), which intersects time and subverts human hopes. The general form of transcendental eschatology is based on the epiphany of the eternal Logos.

Moltmann stated, regarding this type of eschatology, that "it was precisely the transcendentalist view of eschatology that prevented the breakthrough of eschatological dimensions in dogmatics."[168] For Barth, eschatology is unhistorical, supra-historical or proto-historical. "It is basic to Barth's thought", according to T. David Beck "to work out eschatological positions within the dialectic of time and eternity."[169] The *eschaton* is regarded as that which separates time and eternity.

Wolfhart Pannenberg stresses Barth's "concentration on the constitutive reality of God in relation to the present that replaced the biblical eschatology of the future."[170] This resulted in the loss of the specific temporal structure of eschatology such that eschatology now functioned more as a metaphor or a "mystical" conception of an existential interpretation.[171] Eschatology losses its specific temporal structure, when

[167] Suggs, "Biblical Eschatology and the Message of the Church," 4-5.
[168] As cited in Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of All Things*, 122.
[169] T. David Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of All Things: Pneumatology in Paul and Jurgen Moltmann* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2010), 122.
[170] *Wolfhart Pannenberg*, *Systematic Theology* trans. *Geoffrey W. Bromiley*, *vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 537.
[171] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 537.

viewed in the transcendental form. For example, the book of Romans becomes obscure when interpreted through the eyes of "transcendental eschatology." Pannenberg observes as follows:

> "In [Karl Barth's] *Church Dogmatics* the eschatological mood of *Romans* then faded from the scene because what had been the direct dialectical turning of judgment into grace was now taken up into a Christological orientation to the unity between God and us in Jesus Christ. In this latter form of theology, Barth never reached the point at which to give a new shape to the traditional doctrine of the "last things." … Reflection on the *future* nature of God's kingdom and on its relevance for the understanding of God, for our own present, and for the presence of God with us, would be a task for the age that followed.[172]

Hegel has criticised transcendental eschatology in the technical sense of the term that is, referring to nonsensuous realities or being beyond the realm. Vítor Westhelle, quoting Hegels' argument, writes "Hegel believed himself loyal to the genius of Christianity by realizing the kingdom of God on earth. And, since he transposed the Christian expectation of a final consummation into the historical process as such, he saw the world's history as consummating itself."[173] However, this type of eschatology has had a great influence on modern theological discourses.

Existential Eschatology

Existentialism "is a term used by neo-orthodoxy to designate the place of personal commitment in an act of faith. Existential faith believes with inward passion; it is concerned with the relation between the self and the object of belief; it chooses from within the centre of moral freedom. Cheap faith believes too easily; it does not count the cost."[174] Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) took transcendental eschatology in an existential direction, thus considering eschatology as the contact of eternity with each present moment of time. It is an existentialist eschatology, in which the entering

[172] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 537.

[173] Vítor Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space: The Lost Dimension in Theology Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 73-74.

[174] Edward J. Carnell, "Existential, Existentialism" in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 205.

into the authentic existence or the eternally present "now" of God's eternity is achieved through the personal answer of the Christian to God's calling. Bultmann is one of the most influential theologians and biblical scholars of the twentieth century. Known for his erudite contributions to both disciplines, he synthesised his wide-ranging efforts into a unified and provocative theological vision.

Bultmann outlined his Existential Eschatology with his attempt of "demythologising" Biblical eschatology.[175] He was skeptical about the historicity of the New Testament.[176] He insisted that the New Testament cannot be taken as the objective accounts of Jesus' life because the writers' understanding of Jesus was informed by the prevailing understanding that was common in the New Testament times.[177] The accounts should not be understood literally as what actually transpired in Jesus' life. Therefore, it must be understood that "the [New Testament] writers used myths drawn from Gnosticism, Judaism, and other sources in order to give expression to what had been with them existentially."[178] By "myth", Bultmann meant that which describes otherworldly realities in imagery drawn from this world. For him, myths were neither to be rejected nor accepted but interpreted (or reinterpreted) in a process called "demythologising." Bultmann's demythologisation led him to reject any supernatural account of Adam's original sin and instead locate sin in the context of human refusal to accept the gift of authentic existence.[179] Similarly, scriptural reference to God's judgement, for him "is not a cosmic event that is still to happen but is the fact that Jesus has come into the world and issued the call to faith."[180]

Existential eschatology, for Bultmann, is not about the end of the world, rather the future comes to meet human beings in the kerygma and faces them with the final decision. Bultmann "reinterprets eschatology along existential lines" and "calls the coming of

[175] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1165.
[176] Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 120.
[177] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1166.
[178] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1166.
[179] Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press., 1984), 29.
[180] Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology And Other Basic Writings*, 19

the Redeemer an 'eschatological event,' 'the turning-point of the age.'"[181] Bultmann separated the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history and declared, "How things looked in the heart of Jesus, I do not know and I do not want to know."[182] Jesus is the end of history, not temporally but existentially. For him, Jesus' used "eschatological language," which was not intended to mean the literal end of the world, but the challenge to each individual to an encounter with God. He believes that "The dominant concept of Jesus' message is the *Reign of God*. Jesus proclaims its immediately impending irruption, now already making itself felt."[183]

Bultmann applied Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' existence into his interpretation of the New Testament.[184] Bultmann believed that "…Heidegger's existentialist analysis of human existence seems to be only a profane philosophical presentation of the New Testament view of who we are…"[185] In Bultmann's presentation of Heidegger's philosophy, humans are "ever in the moment of decision between the past and future," which we can accept responsibility for and live out "authentically" or "lose ourselves" to the variety of outside pressures that try to deny our freedom.[186] For Bultmann, the kingdom as the reign of God is present rather than future. Bultmann's contribution in reshaping the landscape of Protestant theology in Germany and beyond has been enormous.

Politicised Eschatology (Theology of Hope)

German Romantic theologian, Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926) is most noted for his "theology of hope" and for his incorporation of insights from liberation theology and ecology into mainstream trinitarian theology. It was Moltmann's personal experience that motivated him to develop this kind of theology. Born in 1926 as a German who lived through the Second World War, Moltmann's personal experiences and the broader

[181] Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 336.
[182] As cited in Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 121.
[183] Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1965), 4.
[184] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1166.
[185] Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology*, 23.
[186] Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology*, 23

cultural influences contributed to his view of hope as a theological theme. Not only did he see the collapse of the German state, but he was also a prisoner of war until 1948.[187] At that time Communism seemed to provide hope, while Christianity seemed irrelevant. He then came to realise that Christ's resurrection builds on promises yet to come. He noted, like others the difference that hope makes, even for physical survival.[188] As a prisoner of war in a British camp during World War II, Moltmann observed that his fellow prisoners who had hope fared the best. After the war, it seemed to him Christianity was ignoring the hope offered in its promise of a future life. He returned to Germany in 1948 at age 22 to pursue theological training and soon obtained a doctorate from the University of Gottingen.

In *Theology of Hope* Moltmann focuses on the resurrection and sees in it the promise of transformation for the whole world. He developed the Theology of Hope putting the Christian eschatological vision at the centre of his interpretation of Christian theology.[189] In his most influential work *Theology of Hope*, published in 1967, Moltmann argues that Christian hope should be the central motivating factor in the life and thought of the church and of each Christian. In Moltmann's view, eschatology is, "the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it."[190] Moltmann writes that,

> From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set.… Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, and of every Christian existence and of the whole Church.[191]

Moltmann envisages a reframing of Christian eschatology that tries to avoid the tendency to relegate discussion of the future to the appendices

[187] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1167.
[188] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1167.
[189] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1167.
[190] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 6.
[191] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

of the theological system, and, further, that avoids the propensity to treat eschatology as though its purpose is seemingly irrelevant debates about details of future events. Moltmann describes hope as eschatology, in which Moltmann calls for the realisation of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanising of humankind, the socialising of humanity in which the church would exercise its healing responsibly in the modern society. In this case, eschatology defines the promises of God to all creation, a promise that is the measure of all that would claim the name Christianity. Moltmann further writes:

> Eschatology is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium, of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah. Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation of every Christian existence and of the whole church.[192]

Moltmann is known as "one of the leading proponents of the theology of hope. He believes that God's promise to act in the future is more important than the fact that he has acted in the past. What is implied by this focus on the future, however, is not a withdrawal from the world in the hope that a better world will somehow evolve, but active participation in the world in order to aid in the coming of that better world."[193] Two things need to be borne in mind. First, it shows that Moltmann emphasises that the concept of the kingdom of God stresses that the people of God live in hope. Thus, his eschatology is a theology of hope. Secondly, Moltmann's eschatology leads to a politicised eschatology in that the eschaton will bring about a kingdom of equality and universal justice. In political theology, the future of God is mediated by the world-transforming power of human persons. The future moves towards us and we also move towards the future.

[192] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (SCM: London Moltmann, 1967), 16.

[193] Noel B. Woodbridge, "Revisiting Moltmann's Theology of Hope in the light of its renewed impact on emergent theology," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary,* vol. 9 (2010):106-113, 108.

But the future is not determined by the success of our present activities. The future has value above and beyond the attained and the attainable and this is derived from the resurrection of Christ – our hope for the future. Ernst Bloch picked up Moltmann's idea and developed a "future-oriented eschatology" with a distinctive cosmological perspective.

The Theology of Hope sees the framework or mood of theology as wholly eschatological.Eschatology, according Moltmann, is central to Christian theology and the message of the gospel.[194] Moltmann based his eschatological content on the promises of God. Hope arises from the promises of God, namely the promise of redemption and a completed creation. These promises are not limited by what the world can offer but come from the power, the promises and potentialities of God. As Moltmann says:

As the God of the promises and the historical guidance towards fulfilment, that is, as the God of the coming kingdom, he has shaped the experience of the historicity of world and man [humankind] that is open towards his future. The place where God's existence and communion are believed and hoped for is the place "in front of us" and "ahead of us". This is not spatial, but a temporal definition of place. God is not "beyond us" or "in us", but ahead of us in the horizon of the future opened to us in his promises.[195]

For Moltmann, "Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God… hope anticipates that it will sometime be revealed; faith is the foundation on which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith."[196]

Wolfhart Pannenberg, another proponent of the theology of hope, writes: "The core of eschatological hope, hope beyond death, is faith in God. Faith in the eternal God encompasses everything that must be presented as the object of Christian hope. Such hope does not come as something

[194] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope* [Theologie der Hoffnung], trans. James W. Leitsch (London: SCM, 1964), 16.

[195] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Hope; Theology as Eschatology* (NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 10 .

[196] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 10-11

additional to faith in God, and it cannot persist without such faith."[197] For Pannenberg, "the future of God's kingdom in the world presupposes the existence of the world as his creation."[198] Furthermore, from this future oriented eschatological approach he draws "radical political conclusions." The hope of a future transformation of the world provides an incentive for present day renewal. In other words, for Moltmann, eschatology should impact, and even direct, praxis. This creation finds its consummation in the future of God's kingdom. This hope, according to Moltmann is built from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and Apostle Paul alludes to this idea in Colossians (1:27) when he trumpets that "Christ is our hope".

Conclusion

Christianity, for the last two thousand years, has been characterised by certain eschatological emphases. In the Patristic period, the most influential theologian regarding eschatology was that of Augustine of Hippo, who believed in a symbolic millennium, not an actual earthly millennium. Though Augustine's view was prominent, other theologians like Irenaeus of Lyons would disagree, arguing for an earthly, literal kingdom. During the medieval period, the now popular views of millennialism began to take shape. Along with these views, the doctrine of purgatory was formulated by the Catholic Church.

Later, apocalypticism took centre stage. In the Reformation, Calvin would challenge the Anabaptist belief in soul sleep. The Reformers also rejected the doctrine of purgatory and hence the practice of praying for the dead. They likened the Pope to the antichrist and taught that the end of the world was near. During the post-Reformation period, covenant theology began to come on the scene, while people like Jonathan Edwards were holding to a very post-millennial stance. Contemporary theology has brought about a social gospel rather than a gospel of salvation from human sinfulness, emphasising social reforms instead of forgiveness of sins. The theology of hope propounded by Moltmann also became very prominent.

[197] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Task of Christian Eschatology", eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Last Things: Biblical & Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002),3.

[198] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology,* 540.

C. H. Dodd introduced his Realized eschatology, arguing that the kingdom of God is already realised on earth. John Darby posited the concepts of dispensationalism, and specifically the pre-tribulation views emphasising a rapture of the church before the start of the tribulation. The Scofield Reference Bible was instrumental in spreading pre-tribulation rapture which much of dispensationalism promoted in the church during this time.

Review Exercise

1. What are the main teachings of realised eschatology?
2. What is liberalism? How does it affect eschatology?
3. Explain the term "demythologisation." How does this concept inform Rudolf Bultmann's eschatological articulations?
4. Give a brief account of Martin Luther's eschatological thought.
5. What is Pannenberg's role in the development of modern eschatology?
6. Outline Moltmann's understanding of eschatology.
7. Critically examine Martin Luther's eschatological thought.
8. What eschatological idea prevailed during the patristic era?

Chapter 5

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The heart of Jesus' teachings centred on the theme of the kingdom of God. The phrase "kingdom of God" occurs in sixty-one separate sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. Counting parallels to these passages, the expression occurs over eighty-five times in the New Testament. Throughout the history of biblical eschatology, the arrival of the kingdom of God as well as its continuance and final consummation at the end of history has been vigorously debated. The main point of contention is the when and how of the kingdom. The kingdom itself refers to the reign of God rather than the realm over which God reigns. The concept of the kingdom of God is central to the biblical eschatological discourse. That there is a future dimension to God's reign is accepted by many but the present reign of God is often debated.

In our survey of the history of eschatology, we came across recent trends in eschatology where we considered modernised eschatology, demodernised eschatology, realised eschatology, transcendental eschatology, existential eschatology, politicised eschatology, systematised eschatology (dispensationalism) and inaugurated eschatology. All these views easily fall under three major positions: (1) the kingdom is entirely eschatological; (2) the kingdom is entirely realised and (3) the kingdom is partly realised and partly eschatological.

Kingdom of God in Old Testament

The phraseology "kingdom of God" is found nowhere in the Old Testament. Yet, the Old Testament clearly presents God as the sovereign, all-powerful Creator who rules over all things. In other words, the concept of God as King is a dominant one in the Old Testament. As we shall see soon, there

is a double thrust of the meaning of God's kingdom in the Old Testament: (1) God is King for he rules over all the earth and above all the tumult of the world and (2) God's kingdom lies in the future in respect of the nations which are not yet voluntarily subject to God's reign.[199] That is, God is King and will become King. The Old Testament uses different Hebrew words for the kingdom on 146 occasions. The Hebrew verb *mālak* means to "reign" (Exod. 15:18; Ps. 47:8; 97:1; Isa. 24:23; Mic. 4:7). The noun *melek*, meaning "king," is used as a title for Yahweh (Ps. 47:2; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 46:18; cf. Num. 23:21). Another Hebrew noun, *malkût,* which connotes God's "kingdom," "dominion," "rule" is used by Old Testament authors to tell us about God's kingdom (Pss. 45:6; 103:19; 145:11-13). In addition, the word *melûkāh* which signifies God's "kingship" or "royalty" is used (Ps. 22:28; Obad. 21). Finally, the Old Testament uses the word *mamlākāh* to refer to God's "sovereignty" or "kingdom" (1 Chron. 29:11 and often with respect to earthly kingdoms).

In discussing God's kingdom in the Old Testament, we can conveniently divide Israel's history into two. The first part of Israel's history depicts her as a nation ruled by God. Here, the rule and authority of God are recognised in terms of God's kingship both over Israel (Exod. 15:18; Num. 23:21; Deut. 33:5, Isaiah 43:15) and over all the earth (2 King 19:15; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 46:18, Ps. 29:10, 99:1-4, 145:11-13). Before, instituting Israel as a nation on Mt. Sinai, God demonstrated his sovereignty in Egypt in the plagues and the crossing of the Sea of Reed. In these events, we encounter a violent confrontation between kingdoms—God's kingdom and human kingdoms. God's victory over Egypt demonstrated God's reign over the nations and both their human and demonic rulers (Pharaoh and Egypt's gods). When the Israelites got to Mt. Sinai, God made his covenant with them and gave them the Law. In so doing, God established his rule over every area of the life of the newly established nation, Israel. As a theocratic nation, God fought on Israel's behalf and won many battles for them. The conquest of Canaan similarly demonstrated God's absolute reign over all nations and their gods. With the institution of the monarchy in Israel, God began to rule through his chosen and anointed human king. The expression

[199] Westlake T. Purkiser (ed.), *Exploring our Christian Faith* (Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1960), 522.

of God's reign in the history of Israel came to its climax during the reigns of David and Solomon. In this era, the humble obedience of these kings allowed God to rule in the highest sense. Consequently, Israel experienced the full rule of God as the natural evolution of what they were already experiencing. This period was characterised by great peace, prosperity and international pre-eminence.

The second part, however, is a witness to Israel's disobedience (after the reign of Solomon) which led to her decline, diminishing God's reign and Israel's eventual conquest by Gentile nations. In exile, God's rule over Israel became merely a promise. In this context, the expectation of the kingdom was pushed into the future, into another age and another world. We, therefore, see in the Old Testament prophecies about a new age when God's reign will truly take place so that Israel is exalted, justice prevails and all people worship Yahweh. The nature of the future kingdom is expressed in two different ways. First, the kingdom is pictured as an earthly perfect kingdom that will arise out of history and be ruled by David's descendant (Isa. 9, 11).[200] The kingdom will be central to the city of Jerusalem and "will bring about peace, honor, and pure worship among all nations."[201] This idea was lost when the Jewish monarchy was disintegrated. There came a second concept of God's kingdom involving an apocalyptic inbreaking of the "Son of Man with a completely transcendental Kingdom 'beyond history' (Dan. 7)."[202]

The one to bring this kingdom is the Messiah. Thus, the Old Testament sometimes speaks of the government of the Messiah (Isa. 9:6-7). For Isaiah, the coming of the kingdom involved the coming of seven things: God himself, God's Messiah, God's Spirit, a new (and better) covenant, a new (and better) salvation (which would save perfectly, universally and eternally), a new people of God (with a new city, temple and priesthood), and a whole new order of creation. The new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-32, 33-34 is full of eschatological overtones. This can also be seen in God's promise of restoration after the captivity (See Jer.23:3; Isa.11:11). The restoration was to be premised on Israel's repentance and rededication to

[200] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 58.
[201] Purkiser, *Exploring our Christian Faith,* 523.
[202] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 58.

God's service (Eze.36: 24-28; Isa. 24-27). In Daniel 2:44-45 and 7:13-14, Daniel predicts that all temporary earthly kingdoms would violently be crushed and replaced by the eternal heavenly kingdom, which would be introduced and inherited by the coming Redeemer. Daniel looked forward to the time when the kingdom of God would overcome all human efforts to establish a universal kingdom. The initial fulfillment of this expectation in Jesus of Nazareth underlies the message of the New Testament. The coming of Christ into this world was so important because with his coming the kingdom of God will be established among human beings.

In the Old Testament, the reign of God is depicted as everlasting. Daniel, for example, describes God's kingdom as "a kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44). He also said that "the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever" (7:18). David prayed to God, "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations (Psa.145:13).

The Kingdom of God in the Inter-Testamental Period

During the inter-testamental period, Israel saw evil triumph over righteousness. They began to question why it was so. The kind of writings that came up pointed to a time when God will establish his kingdom and rule with Justice. The Jews, therefore, believed that when God establishes his kingdom in the age to come, suffering and evil will end. Literature from the Qumran Community betrays such hope. Israel believed that in the coming age, angels will support them (the children of light) in the battle against their enemies (the children of darkness) and give them victory over all worldly people.[203] The Rabbinic communities used the expression kingdom of heaven in reference to God's sovereignty expressed through his law and hence a proselyte Gentile "takes upon himself [or herself] the sovereignty (kingdom of God)."[204] This means that to submit to the Law is equivalent to submitting to the rule of God.[205] The obvious conclusion is that the kingdom of God on earth was limited to the Jews. Yet, the Jews also

[203] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 59.
[204] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 59.
[205] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 59.

believed that God's sovereignty will be manifested to the whole world at the end of history. The Assumptions of Moses declares: "And then His [God's] kingdom shall appear throughout all His creation" (Ass. Mos.10:1). The Jewish radical and revolutionary group, the zealots, were very obsessed with the coming kingdom. For them, the kingdom must be established through violence.[206] Thus, we can say that the Jews were expectant of the kingdom of God as they expected God to defeat the enemies of Israel and restore her under God's rule alone. Therefore, prior to the New Testament era, Jewish eschatological expectation was centred on the coming of God's kingdom, perhaps through the use of a human agency, to overthrow the kingdoms of this world (particularly the enemies of the Jews) and bring the Jews together into the Promised Land.[207]

Kingdom of God in the New Testament

The noun *basileia* is derived from the verb *basileuein* (to "be king," to "rule" "to reign").[208] Together with *basileus* ("ruler," "king"), the three terms occur 180 times in the Synoptic Gospels. The word *basileia* alone occurs 127 times in 119 verses in the New Testament. From its root meaning, the term kingdom encompasses both concrete ideas such as realm, territory, domain, or people over whom a king reigns and abstract ideas such as sovereign authority, royal power or dominion. The reader must determine which meaning the word signifies in a given situation—whether a king's realm or his sovereignty or both. When applied to God, the meaning of the term kingdom comprises "God's overall reign in the universe, [God's] present spiritual reign in [God's] people, and [God's] future messianic reign on earth."[209] Distinguishing the concrete usage of the term *basileia* from its abstract usage is very essential in our discussion of the meaning of the expression "the kingdom of God." The phrase, when used in concrete terms, refers to "the new order, material and social, which will be established through Christ" but in abstract terms, it designates "'the kingly rule of God' in the hearts of [people] made possible through the life,

[206] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 60.
[207] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,* 60.
[208] Purkiser, *Exploring our Christian Faith,* 520.
[209] Geisler, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 4,1347.

death, and resurrection of Christ."[210]

Among the Synoptics, only Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven." Scholars believe that Matthew used the "kingdom of heaven" because he was writing to Jews who revered the name of God so much that, they hardly vocalised it. For fear of any profane reference to God's name, the Jews sought substitutes for it and heaven was one of the most common of these substitutes.[211] Matthew also uses the "kingdom of God" on four occasions. From the way they have been used in the Synoptics, it is clear that the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" carry the same idea[212] (See Table 1.1)

Gospel Passages Showing the Parallel Use of "The Kingdom of Heaven" and "The Kingdom of God" in Matthew, Mark and Luke

Matt. 4:17: From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is near.**"	**Mark 1:14-15:** "The time has come," he said. "**The kingdom of God is near.** Repent and believe the good news!"
Matt. 5:3: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for **theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**	**Luke 6:20:** Blessed are you who are poor, for **yours is the kingdom of God.**
Matt. 11:11: I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is **least in the kingdom of heaven** is greater than he.	**Luke 7:28:** I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is **least in the kingdom of God** is greater than he.
Matt. 13:11: He replied, "The knowledge of the **secrets of the kingdom of heaven** has been given to you …	**Luke 8:9-10:** He said, "The knowledge of the **secrets of the kingdom of God** has been given to you …

[210] Purkiser, *Exploring our Christian Faith,* 521.
[211] Purkiser, *Exploring our Christian Faith,* 520.
[212] Denzil R. Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power, The Kingdom of God: A Pentecostal Interpretation* (Missouri: AIA Publications, 1946), 4.

Matt. 13:31-33: He told them another parable: "The **kingdom of heaven** is like a mustard seed, …" He told them still another parable: "The **kingdom of heaven** is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."	**Luke 13:18-21:** Then Jesus asked, "What is the **kingdom of God** like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed,..." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the **kingdom of God** to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."
Matt. 19:14: Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for **the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."**	**Mark 10:13-16:** He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for **the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."** (cf. Luke 18:16-17).
Matt. 19:23-24: Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the **kingdom of heaven**." Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the **kingdom of God**."	**Mark 10:23-25:** Jesus … said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the **kingdom of God!**" … It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the **kingdom of God.**" (cf. Luke 18:23-25)

Other terms used to designate the kingdom of God include: "my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29), "the kingdom of our father David" (Mark 11:10), "kingdom of the Son of Man" (Matt. 13:41), "my [Jesus'] kingdom" (Luke 22:30), "kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5), "kingdom of light" (Col. 1:12), "kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13), "His kingdom" (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 4:1), "His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18), "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11) and "kingdom of our Lord and his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). The prominence of the kingdom of God in 'Jesus', teaching and that of the Apostles cannot be over-emphasised. It is the subject of most of Jesus' parables. It is a major theme of the book of Acts, which begins and ends with an emphasis on the kingdom of God (1:3, 6; 28:23, 31). In the epistles, it is referred to seventeen times.

The History of Interpretation of the Kingdom

Throughout the history of the Christian church, two general interpretations of the kingdom of God have prevailed—one emphasising the futuristic or eschatological nature and the other stressing the present sense of the kingdom. Philo (25 BCE), based on the present sense of the kingdom, identified the kingdom of God with the national kingdom of Israel. Four main views of the kingdom of God emerged during the patristic era. The first emerged in the 1st century due to apocalyptic, futuristic, or eschatological interpretation of the kingdom. It was developed by the Apostles and influenced the thought of most Apostolic Fathers, because of their personal association with the Apostles. According to this view, the kingdom of God was solely dependent on God's merciful love towards humanity. This means that God will redeem his people in the future through the judgement of worldly kingdoms, destruction of God's enemies and the reversal of the present world order. This view was dominant in the first century. Clement of Rome (30-97 AD), for example wrote about the disciples going forth "with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come" (1 Clement 42:3) and that "the promise of Christ is great and marvelous, even the rest of the kingdom that shall be and of life eternal" (2 Clement 5:5). He also spoke of "Awaiting the kingdom" (2 Clement 12:1).

Origen rejected the eschatological interpretation and contended for a literal interpretation which resulted in a "spiritual" or "allegorical" definition of the kingdom. According to Origen, the kingdom is "the apprehension of divine truth and spiritual reality, as the indwelling of the Logos, or 'as the spiritual doctrine of the ensouled Logos imparted through Jesus Christ.'"[213] This view claims that God's kingdom is *autobasileia,* a "self-kingdom," that is Christ himself.[214] Origen redefined the kingdom of God as a reign in the heart of the believer when he wrote, "Moreover, that all [people] are not without communion with God, is taught in the Gospel thus, by the Saviour's words: 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! but the kingdom

[213] Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 157.
[214] Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi*, 104.

of God is within you.'"[215] By this statement, he was contending that the kingdom of God does not come for all to see, but it is within and as such God reigns in each of his holy ones. This is a clear abstract expression of the kingdom of God as the reign of God in one's soul.

In 313 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine declared that Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire. With time, the church began to identify itself with the kingdom of God. The political view of the kingdom emerged in the 4th century by which the establishment of a Christian Roman Empire under Constantine was considered as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy about the kingdom of God. The phrase "one God, one Logos, one Emperor, one Empire" became common in the church. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-331AD) argued that God established his kingdom on earth through the Empire. In this sense, the emperor was the son of man who possessed the power to rule both the state and the church. In the East, this view prevailed until 1453; in the West, it prevailed till 1806.[216]

A fourth view, an ecclesiastical kingdom, was developed by Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430AD). For Augustine, "the kingdom of God was a supernatural entity whose presence can dimly be perceived in the time between the first and the second comings."[217] He regarded the kingdom as a present reality and identified it with the visible church.[218] By identifying the church with the kingdom, Augustine was saying that the millennial reign has been inaugurated with Christ's First Advent. It follows that there would be no future fulfillment of the millennial kingdom.

The medieval church largely subscribed to Augustine's teaching that the kingdom of God was the visible church of their day. As a result, the church and state were merged as one body. The church exercised "power in the political, economic, and military realms."[219] The priests controlled

[215] Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and Arthur C. Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Fathers of the Third Century* Vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo Classic, 2007), 254.
[216] Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi*, 104.
[217] Mafikiri, *Christ as the Mangi*, 105.
[218] Dilling, *The Kingdom of God*, 13.
[219] David K. Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine: The Post-Apostolic Age to Middle Ages (A.D 100-1500)* Vol. 1 (Hazelwood, MO: Word Alame Press, 1956), 238.

the church and ruled over the lives of the people.[220] The consequences were tragic. The church lost its moral power and became secularised as it craved for secular power. The church also fought many battles and killed innocent people in order to protect its land. As time went on, the church identified its hierarchical institution with the kingdom of God.

The Reformers identified the kingdom of God with the invisible (or ideal) church and contended that the kingdom was primarily a religious concept. They also argued that the kingdom of God is in the hearts of believers. Therefore, the "invisible church" in this context refers to a group of people whose lives are completely ruled by God. They posited that some people are part of the visible church but do not belong to the kingdom of God because their lives are not ruled by God. Calvin propounded that the kingdom is the realisation of God's rule among the redeemed in and through Christ. He subscribed to a Christocratic theology of the kingdom of God. He thought in the present age the kingdom manifests itself in theocratic societies of the kingdom as the rule of Christ. In Geneva, Switzerland, Calvin ensured that the church had control over all affairs of the society. This was done by ensuring that the city councils were represented by church members. This way, Calvin ensured that community life was based on kingdom principles.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the meaning of the kingdom of God was fiercely debated.[221] Liberal theologians entirely ignored Jesus' eschatological teachings and placed all the emphasis on his ethical teachings. They replaced "other-worldliness" with "this-worldliness" and the blessed hope of eternal life with the social hope of a kingdom of God exclusively of this world. Influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Albert Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack propounded an evolutionary view of the kingdom (liberal social kingdom) according to which the kingdom must not be equated with the church. According to this view, the kingdom of God is at work in the evolutionary progress of human history and it will finally reach the highest levels of civilisation and moral society. For Ritschl, the kingdom signifies "the moral unification of the

[220] Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, 238.

[221] Much has been discussed on the debate in Chapter 3. We shall only give a summary here.

human race, through action prompted by universal love to our neighbor."[222] It was the moral perfection of the Christian life which we attain by fulfilling our vocation as members of the kingdom of God. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) held the moral/ethical kingdom (the reign of moral law) view. This idea led to the religious ideology of humanism which teaches that humanity can solve the problems of the world through science and human reason, apart from the help of God.

The twentieth century witnessed many scholarly debates regarding the nature of the kingdom of God. At the beginning of the century, Weiss and Schweitzer rejected the evolutionary kingdom view and taught that the kingdom of God had not yet come; it was only in the future. Thus, they argued for an eschatological, futuristic, and even apocalyptic kingdom. Walter Rauschenbusch (d. 1918) taught that "the kingdom of God is the quintessential doctrine of Christianity."[223] He associated the kingdom with "human society Christianized by education and social legislation."[224] "The kingdom is not a matter of saving human atoms, but of saving the social organism. It is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven."[225] Lewis and Demarest outline Rauschenbusch's concept of the nature of the kingdom as follows:[226]

1. The domain of the kingdom is not heaven (the other-worldly Greek outlook) but the earthly social situation (the this-worldly Hebrew outlook).
2. The enlargement of the kingdom occurs via the forces of evolutionary development.
3. The task of the kingdom is not saving souls or establishing churches but Christianising social customs and institutions.
4. Membership in the kingdom is not restricted to a select minority but

[222] Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, edited by H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Clifton, N.J.: Reference Book Publishers, reprint, 1966), 280.
[223] Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 320.
[224] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 320.
[225] As cited in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 320.
[226] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 320.

embraces the whole of humanity.

5. [T]he goal of the kingdom is the unity of all humankind. Rauschenbusch claimed that often in history the church has been an impediment to the kingdom, in that it diverted energy and resources from this-worldly problems to other-worldly interests.

Dodd (in the mid-1930s) reacting to the 'futurist' eschatology propounded by Schweitzer and others proposed the "realised kingdom view" which holds that the kingdom of God is already present. By this approach, Jesus' teachings about a coming kingdom are not to be taken literally. Barth propounded the transcendental kingdom view which stresses the alienness of the kingdom and locates eschatology within the framework of God's eternal otherness (transcendence), which intersects time and subverts human hopes. For Bultmann, the kingdom as the reign of God is present rather than future.

George E. Ladd, Craig Blaising, Anthony Hoekema, Vern Poythress and Darrell Bock also proposed an inaugurated kingdom view which states that the kingdom is a present reality working towards a future consummation. Inaugurated Eschatology views the doctrine of last things in the broader context of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is "Now and not yet." This view seems to align more with the biblical data than the others and it is affirmed in this book. There is a sense in which the kingdom has come but there is still a future kingdom to await. Inaugurated Eschatology is an alternative both to the completely futurist interpretation of Classic Dispensationalism and to the completely-spiritualist interpretation of Covenantal Amillennialism. Hoekema notes that even though most of the prophecies in the Old Testament, concerning God's coming kingdom are fulfilled in the New Testament, there are still some prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled.[227] According to Ladd,

> For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was the dynamic rule of God which had invaded history in his own person and mission to bring [people] in the present age the blessings of the messianic age, and which would manifest itself yet again at the end of the age to bring this

[227] Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 1.

same messianic salvation to its consummation.[228]

Ladd proposes both present and future dimensions of the kingdom. For him, God's rule is present, inward, and spiritual, being realised as people repent and believe the word of God (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; Luke 17:21). God's rule is also future, outward and apocalyptic, to be revealed in power and glory when the King returns to judge and reign (Matt. 8:11; 2 Peter 1:11). We shall discuss this view further, later in this chapter.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. represents a Promise-Fulfillment Theology. He considers "the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as one of promise to fulfillment."[229] Kaiser posits that God gave a single promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David (Acts 26:6; Rom. 4:13, 16; Gal. 3:29; Eph. 2:12; Heb. 6:13, 15, 17) which has many specifications or plural "promises" (Rom. 9:4; 15:8; 2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 7:6). He further confirms "the rule, reign and realm of God over all beings, all nations, and all creation."[230] Kaiser divides God's single kingdom into the present and spiritual dimension (the reign of God in the hearts of believers of all ages) and the future and national dimension (the consummation of the kingdom in the millennial rule of Christ). Thus, like Ladd, Kaiser holds both soteriological (present) and eschatological (future) views of the kingdom.

Berkhof rejects the idea that the kingdom is the reign of God restored in theocratic Israel ("a kingdom of Israel"). For him, the kingdom of God is that rule of God that is established and acknowledged in the hearts of repentant sinners as a result of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit.[231] This rule, he argues, finds its realisation in principle on earth, but will only come to its culmination when Christ finally returns in glory in the sight of everyone.[232] Like Ladd, Berkhof regards God's kingdom as already present; he considers eternal life as realised in principle, the Spirit as the earnest of the heavenly inheritance and believers as already seated

[228] George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 307.

[229] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* Vol. 3, 318.

[230] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, edited by John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988), 307.

[231] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 629.

[232] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 629.

with Christ in heavenly places.[233] However, the present realisation of the kingdom is only spiritual and invisible, awaiting its final consummation in the future. Summarising, Berkof's kingdom eschatology rests on three basic foundations: The kingdom is (1) the rule or reign of God, (2) a present kingdom already at work in the world and into which people are now entering and (3) a future kingdom into which the righteous will enter at the end of the age.

At the heart of the meaning of the kingdom of God is Christ's authority and rule as a reward for his redemptive obedience (Phil. 2:5-11). In the kingdom of God, all knees shall bow to Christ and all tongues shall confess that Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. This means that the kingdom of God must witness the full authority of Christ over creation. The extraordinary obedience of Christ portrayed in the above passage is purposed to bring about redemption. For this reason, Hoekema argues that the kingdom of God is "the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of his people from sin and demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and new earth."[234] Hoekema further describes it as, "the inauguration of the great drama of history and the ushering in of the New Age."[235] Similarly, George Ladd defines the kingdom of God as "God's breaking into the humanity to establish his reign and advance his purpose."[236]

William Symington agrees with Hoekema at least on the above point and in addition, links Christ's mediatory role to his kingdom:

> The sovereign authority of Christ may be viewed either as necessary, or as official. Viewing him as God, it is necessary, inherent, and underived: viewing him as Mediator, it is official and delegated. It is the latter of these that we are now to contemplate. The subject of our present inquiry is, the MEDIATORIAL DOMINION of the Son; not that which essentially belongs to him as God, but that with which, by the authoritative act of the Father, he has been officially invested as the Messiah. It is that government, in short, which was laid upon

[233] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 737.
[234] Hoekma, *The Bible and the Future.*
[235] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future.*
[236] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament,*

> his shoulders, that power which was given unto him in heaven and earth.[237]

At least we can deduce two points from Symington's submission. First, the kingdom of God is not simply Jesus ruling as God but Christ the mediator, the God-human reigning over a kingdom of grace. In this sense, Christ can be seen as "a soteriological King." This soteriological kingship was necessitated by the Fall of humanity (Gen. 3). The Fall of humanity made God reveal his plan of redemption. Thus, in Gen. 3:15, God prophesied that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the seed of the Serpent. Second, Symington draws attention to the fact that the seed was supposed to be God-human. It was only God-human that could pay the highest price required for human redemption and at the same time represent humanity in paying for their sins. Therefore, the kingdom deals mainly with God's activity in this world and the salvation of humanity. The kingdom aims to provide salvation for humanity and to deliver humanity from the powers of evil (See 1 Cor. 15:23-28). The kingdom of God is to re-establish the rule of God which existed before the Fall. Had the Fall not occurred, there would have been a worldwide civilisation living in direct fellowship and communication with God and the entire humanity would have constituted a kingdom under the direct loving rule of God. In the redemptive work of Christ is found the inauguration of the kingdom.

In Hodge's opinion the "kingdom of God" may refer to heaven (the future state of bliss), the external or visible church (as consisting of those who profess to acknowledge Christ as their king) or the invisible church (consisting of those in and over whom Christ actually reigns).[238]

Ryrie identifies four aspects of the kingdom theme in Scripture:[239] (1) "the universal kingdom," which has to do with God's rule over the entire world; (2) "the Davidic kingdom," which pertains to Messianic rule on David's throne; (3) "the mystery form of the kingdom," which refers to the church between Christ's first and second advents; and (4) "the spiritual kingdom," which is God's rule over believers in the church age.

[237] William Symington, *Messiah the Prince or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ* (Pittsburgh: Christian Statesman Press, 1999), 3.

[238] Hodge, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3

[239] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1986), 536.

The Kingdom as both Eternal and Existing in History

The kingdom of God is eternal because it endures from eternity past into eternity future. The Bible describes God's kingdom as enduring from everlasting to everlasting (cf. Dan. 2:44, 7:18, Ps. 145:13). Yet, the kingdom of God has emerged in human history. For example, the angel who visited Mary to inform her about her son, Jesus, told her that "the Lord God will give him[Jesus] the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33). This means that the kingdom is expected to be manifested in human history.

This manifestation of the kingdom in history, according to J. Rodman Williams, is tripartite in nature: its preparation, its establishment, and its completion.[240] The preparatory stage involves God's rule over Israel (as theocratic king) and also overall creation as demonstrated in the Old Testament. This kingdom prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. In Daniel 2:44-45 and 7:13-14, Daniel predicted a future kingdom and tied the kingdom with the coming Redeemer. The new covenant in Jer. 31:31-32, 33-34 is full of eschatological overtones. This can also be seen in God's promise of restoration after the captivity (See Jer. 23:3; Is.11:11). The restoration was to be premised on Israel's repentance and rededication to God's service (Ezek. 36: 24-28; Is. 24-27). The kingdom was established (inaugurated) in the ministry of Christ. Presently, Christ establishes his kingdom reign in the lives of those who will repent and believe the gospel (cf. Mark 1:15). Believers experience part of what God's final kingdom reign will be like— they have some measure of victory over sin (Rom. 6:14; 14:17), over demonic opposition (Luke 10:17) and over disease (Luke 10:9) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Rom. 8:4–17; 14:17). The completion of the kingdom will take place in the millennial rule of Christ which accompanies his Second Coming (cf. Rev. 11:15, 1 Cor. 15:24–28).

John the Baptist and the Kingdom of God

We have already established that the Jews in Jesus' day were expectant

[240] J. Rodman Williams, "*Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective,* Three Volumes in One, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 289-295.

of the dawning of God's rule characterised by peace, righteousness and justice. John the Baptist came at a time when God was far removed from the Jews. There was a period of prophetic silence of four hundred years. During these years there was no prophetic revelation and everyone was afraid of what may happen. The New Testament presents John the Baptist as one sent to prepare the way for the coming Christ. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets. As the New Testament opens, we hear John the Baptist preaching about the kingdom, saying: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2-3). John used this sermon to announce to the people that Jesus would soon begin his kingdom ministry. John was pointing to the fact that the Messiah's mission was one of separation: those who repent would be saved while those who refuse to repent would be judged.[241]

John perceived the ministry of the Messiah as twofold, comprising gathering what is good and burning what is bad: "the coming Messiah would both 'gather his wheat into the granary" and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12)."[242] John's ministry, therefore, was geared towards alerting the people that God was about to take the long awaited and expected action— the coming of the Messiah to establish his kingdom.

John baptised repentant Jews with water to get them ready for the soon-coming kingdom. People were then to repent and accept baptism as a way of preparing them to embrace the kingdom.[243] He also announces another baptism—the baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit— which will be administered by Christ (Luke 3:16).[244] Baptism by fire carries the idea of an impending judgement that will purge and refine the righteous and consume the wicked as well. Baptism of the Spirit refers to the indwelling of the Spirit who is the invisible and enabling power of God, God's empowering presence. The Old Testament prophets prophesied this kind of baptism (Isa. 11: 1-2; 61:1-3; Joel 2: 28-29; Ezek. 36: 26-27).

[241] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* 42.
[242] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 42.
[243] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 35.
[244] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* 34

The Kingdom as Present and Future

Jesus' message was basically about the kingdom of God/heaven. The question as to whether Jesus preached a kingdom that is past or present or both has been fiercely debated by theologians. Upon careful inspection of the biblical data, the evidence is that, the kingdom is both present and future. Jesus' teachings and the rest of the New Testament present the kingdom in two phases: present (a kingdom that has come) and future (a kingdom that is coming), or a kingdom both "yet and not yet" —it has come but not yet in its full state. Jesus separated the present kingdom from the future kingdom. The arrival of this kingdom, its continuation and final consummation are essential aspects of Biblical Eschatology.

Jesus' announcement of the coming kingdom echoed that of John: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15, NKJV).[245] Whereas John preaches that the kingdom was near (about to come), Jesus preaches that the time predicted by the Old Testament prophets was now fulfilled. His teachings betray the spiritual realisation and the universal character of the kingdom.[246] He revealed a measure of the kingdom formerly unknown and greatly increased the present blessings of the kingdom.[247] Jesus took hold of Old Testament eschatological expectations and made them prominent in his teachings. Two passages are cited. In Jesus' manifesto at Nazareth (Luke 4:18-20), he read Isaiah's prophecy about the coming Messiah to proclaim the year of the Lord. He declared: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel …" (Luke 4:18-20). A six-fold agenda of Jesus' ministry can be identified in this passage:

1. He would preach the gospel to the poor.
2. He would heal the brokenhearted.
3. He would proclaim liberty to the captives.
4. He would proclaim recovery of sight to the blind.
5. He would free the oppressed.

[245] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future,* 42.
[246] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 629.
[247] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 629.

6. He would proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

After reading this, Jesus profoundly declared, "Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This means that Christ's kingdom ministry was in the present. The Messianic Age had come (cf. Matt. 11:2-6). In this passage, we find disciples sent by John the Baptist to inquire from Jesus as to whether he was the expected Messiah or the Messiah was yet to come. In his reply, Jesus quotes Isaiah 35:5-6 and indicates to John that Isaiah's messianic prophecy was indeed being fulfilled.[248] That Jesus' ministry was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies is reechoed throughout the Synoptics.[249]

In Miller's view, Jesus' declaration about "fulfillment" contains two main emphases about the kingdom of God.[250]

1. God has acted in history: "The kingdom of God is at hand." God invaded human history in the person of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit.
2. Therefore people must respond to what God has done*:* "Repent and believe the gospel." Every demonstration of the kingdom demands a response. Response to the gospel is twofold: "repentance" and "belief in the gospel." Repentance is directed towards God and faith is directed towards Christ, the subject of the gospel (Acts 20:20-21).

Jesus called attention to the kingdom in these words: "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:14-15). At another time, Jesus announced to some Pharisees that the kingdom had come: "The kingdom of God is in your midst" (NASB). On another occasion, Jesus, after he had driven a demon out of a man, said, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt.12:28). More so, Jesus taught that the kingdom is a present realm of blessing into which the humble believer may enter through repentance (Matt. 21:31; cf. 23:13; Luke 11:52).

As noted earlier, the coming of the kingdom was not a new teaching

[248] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 63.
[249] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 63.
[250] Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power*, 68-69.

about God; it was a new reality of God in the person of Jesus, bringing to humankind what the prophets predicted in the eschatological kingdom. Jesus taught that his coming into the world ushered the kingdom of God into the midst of humanity. The kingdom is the redemption of God's people from sin, demonic powers and death and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. He stressed that the Spirit of God is already working and so the kingdom is present. Jesus is the Strongman who binds Satan, plundering his kingdom.

But Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. (Matt.12:28-32)

In addition to disarming of Satan, Jesus' acts of forgiveness of sins (Lk. 10: 20; Matt.11: 15), the healing and exorcism conducted by Jesus and that of his disciples (Matt.12: 28, Matt.11:5; 15:30-31; cf. Isa.35:5-6; 61:1) were signs that the messianic age had come (Lk.11:20).

According to the teachings of Jesus, the kingdom of God is established to fulfil the mission of God. In Matt. 24:14, Jesus summed up God's plan to fulfill that goal: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come." Miller sees in this verse, God's tripartite plan for achieving his mission: It involves "preaching the gospel in kingdom power."[251] The manifestation of this power will lead to deliverance from bondage of sin, the control of demonic powers and so on. It also involves "preaching the gospel in every part of the world (Gk. *oikoumeme*, the inhabitable earth) (cf. Acts 1:8)"[252] and "preaching the gospel to every nation (Gk. *ethne,* ethnic

[251] Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power*, 69.
[252] Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power,* 70.

grouping) (cf. Rev.5:9; 7:9)."[253] This is an aspect that Jesus fulfilled and the apostles continued. In our time, the manifestation of the power of the kingdom is seen in the mission of the church through preaching, healing, exorcism and other works in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, Jesus also teaches that certain aspects of the kingdom had not yet arrived. This is explicitly taught in the Lord's Prayer as we pray: "Thy kingdom come" (Matt.6:10, KJV). Hoekema notes, "We are in the kingdom, and yet we look forward to its full manifestation; we share its blessings yet await its total victory; we thank God for having brought us into the kingdom…..and yet we continue to pray, "Thy Kingdom Come."[254] Jesus presented the kingdom as the hope of the future appearance of that kingdom in the external glory and with the perfect blessings of salvation. The arrival of the kingdom constitutes the initial phase of the great end-time drama. What this means is that the kingdom has a future dimension to be accomplished as well. In other words, even though it has been established, its fullness shall not be realised until at the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper point to this future expression of the kingdom: "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God" (Mk 14:25, cf. Matt.26:28-29). The future kingdom will come at the end of the Age when the Son of Man comes in his glory and sits on the throne of judgement to punish the wicked and reward the righteous (Matt. 25:31-46) and the old order gives way to the new accompanied by the rebirth and transformation of the material order.

Hence, the New Testament teaches that the kingdom is here, but yet to come. The last days are here, but yet to come. The fulfillment of history has occurred already, in Christ, but is also not yet, for there is more to come. Thus, the kingdom of God has both fulfillment within history and consummation at the climax of history.[255] The present kingdom is one of faith; the future kingdom of sight but the two are inextricably linked. The tension between the 'already' and 'not yet' is exemplified in the kingdom of God motif.

[253] Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power*, 70.
[254] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future,* 52.
[255] Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 218.

The Church and the Kingdom of God

The relationship between the church and the kingdom of God is of major concern to theologians. There are a number of questions theologians seek to answer: Is the kingdom identical with the church? Or is the kingdom different from the church? What is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church? Protestants distinguish between the visible church and the kingdom because they believe that not all the members of the visible church are part of the kingdom. For Protestantism, insofar as the church is truly under God's reign, it is the kingdom of God. However, the ideal order is never achieved in our human, finite order and so the kingdom must be distinguished from the visible church. The differences have been summarised well by Ladd:

> The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and, derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are the people of God's rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus' disciples belong to the Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of [people].[256]

Miller also points out that "The kingdom of God is greater and more enduring than the church. The kingdom of God stretches from eternity to eternity. It has as its subjects all the saints of all ages, including angels. The church, however, lasts only from Christ's first until his second coming. It has as its members those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit."[257] Ladd goes on to summarise five specific aspects of the relationship between the kingdom and the church:

1. **The church and the kingdom are not the same**. The church and the kingdom are related but different. The kingdom is the invisible sphere of God's rule, reign and action towards human salvation but the church is the visible realm of God, people under his rule. Jesus and the early

[256] Gleaned from Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 111. As cited in Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 753.

[257] Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power,* 11.

Christians preached that the kingdom of God was near, not that the church was near and preached the good news of the kingdom, not the good news of the church: Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

2. **The kingdom creates the church**. The kingdom creates the church in the sense that as people enter into God's kingdom they become joined to the human fellowship of the church. Again, the church was born as a result of the coming of the kingdom into the world. This leads to the fact that the kingdom is bigger than the church. "The kingdom of God is greater … than the church."[258] This point is demonstrated by the parable of drawing a net in which the net (kingdom) catches good and bad fishes (people of mixed fellowship/faith). It can be deduced from this parable that the church is not the ideal people of the kingdom yet because it includes those who are not children of the kingdom. Some people may be in the church that may not be qualified to be in the kingdom.

3. **The church witnesses to the kingdom.** The church is to proclaim the reality of God in the past and future to all nations before the Second Coming of Christ, the King. Jesus' commission of the apostles (Matt. 10) and the mission of the seventy (Lk. 10) was geared towards the goal of mandating the church to witness to the kingdom. The sending of the seventy was symbolic of the mission to the whole world. Indeed, Christ mandated that the gospel be preached to all people. That the church's mission is to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all nations can also be seen in Jesus' words: "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world" (Matt.24:14; Mk.13:10). Jesus addressed the Jews, saying, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). At another time, he said: "I say to you that many will come from the East and the West, and will take their place at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 8:11). This proclamation is to be done in kingdom power made available to all believers through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-8).

[258] Miller, *The Kingdom and the Power,* 11

4. **The church is the instrument of the kingdom.** What this means is that the works of the kingdom are done through the church. This is evidenced in the fact that the Holy Spirit, manifesting the power of the kingdom, works through the disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons, as he did in the ministry of Jesus (Matt.10:8; Lk.10:17). The report of the seventy betrays the fact that the disciples were just instruments of God's kingdom. Jesus' assertion that the gates of Hades shall never prevail against the church (Matt.16:18) he would build means no satanic forces will be able to stand against the church. Therefore, as the instrument of the kingdom, the church has the power to deliver people from the dominion of sin, sickness and death. The signs of this kingdom include the gospel and forgiveness of sins (Lk 10:20; Matt.11:15), the fall of Satan (Lk.10:18), casting out of demons (Matt.12: 28) and performance of miracles (Matt.11:4-5). This is also demonstrable in the Acts of the Apostles when the Apostles are used as instruments to administer the power of the kingdom - power demonstrated through signs and wonders - through the proclamation of the word.

5. **The church is the custodian of the kingdom.** This is evident in Jesus' declaration that the church has been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19). As the custodians of the kingdom, the church is given the privilege of bringing people into the kingdom and keeping them out of the world. Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees: "woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites; you shut the kingdom of heaven against people; for you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter go in" (Matt.23:13). In Acts, Peter excluded Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and Paul excluded Elymas (Acts 13:6–12).

African Kingship and the Kingdom of God

The theology of the kingdom of God can be found in African traditional worldview which considers God as King of all. The African belief in the kingship of God and various theological conclusions from this belief demonstrates a substantive continuity between Christian and African

traditions to pave the way for a Christian theology reflecting an African ethos. Most African traditional societies express belief in "divine kingship" which means Africans believe that the chieftaincy institution was given by God. The biblical idea that earthly authority has a divine origin (Rom. 13:1) seems to support the African view that the Supreme Being is the source of political power. Granted that African chieftaincy institution has divine origin, one can also consider the office of the chief as sacred in that *this office* constitutes a *link between human* and spiritual rule. The idea of divine kingship does not negate the human factor in the selection of kings who may be liable to destoolment. Mbiti talks about the African divine kings and their office:

> Where these rulers are found, they are not simply political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbol of their people's health and welfare. The individuals as such may not have outstanding talents or abilities, but their office is the link between human rule and spiritual government. They are therefore, divine or sacral rulers, the shadow or reflection of God's rule in the universe. People regard them as God's earthly viceroys. They give them highly elevated positions and titles, such as 'saviour', 'protector', 'child of God', 'chief of the divinities', 'lord of earth and life'. People think that they can do what they want, have control over rain, and link them with God as divine incarnation or as originally coming from heaven. They regard their office as having been instituted by God in the *Zamani* [ancient] period.[259]

The idea that African chieftaincy institution reflects God's kingdom goes back to time immemorial. A classic example can be drawn from the dynastic period of Ancient Kamit (Egypt): "The ancient Egyptian pharaohs were God-kings on earth who became gods in their own right at their death…. The 170 or more pharaohs were all part of a line of royalty that stretch back to 3100 BC and forward to the last of the native Pharaohs who died in 343 BC. … They could command resources that many of modern day states would be hard pressed to emulate."[260] In the Akan community

[259] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 182.

[260] P. A. Clayton, *Chronicle of the Pharaohs; The Reign-By-Reign Record of the Rulers and Dynasties of Ancient Egypt* (Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1994), 6.

of Ghana the chief serves as the spiritual head of his community and the intermediary between the living and dead. Occasionally, he enters the *nkonwa dan mu* (the stool room) to offer sacrifices to the ancestors, pour libation and intercede for his people. In this sense he acts as the priest-chief before his ancestors. The sacredness of the chieftaincy office is emphasised by taboos including: the chief must not hit or be hit by anyone; he is not expected to walk briskly, play with other people in public, be seen walking barefooted; his buttocks must never touch the ground, and he must not be insulted by anyone lest something evil will happen to the community.

Other important officials who help the chief in administering their society include queen mothers, subchiefs, councilors, advisers, governors, instructors and religious personages (like priests and diviners). The king maintains his authority over the kingdom through the sub-chiefs and others who help him. Africans believe that earthly kings continue their leadership role in the world of the dead. It is for this reason that some societies bury kings with people to serve as wives and servants in the "otherworld." This belief compares well with the biblical idea that God's rules not only over the present world but also over the world to come. God is the God of both the present world and the world to come. Similarly, the African king is king in this world and in the world he enters after death because his kingdom is of divine origin. The African king however is limited in terms of the jurisdiction of his authority. God is the universal Ruler, the Ruler of all the universe; the human king is however king over a certain geographical area. Yet the human king who rules well executes the will of God in his reign and therefore rules on behalf of God as God's servant.

Conclusion

This chapter has closely examined the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God as God's sovereign rule over his creation. It has been contended that the kingdom is both a present reality and a future expectation. The kingdom of God has come in the person and works of Jesus and in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the fullness of the kingdom will only be experienced when Jesus comes again and establishes his millennial reign

on the earth. The kingdom of God is the dynamic kingship of God, who entered history through Jesus Christ in order to bring to human beings of the present age the blessings of the messianic age. God's kingdom will be manifest again at the end of this age to fulfil this messianic salvation. In African Christianity, every human king is believed to be enthroned by God. When the king dies, his reign continues in the next world, so that the rule does not end with death. Every king who rules well serves God by ruling on God's behalf. A bad king, therefore is a rebel who fails to rule on God's behalf.

Review Exercise

1. Explain the term "kingdom of God."
2. Outline the major signs of the presence of the kingdom of God.
3. What is the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God?
4. Discuss any two of the signs of the presence of the kingdom of God.
5. How does the Old Testament understanding of the kingdom of God compare and contrast with that of the New Testament?
6. How were Albrecht Ritschl and his followers influenced by the writings of Charles Darwin in their concept of the kingdom of God?
7. What are the two phases of the kingdom of God? Explain each.
8. What does it mean to say that "the kingdom of God has appeared in history"?
9. Outline Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God in Matthew 24.
10. How does the understanding of the two phases of the Kingdom help keep believers focused on fulfilling God's will in their lives?
11. How does the chieftaincy institution in your society resemble God's rule over the universe?

Chapter 6

PHYSICAL DEATH

Death is a reality for every member of the human race. Africans, like other people, are much aware that death is inevitable. People die in Africa due to political, health, economic and social reasons, among others. Regardless of whether one is a child, young man or woman, or adult woman or man, he/she shall die one day. This is the certain and immutable injunction of God: "It is appointed to mortals to die once and after that the judgement" (Heb. 9:27). This is the sentence: "… for you are dust and unto dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). This is confirmed to all humans by experience. Apart from Enoch and Elijah, all human beings who have lived in this world have tasted death. The exception, of course might be those who would be alive when Jesus returns to earth; they might be raptured without tasting death. For the time being, every mortal will die at some point. But why must the human being die? To answer this question, different religions have given different reasons for the onset of death. This section of the book examines what the Bible teaches about death.

Meaning of "Death"

Defining death in modern times is not a straightforward issue due to advances in scientific knowledge and technology. Physiologically, death is conceived as a cessation of breath, heartbeat and brain activity.[261] Medical advancement, however, has made this definition somewhat obsolete. Today, life support technologies introduced in the medical field have produced a new kind of patient - one whose brain has ceased to function, but whose

[261] Ebrahim Kazim, *Scientific Commentary of Suratul Faateḥah*, Second Edition (New Delhi : Pharos Media & Publishing, 2010), 116.

heart and lungs continue to work (artificially). E. Owusu-Dapaa rightly points out that, "advances are so cumulative that the standard definition of biological death is being revised constantly within the medical research world, especially in the light of successes with the medical technology of organ transplantation."[262]

In spite of this, we can propose a working definition of physical death (medically), as the irreversible cessation of all heart and circulatory functions, all lung and respiratory functions and all brain functions, including those of the brain stem.[263] Gerald Onyewuchi Onukwugha defines death philosophically as "the cessation of the integrated functioning of the human organism. This disintegration, of course, is like the separation of body and soul."[264] Traditionally understood, death is the power that destroys life and is feared everywhere. In line with this thought, K. A. Opoku remarked that "death is regarded as a wicked destroyer, a killer and a curse, which frustrates human effort."[265] It is in this sense that the Akan of Ghana say *Owuo tiri mu yɛ den* (Death is wicked). Death launches a dreadful attack on the human society and servers and dislocates their relationship with one another. The perennial problem which it presents not only to individuals, but also to societies makes death all the more mysterious, yet humans live with it. Death is also considered as a strong entity and so the Akan say *Owuo kura adeɛ a nkwa ntumi nnye* (When death is holding something, life cannot take it). Here, death is portrayed as stronger than life and so when there is a struggle between death and life over a person death prevails. This understanding of death is also preserved in the Eʋe name *kugblēnu* (death destroys). The human inability to tell when death occurs adds to the mystery of death. Another Eʋe name, *Kumaḍo* (you cannot make a date with death) underscores this. Indeed, death is an inevitable but mysterious phenomenon among Africans.

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[262] E. Owusu-Dapaa, "Euthanasia, Assisted Dying and the Right to Die in Ghana: A Socio- Legal Analysis" *Med Law* 32(4) (2013), 590.

[263] John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics Today* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reform ed,1985), 175-76.

[264] Gerald Onyewuchi Onukwugha *Death and Dying in the African Context*, 2010, accessed April 7, 2016. http://www.nathanielturner.com

[265] Opoku, *West African traditional Religion*, 134.

In the Christian context, "death" has a wide variety of meanings. First, it is the penalty imposed upon the human race due to sin. Second, it refers to physical death which is the temporary separation of the material and immaterial aspects of the human (cf. Gen. 35:18; James 2:26; Phil. 1:21-24; 2 Cor. 5:1-8, 1 Cor. 15:35-58). In other words, it is the separation of the soul/spirit from the body. Third, it refers to the realm of the dead or death as a state, commonly known as an intermediate state. Fourth, it refers to ethical death, as believers are "crucified with Christ," which refers to their separation from the lure of the world, the flesh and the Devil - that is, unresponsiveness to temptations. Fifth, it refers to spiritual death, or the separation or alienation of the individual soul or spirit from communion with God resulting in unresponsiveness to God's revealed will. (cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:3, 8-9; Eph. 2:1, 5) As Gordon and Lewis note, the result of spiritual death is the "loss of fellowship with the Creator, or spiritual alienation, enmity, and estrangement."[266] One can die spiritually (be separated from God) and yet live physically. This is what happened to Adam in Gen. 3. The moment he sinned, he died spiritually, yet he lived physically until he was 930 years old (Gen. 5:5). Paul talks about this kind of death when he says, "Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins" (Eph. 2:1). Sixth, it refers to eternal death or second death, which is the culmination or eternal perpetuation of spiritual death[267] (cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). The first four events precede the Second Advent of Christ while the last two follow it and "are bound up with the consummation of all things."[268] Insofar as this book concerns the destiny of individual Christians (ie. those who have been saved from spiritual death), this chapter will focus only on physical death.

Origin of Physical Death: Natural or Unnatural?

Did death of any kind exist before the fall? Over the years, theologians have debated the original condition of humankind before the fall, as to whether Adam and Eve were created mortal or immortal. How one answers this question determines whether Adam and Eve would have died or not, had

[266] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* Vol. 3, 471.
[267] Lewis and. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* Vol. 3, 471-2.
[268] H. Orthon Willey, *Christian Theology,* Vol. 3 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1958), 212.

they not sinned by disobeying God. One school of thought holds that death is inherent in life, meaning death is part of the life process. Life begins, sprouts, develops, blossoms and matures. At the mature stage, life begins to decay; it fades. Finally, there is death. Pelagius taught that "[humankind] was created mortal, not merely in the sense that he [or she] could fall prey to death, but in the sense that he [or she] was, in virtue of his [or her] creation, under the law of death, and in course of time was bound to die."[269] The 16th century Socinian movement revived the old Pelagian heresy, denying original sin, the transmission of depravity and guilt to posterity and most importantly to the current book, the sentence of death as punishment for sin. This implies that the first human beings were "not only susceptible to death but [were] actually subject to it before [the Fall]."[270] This view rejects the proof for original sin derived from the suffering and death of infants.

Following the lead of Pelagius and the Socinians, Barth in recent years advanced the view that physical death is not the result of sin. Barth recognises the fact that physical death and sin are related and hence death is a sign of God's judgement of human life.[271] Yet, he makes a distinction between the natural and judgement aspects of death. Barth expresses his understanding of the nature of death in the following words:

> … [death] also belongs to human nature, and is determined and ordered by God's good creation and to that extent right and good, that [a person's] being in time should be finite and [humankind] him/herself mortal…. In itself, therefore, it is not unnatural but natural for human life …to run its course to this *terminus ad quem,* to ebb and fade, and therefore to have the forward limit."[272]

This means that death was part of God's creation and not the result of sin. The above position seems to have support from modern day science which stresses that death is the law of organised matter since it carries within it the seed of decay and dissolution. Modern scientific discoveries claim that death occurred before the fall of humans. Scientists have found that humans appear very late in the history of life. According to the fossil record, many

[269] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 669.
[270] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 669.
[271] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1960), III/2, 596-98.
[272] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 632.

creatures died long before humans appeared. Even many species went extinct millions of years previously (the dinosaurs are the most famous example), long before humans lived or sinned.[273]

The biblical view seems to be that physical death was not an original part of the human condition or God's original intention for humankind. According to the Bible, death is not a normal, natural part of life at all. Instead, death is viewed as something foreign, disruptive and hostile to human life. The entrance of death into the human world is the result of sin and disobedience (Gen. 3; 6:5-6). Through the sin of Adam, death came into the human spectrum and this completely spread to the rest of the human race (Rom 5:12). In 1 Corinthians 15:21 Paul says, "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being." The person through whom death came refers to Adam and the one through whom the resurrection of the dead comes is Jesus Christ. In this verse, Paul refers, at least in part, to physical death. Physical death is one of the evils which were countered and overcome by the resurrection of Christ. Erickson persuasively argues that since death was not part of God's creation but "a result of sin, it seems probable that the first humans were created with the possibility of living forever."[274] John Wesley agrees with this view. He notes that "The sin of Adam, without the sins which we afterward committed, brought us death."[275]

This, however, is not to say that Adam and Eve were inherently immortal or that they would by virtue of their nature have lived forever. The point rather is that "if they had not sinned, they could have partaken of the tree of life and thus have received everlasting life."[276] In this sense, it can be said that Adam and Eve were created with contingent immortality. This means that they could have lived forever, but it was not guaranteed that they would live forever. Or that they were created mortal, but they could achieve immortality by obedience. Adam and Eve were punished with physical

[273] N.T. Wright, "Did death occur before the Fall?" Assessed at http://biologos.org/common-questions/human-origins/death-before-the all/#sthash.DQJ6WIh8.dpuf on 2/4/16.

[274] Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 377.

[275] Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Childs (eds.), *A Compend of Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 114.

[276] Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 377.

death by being banished from the garden lest they should eat of the tree of life and live forever (Gen. 3: 22-24). Finally, God condemns humankind to death: "Dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3: 19; cf. Gen. 3: 22-24).

Death, then, is not something natural but something foreign and hostile to humans. The following biblical facts refute the Pelagian position (discussed above). First, "[humankind] was created in the image of God and this, in view of the perfect condition in which the image of God existed originally, would seem to exclude the possibility of his carrying within him the seeds of dissolution and mortality."[277] Second, Scripture does not represent physical death as the natural result of the continuation of the original condition of humankind, due to human failure to rise to the height of immortality by the path of obedience.[278] Rather, physical death is presented as the result of spiritual death (Rom. 6:23; 5:21; 1 Cor. 15:56; Jas. 1:15). Third, death is not represented as something natural in the life of humanity, a mere falling short of the ideal, but very decidedly as something foreign and hostile to human life: it is an expression of divine anger (Ps. 90:7, 11), a judgement (Rom. 1:32), a condemnation (Rom. 5:16) and a curse (Gal. 3:13) and fills the hearts of human beings with dread and fear, just because it is felt to be something unnatural.[279]

A brief comment about the African eschatological beliefs about the source of death is necessary at this point. When the Akan say *Nyame nkuu wo a wonwui* (If God hasn't killed you, you are not dead yet) they are pointing to the fact that death occurs only when God allows it. In the literal sense they are saying that it is God who kills and for that matter, he is the one who gives life. Sickness, hunger, disaster are all ways by which people lose their lives.

The Nature of Physical Death

First, death is not annihilation. In Scripture physical death does not mean annihilation but the separation of the spirit from the body (Jas. 2:26). It was

[277] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 669.
[278] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 669.
[279] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 669.

not existence which was forfeited by the original sin. As mentioned earlier, death is the separation of the soul/spirit from the body and in the spiritual sense, the separation of the soul/spirit from the presence of God. Second, death is not a punishment to believers but to the unbeliever, it is the original penalty of sin. When a believer dies we must not conceive of it as a form of a sentence. However, physical death falls upon the unbeliever as the original penalty of sin, to all who are united in Christ, it loses its aspect of a penalty and becomes a means of discipline and of entrance into eternal life among other benefits. The psalmist says "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). It is true that the penalty for sin is death. Yet, that penalty no longer applies to us—not in terms of physical death and not in terms of spiritual death or separation from God because, as Paul puts it, there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Third, death is the end of moral or spiritual development. When one dies, there is no more opportunity for any further moral or spiritual development. After death, there is judgement (Heb. 9:27). This is evident in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in which the destiny of the rich man was determined at death without any chance of possible change (Luke 16).

The Abolition of Death's Penalty

According to Paul, sin was introduced into the world by one person, Adam. This sin in turn introduced death which passed upon all people, for that all have sinned (Rom. 5:12).[280] He also teaches "death as a penalty is abolished in Christ."[281] Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgement came upon all people to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all people. Romans gives a comparison between Jesus' First and Second Comings unto justification of life (Rom. 5:18). Death as a penalty, whether considered physically or spiritually, is abolished by Christ. Christ came into the world to conquer and destroy death. Writing about Christ, the writer of Hebrews says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (2:14-15,

[280] Willey, *Christian Theology Vol. 3*, 213.
[281] Willey, *Christian Theology Vol. 3,* 213.

NIV). This passage points to the fact that through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, he won a great victory over death. "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him" (Rom. 6:9). Death is at once the first enemy and the last enemy that shall be destroyed— such is the infinite sweep of this great salvation.

According to Willey, there are two ways in which Christ abolished death.[282] First, death is abolished provisionally for all humankind when Christ underwent the curse of the Law and received the sentence of condemnation. By his crucifixion, Christ tasted death for every human being (Heb. 2:9), and thus removed the condemnation from the race. Second, death is actually abolished for all believers in Christ. This abolition is conditional, for it is only experienced by those who have expressed faith in Christ. For this reason, the Bible says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36, see also 2 Tim. 1:10). The abolition is also gradual, "even as the revelation of the death from which we are saved is gradual"[283] and will only be completed on the day that every trace of death shall be removed from God's creation.

In this gradual abolition of death, we may note the following stages. First of all, physical death is now bound up with the divine purpose concerning the destiny of humankind. Secondly, "Christian death becomes a part of the probationary discipline of believers, and is hallowed as a ground of fellowship with Christ"[284] (2 Tim. 2:11). Third, physical death for the Christian is now transfigured into a simple departure from this life to another (2 Cor. 5:1, 4). The biblical idea of life and death is relational, not a question of existence or nonexistence.

Why Must Believers Still Die?

The foregone discussion raises some questions. Why must believers still die? How come death still reigns and has legitimacy over the state of

[282] Willey, *Christian Theology Vol. 3* 213.
[283] Willey, *Christian Theology Vol. 3* 213.
[284] Willey, *Christian Theology vol. 3,* 214.

believers whose penalty for sin has been paid by Christ? Why couldn't believers ascend to heaven at the end of their earthly days without going through the painful process of physical death? There are many reasons for which Christians may have to die. First, death gives entrance into the new life. The Heidelberg Catechism states: "Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life."[285] Here satisfaction means the recompense for sin demanded by the Law. As noted earlier such recompense has been paid by Christ and so no one needs to pay it again. The word abolishing, in this context, refers to dying to, destroying, or putting an end to something. Also, eternal life refers to the blissful state of existence enjoyed forever by believers in heaven. Thus, the Catechism points to the fact that for the Christian, death marks the point at which we enter directly into the presence of Christ (Phil. 1:21–23). The death of Christians is holy and precious to God. When a Christian dies, God receives their spirit into heaven, where they are comforted until the resurrection. Therefore, though not welcome and certainly an enemy, death is a gateway to a blessed end. It is the door through which one enters into the new/eternal life, the method by which he/she receives the resurrection which follows, a new and glorified body as the eternal habitation of his/her redeemed soul/spirit.

Second, death is part of God's training and discipline to complete the believer's sanctification. The experience of physical death is related to other results of the fall that harm our physical bodies and signal the presence of death in the world.[286] Aging, illnesses, injuries and natural disasters—such as floods, violent storms and earthquakes— are experienced by believers and unbelievers alike. God uses sickness, suffering and death as a means by which we grow in our faith. For this reason, the Bible says "The Lord disciplines those he loves…. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it is painful! But afterward, there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." (Heb. 12:5-13, NLT). Death, like illness, is one of the means that God uses to lead us into maturity. Sometimes God uses these things, like the fear of death, to correct wrong in

[285] Joel R. Beeke, Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1999), 78.

[286] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 811.

our lives (1 Cor.11:30). At other times, he uses them to strengthen positive qualities. Jesus, who was without sin, "learned obedience **through what he suffered**" (Heb. 5:8) and was made perfect **"through suffering"** (Heb. 2:10). In view of this, Grudem asserts that "we should see all the hardship and suffering that comes to us in life as something that God brings to us to do us good, strengthening our trust in him, leading to our obedience, and ultimately increasing our ability to glorify [him]."[287]

Third, death may serve the purpose of the sanctification of God's people. When someone expresses belief in Christ, he/she is saved from the penalty of sins. As he/she lives in this world the power of sin is broken for him/her to live holier and holier day in out. However, the sanctification process does not end until death occurs. The death of believers must therefore be regarded as the culmination of the chastisements which God has ordained for the sanctification of God's children. Berkhof shares this view when he notes:

> While death in itself remains a real natural evil for the children of God, something unnatural, which is dreaded by them as such, it is made subservient in the economy of grace to their spiritual advancement and to the best interests of the Kingdom of God. The very thought of death, bereavements through death, the feeling that sicknesses and sufferings are harbingers of death, and the consciousness of the approach of death, — all have a very beneficial effect on the people of God. They serve to humble the proud, to mortify carnality, to check worldliness and to foster spiritual-mindedness.[288]

Fourth, God uses the experience of death to complete our union with Christ. Union with Christ in suffering includes union with him in death as well (Phil. 3:10). Through death, the believer imitates Christ in what he did and thereby experiences a closer union with him. As fellow heirs with Christ, Christians must suffer with Jesus so that they may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:17; see also 1 Pet. 4:13, Heb. 12:2, 1 Pet. 2:21). For this reason, Paul says "to die is to be with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

[287] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 812.
[288] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 670-671.

A Christian Attitude towards the Event of Death

(a) Attitude towards Our Own Death: In the New Testament, we are encouraged to view our own death (as Christians) not with fear but with joy at the prospect of going to be with Christ. Paul says, "We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8). He also says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." (Phil. 1:21–23, ESV) Christians should not live in the lifelong bondage of fear of death like unbelievers because the blood of Jesus has delivered us. (Heb. 2:15) This deliverance should take away from us the fear of death that haunts the minds of unbelievers. For the Christian, death is not the end, but the beginning of a new perfect life. They enter death with the assurance that its sting has been removed (1 Cor. 15:55) and that it is for them the gateway of heaven. The conclusion then is that even though death is a painful experience, Christians need not fear it.

(b) **Attitude towards Death of Christian Friends and Relatives:** The death of a Christian friend or relative, will lead to the experience of genuine sorrow. Such an experience of sorrow is not wrong. Mourning deeply over the death of a loved one does not necessarily indicate that one lacks faith. After all, Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35); Paul would have had "sorrow upon sorrow" if Epaphroditus had died (Phil. 2:27). However, Christians must not grieve like the worldly "who has no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). Our sorrow must be mixed with joy that the dead has gone to be with the Lord. Our mourning should be mixed with worship of God and thanksgiving for the life of the loved one who has died just like King David and Job did when their children died (2 Sam. 12:20, Job 1:20-21). A Christian who has lost a Christian friend or relative can rest in the promise that there will be a future reunion. At the time of the resurrection, all who have accepted Christ will be glorified and given incorruptible bodies (1 Cor. 15:42–44; John 11:25); there will be a reunion in heaven.

(c) Attitude towards Death of Unbelievers: The death of an unbeliever leads to sorrow. This sorrow is not mixed with the joy of assurance that the person was saved while alive. The Apostle Paul had great and deep sorrow over his own people Israel, who had rejected Christ. He said, "my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my ." (Rom. 9:1-3, NRSV) After death, we often cannot be absolutely sure that the dead persisted in refusal to trust in Christ all the way to the point of death. In spite of this, it would be wrong to give any indication to others that we think that person has gone to heaven since such an assurance would diminish the need of those living to trust in Christ. In such circumstances, it is very helpful to speak with genuine thankfulness about the good qualities that we have noticed and been encouraged by the life of the person who has died. King David did this when King Saul had died (2 Sam. 1:19-25).

Eschatological ideas in African Funeral Rites

In chapter one, we made the point that African eschatological beliefs inform African people's dying, death and funeral rites. For example, Africans bury their dead with food items, cooking utensils, clothes and money, among others because of the belief that the dead need these items for their journey and to stay in the land of the dead. The African practice of washing the corpse, shaving it or plaiting the hair and decorating it with beautiful clothes not only serves to dignify the deceased, but also makes him/her presentable in the land of the dead. Just as the living dresses nicely for earthly journeys so the dead must be dressed nicely for the journey into the "other" world. Again, African funerals are performed elaborately with the view that the acceptance of the spirit of the dead into the land of the living-dead depends partly on the success of his/her funeral in terms of the number of attendees (sympathisers). On the way to the grave, several gunshots are fired and traditional drums are beaten to announce to the ancestors that one of their own is on his/her way coming so they may come and accept him/her. Similar to the Christian belief in resurrection, Africans believe that the dead may visit the home of his/her living family; therefore, the dead person

is buried with his/her legs pointing to the road/path leading to the town or village in which the living family lives. In this section, we consider two key areas of African funeral rites which have something to reveal about African traditional eschatological beliefs. These areas are African dirges and widowhood rites. Dirges are sung during the funeral of Africans. In this regard, they are associated with the mourning rites that take place even before the burial of the dead. Widowhood rites are performed after the burial of the deceased spouse. Widowhood rites are generally meant to set the departed at peace so that they do not have to return to hunt the living spouse.

Eschatological Thoughts in Selected African Dirges

The word *dirge* is derived from the Latin imperative form, *dirige*, of the verb *dirigere*, which means to "lead" or "direct". The imperative *dirige* was the first word of an antiphon in *Officium Defunctorum*[289] (the Office of the Dead) adapted from Psalm 5:8: "Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make straight your way before me" (ASV). In modern English, the word "dirge" refers to a category of poems referred to as elegy or lament.[290] However, J. H. Nketia points out a useful distinction between a lament and dirges:

> An interesting feature of the lament ... is its tendency to generalize- to see particular events of death in terms of fate or mortality in general, to state general truths, to use aphorisms in our collected texts of dirges, such generalizations are not common. The emphasis is on particular events. There is a tendency to reflect individual deceased persons, particular bereaved mourners, and particular situations rather than on mortality in general or particular situations. The dirge is more interested in saying something to the deceased person, in mentioning the fare of a particular person than in what death can do.[291]

Dirges are often sung round the corpse (or round the house in which the

[289] The *Officium Defunctorum* is a prayer cycle of the Canonical Hours in the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches for the repose of the soul of a decedent

[290] The elegy is a poem or song that expresses sorrow, especially for a person who is dead.

[291] J. H. Nketia, *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People* (Accra: Achimota, 1955), 23.

corpse lies) while it is being prepared for burial. Dirges are very important in African funeral rites, especially for very old dead persons. S. O. Ademiluka notes that "The funeral dirge is not just a formless cry of bereavement; it is a highly stylistic form of expression that is governed by specific poetic recitative conventions used to express the feelings of the mourners in determinate form and personal procedure."[292] They are articulated in a sorrowful tone, narrating the good deeds of the dead, his/her genealogy, his/her praise names, and his/her farewell. The following quote by Lawrence A. Boadi captures this fact: "Death causes pain and grief, it is true; but it also marks a hopeful transition from one abode to another of the same family and clan members. The dirge singer may be grief-stricken, but her temporal and spiritual life does not come to grief. On the contrary, she is confident in the hope of a similar transitional journey which will soon unite her, the deceased and the ancestral spirits beyond."[293]

A popular Yoruba dirge goes thus:

Baba lo gbere a ko rii mo	Father has gone forever, we see him no more
Erin wo, erin lo	The elephant has fallen, the elephant is gone
Ajanaku subu ko le g'oke	The elephant has fallen, cannot get up
Eni rere lo s'ajule orun	The good person has gone to heaven
O d'arinako, o d'oju ala	It is on the road, in the dream
K'a to tun f'oju ganni ara wa,	That we see again
Ma j'okun, ma j'ekolo,	Don't eat the millipede or the earthworm
Ohun won nje l'ajule orun ni k'o je	Eat whatever they eat in heaven
Sun're, eni rere, orun re o.	Sleep in peace, good person; farewell![294]

The above dirge (written for a dead father) expresses a number of theological thoughts some of which we outline briefly below. The first line, "Father has gone forever, we see him no more", underlines the nature of death as something that takes a person out of the sight of the living.

[292] S. O. Ademiluka, "The Sociological Functions of Funeral Mourning: Illustrations from the Old Testament and Africa", *OTE* 22/1 (2009), 9-20, 17.

[293] Lawrence A. Boadi, "Remarks on J. H. Nketia's Funeral Dirges of the Akan People", *Legon Journal of the Humanities,* Volume 24 (2013): 1-17, 5.

[294] Ademiluka, Functions of Funeral Mourning, 15.

As we indicated in chapter one, Africans believe that at death the material and immaterial components of the human person do separate from each other. The material component is buried and left to rot while the immaterial part continues to live in the world of the dead. By saying that "Father has gone forever, we see him no more" the mourner is expressing the belief that death separates the living from the dead; the living and the dead belong to entirely different realms. To have lived with one's father for a long time and to imagine that one cannot set eyes on him again is very sorrowful.

In most African societies, fathers are the breadwinners. Males are usually physically stronger than females and so they may be considered as the elephant. The elephant is a very strong animal and nothing can stop it from what it determines to do with its strength. Death however can make the elephant fall and not rise again. Here, the mourner draws on a zoological metaphor to compare death with a strong elephant which can be rendered powerless by the power of death. Yoruba hunters, like hunters of other African societies, know that the only thing that will let the elephant fall and never to get up again is death. Similarly, humans can fall sick and get well again to continue their earthly life. However, death ends one's earthly life. This idea together with the African belief that death is a journey to another world is expressed in the expression "The elephant has fallen, the elephant is gone." It underscores a father who was a major source of strength for the family. In all, the mourner uses this line to express his/her sense of loss and helplessness:

The Yoruba idea of the universe recognises three different but related worlds, namely, the world of the unborn, the world of the living, and the world of the ancestors.[295] Of the three worlds only the world of the living is physical (concrete), the other two are abstract concepts. The Yoruba believe that every person must pass through these three worlds: at conception, the unborn leaves its abode in the ancestral world to be conceived by a woman in the world of the living; the person is then ushered into the world of the

[295] J. T. Tsaaior, "Telling The Tale, Telling The Nation: Tiv Tales, Modernity And The (Re) Construction of Nigerian Nationhood", *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*, 25(2), (2015): 1–15, 3.

living to live until death takes his/her spirit back into the ancestral world where it (the spirit) originally came from. The Yoruba consider the world of the living as a temporary place of abode comparable to the market where people go to undertake business transactions and go back to their place of abode after they are done with what they went to the market to do. Thus, the world of the living is a transit point (rather than a permanent dwelling) that humans simply pass through for a season. This idea is expressed by the Yoruba saying, "*aiye loja, orun ni ile*" (meaning, "life is a market, heaven is home"). In this saying, heaven is to be understood as referring to the world that the spirit of the dead enters to dwell permanently. It is in this sense that the mourner describes death as taking the deceased to heaven: "The good person has gone to heaven." The description of the deceased as "good" has theological significance.

In Christian theology, good works do not make one enter heaven; however, everyone who enters heaven performed good works after receiving their initial justification from God. In the African worldview, not every deceased person is allowed to enter the spirit world (home of the ancestors, considered here as heaven). Only those who led good lives and died a natural death at a ripe age (among others enter the spirit world). This line of the dirge is therefore a traditional African way of promoting good deeds and discouraging evil in the society. The mourner therefore exhorts the living about the reward of good deeds. This is not too different from the Christian sermons preached at burial services. The main difference is that from the Christian perspective, good deeds (though are part of the life of the believer) do not commend someone before God. In the traditional African setting one's good works forms a major part of the requirement to enter "heaven" after death.

The last line also needs attention. It reads: "Sleep in peace, good person; farewell!" Clearly, this line stresses the Yoruba/African understanding of death as making the deceased take a very long sleep. In this sense, the death of a person may be announced by saying "A person went to sleep and did not wake up." Since Africans believe that death ushers a person into the world of the dead to continue his/her life, the obvious question that comes to mind is: How can a person sleep and at the same

time go about his/her daily duties as a citizen in the realm of the dead? In our opinion, the aspect of the dirge which portrays the deceased as sleeping has the physical body in mind while the journey and the life after death relate to the spirit of the dead. We agree with the use of the imagery of sleeping for the dead person because that is exactly what the corpse looks like when laid in state. That is why the Akan say: *Sɛ wonnim owuo a hwɛ nna* (meaning, "If you do not know death, look at sleep"). At the same time, the mourner bids the dead "farewell" with the journey into the ancestral world in mind. The journey to the grave may also be part of the journey that the dead undertakes. Whatever the case may be, the mourner wishes the deceased to enjoy his/her life after death.

The Akan equivalent of the Yoruba "farewell" is "*Nante yie*" (walk well or journey well). This idea is similar to the Eʋe *zɔ nyuieɖe* or *hede nyuie* (walk/travel/journey well or have a safe journey) A brief analysis of this farewell statement is offered below. Certain principles need to be followed to be able to journey well. First of all, the traveller needs to know the path (road/way) that leads to the desired destination. Taking a different route may lead to the wrong destination. If after getting to a different destination the traveller decided to come back and follow the right path, the journey is delayed and the consequences may not be good. Secondly, the traveller needs to have the means of travelling. He/she needs enough sources of energy; money to pay for the fare is required if the traveller is to go by any other means than foot; the traveller needs to dress in a way to suit the journey and so on. As we have mentioned earlier, Africans cater for these things by burying their dead with certain items to enhance the journey.

The Yoruba kills and prepares a fowl (*adie irana*, that is "'The fare fowl) for the deceased immediately death occurs so as to provide the right energy for the journey to the world of the dead. A similar practice among the Akan is the offering of water to a person whose death is imminent. Thirdly, the traveller needs some level of concentration to be able to get to the destination and to get there on time. It is important to get to the destination on time so that the hosts do not experience unnecessary anxiety.

On the way there may be distractions in the form of side attractions like a conversation with others, playing games, sitting somewhere and taking more rest than required and so on. Fourthly, there is the need to order one's steps in such a way that one does not fall or is not hurt by rocks and other things, especially when journeying on foot. The traveller is considered to have journeyed well if he/she is able to reach the destination at the right time through the right route/path.

The Akan "*Nante yie*" serves as a very useful foundation to develop a sermon based on John 14:6. Even though the context of this text is not that of Jesus' teaching about death many pastors use it (usually John 14:1-6, 27) to prepare sermons for burial services. From our analysis in the above paragraph, a sermon can be prepared with the following points. Physical death takes the spirit of the deceased to a destination (which may be hell or heaven). The one who goes to heaven is successful and the one who goes to hell is unsuccessful in this journey. One's success in the journey is not determined in the person's walk after death but in his/her death during his/her earthly existence. After death there is no chance to make amends; what is left is judgement (Heb. 9:27). Thus, we can consider the journey after death as determined by the journey on earth. In other words, one's earthly life determines where his/her spirit will go after death. Since heaven is God's dwelling place, it can be said that the Akan, in saying *Nante yie*, express their desire that the deceased relatives reach the abode of God (the Father). In John 14:6, Jesus Christ points out that he is the path that leads to the Father. Therefore, as the Akan weep "*Onyame mfa wo nsie dwodwo*" ("May God keep you well") they must be made aware of the fact that the decision by God to keep the dead well is not determined by any post-death life but by the life one leads in the physical world. The obvious conclusion then is that the living need to accept Jesus' offer of salvation to be able to reach their desired destination after death.

In this last line of the Yoruba dirge quoted above, the word "good" is used to qualify the dead. Earlier, we pointed out the significance of this literary construction. We add that Africans do not normally condemn their dead; they rather praise them except in few instances. Therefore, whether a person was good or bad, he/she is usually portrayed as a good one. Part of

the reason for this is to ensure that the living do not incur the wrath of their ancestors.

Eschatological Ideas in African Widowhood Rites

In Africa, the widowhood rite is a very important aspect of funeral rites. A widow may be considered as a woman who has not remarried after the demise of her husband. Husbands who lose their wives also go through widowhood rites. Different societies have different rituals for widowhood rites that betray their eschatological midset. The widowhood rituals of seclusion, prescribed dress codes, walking barefooted, fasting for extended periods of time and symbolic gestures directed at the corpse are commonly practiced in Ghana. Africans believe that the spirit of the dead does not go straight to the ancestors until the funeral rites are performed. Between the time of death and the funeral celebration, the spirit wanders around and may cause harm to the living.

In view of this, widowhood rites are performed to ensure that the widow is not harmed by the late husband who now belongs to a different world. Without performing such rituals, the spirit of the dead person can also decide to take the widow along as a companion in the land of the dead. This is possible because, during marriage ceremonies, men pay the bride price which in a way makes their wives their own property. The dead person may therefore consider the living wife still as his property if no ritual is performed to separate them. After the death of one's husband, she is taken to a place where her hair is shaved clean. The dead man paid *ɛtire adeɛ* or *ɛtire nsa* (head drink, Eʋe, *tabiaha*) to the woman's family and so the hair belongs to him. The hair-shaving ritual is meant to signify that the old hair which the husband paid for has been taken off and the new hair which will grow afterwards does not belong to him. The hair is kept for another ritual to be performed later.

Another ritual is performed to ward off the dead husband from coming close to the living widow. A black thread is used to run through a padlock and this is worn around her waist with the padlock which hangs directly over her "womanhood." This act signifies that "with the demise

of her precious husband, who was a rarity, one of his kind, the one who had unlimited access to her 'womanhood', she has temporarily closed her 'womanhood.'"[296] The padlock which keeps the dead husband from having sexual relations with the widow needs to be removed by a special person (usually a man) designated to break the widowhood of widowed women before the widow can have an affair with anybody. The widow is also always accompanied by people designated for that purpose, usually old women.

For the Akan, the act of severing the relationship between the widow and her late husband takes place on the day of burial. The widow leads the procession to the cemetery, carrying an earthenware bowl (which contains the hair which was shaved immediately after her husband died) just in front of the coffin bearers. On her way she throws the earthenware bowl away together with her hair to symbolically sever her relationship with her late husband and prove that the husband really purchased it and should therefore be seen and accepted in *the* ancestral world as a responsible person. The act of throwing away the earthenware bowl is that "the widow and her dead husband are no more in union ("*yɛtoo nkwanta a, yapae"*) and that the cooking pot in which the widow prepared food for the husband is now broken so that there is no way the two beings can be united.

There are many aspects of African widowhood rites which many so-called modern human rights campaigners consider human rights abuses and therefore inhumane. These include some of the rituals to sever the ties between the deceased spouse and the living partner. Other human rights advocates call attention to the fact that the widowhood rites are not so elaborate for widowers are they are for widows. This, they judge to be discriminatory. As responsible African theologians, we are aware of those concerns. We know that the gospel of Jesus affirms, it does not devalue people. By narrating these ideas about African widowhood rites, it is their symbolic value in teaching eschatology that we wish to draw attention to. We do not necessarily endorse those practices. When as Christians we bury people, we do so in the hope of the resurrection and we often insist that the dead in Christ are not annihilated. Those ideas are in African religions

[296] Emmanuel Asante, *Theology and Society in Context: A Theologist's Reflections on Selected Topics* (SonLife Press: Accra, 2014), 39.

as well and we have mentioned some of those. African theologians have similarly developed contextual liturgies by which the ties between a dead Christian spouse and his or her living partner are severed in church. We make sure we address those pastoral concerns that call for the rites in the traditional society, right there in church, to prevent the widow/widower from going through some obnoxious rituals in their hometowns.

To conclude this section, we make a few observations about ancestral veneration which is depicted by the singing of dirges and other African funeral rites. In our opinion, Africans venerate their ancestors without necessarily worshipping them. African ancestral veneration is different from worship. African Christians should promote traditional rituals which commemorate the good deeds of their ancestors. We agree with the African Synod of the Catholic Church that "ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God … should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorised, and proposed by competent authorities in the church."[297] The point is that "African funeral rites which recognise the deceased as joining the world of ancestors need not be condemned as long as they heed this warning."[298]

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the biblical view of death, the importance of death in the life of the believer and what our attitude towards death should be. We pointed out that death was introduced into the world through sin. This means that Adam and Eve could have lived forever if they had obeyed the command not to eat of the forbidden tree. We also learnt that even though Christ has paid for the penalty of our sins, believers still experience death because it serves a number of God-ordained purposes. More so, the chapter touched on the mindset that Christians are expected to have towards their own death or the death of others.

Most of the African funeral practices simply signify the high value

[297] E. N. Ogbonna, "Models of Inculturation: A Case for Traditional Igbo Burial Music and Funeral Rites", *The Church in Nigeria: Studies in its Religious and Socio-Cultural Challenges.* Edited by N. Omenka, p. 83-98 (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003), 97.

[298] Ademiluka, Functions of Funeral Mourning, 19.

that Africans place on human life without contradicting the Christian faith. For example, dirges teach the living that they need to live good lives so that they can be praised through dirges when they die. This practice promotes good works and responsible living. Though good works do not justify a person before God, the one who is justified by God through faith is expected to bear fruits of which good works form a major part. Again, from the point of view of pastoral theology, dirges and the entire mourning rites catalyses the process of helping the deceased family grieve healthily, put their loss behind them and to move on with their life. Therefore, we are of the view that significant part(s) of African funeral rites that in no way make mourners look like people without hope (1 Thess. 4:13-18 speaks against grieving without hope) and in no way diminishes the essence of Christianity should be encouraged and incorporated into Christian burial liturgies in Africa. We have also discussed the symbolic and pastoral value of African widowhood rites as helping to sever ties between the dead partner and the living spouse to foster integration into normal societal life after the bitter loss of a spouse. In the next chapter, we shall discuss the issue of the immortality of the soul/spirit.

Review Exercise

1. What is the fundamental idea of the biblical conception of death?
2. What should be the attitude of believers towards their own death?
3. In view of this chapter develop a theology of mourning the dead.
4. Is death merely the natural result of sin, or is it a positive punishment for sin?
5. What are dirges? How significant are they in African eschatological thoughts? Use relevant examples to explain your answer.
6. What should be the attitude of believers towards the death of unbelievers?
7. To what extent do widowhood rites in your community support the biblical belief in life after death?

8. The following dirge is sung among the Acoli of Uganda. Construct a contextual eschatological message for the African community based on this dirge

   Fire rages at Layima, oh,
   Fire rages in the valley of River Cumu,
   Everything is utterly utterly destroyed,
   If I could reach the homestead of death's mother,
   My daughter, I would make a long grass touch;
   If I could reach the homestead of death's mother,
   I would destroy everything utterly, utterly.

9. If Christ has taken the death penalty of sin, then why do believers die?

10. Critically examine the eschatological significance of the lines taken from a dirge of the Kipsigis of Kenya. Identify and comment on literary devices used in this dirge.

    Come and take back these cattle:
    My big son has been murdered.
    I have been torn like a piece of cloth,
    I feel helpless as a pond.
    I am not as in past years
    When we were harvesting the fields,
    When I was killing elephants:
    Now the hyena of the tall grass devours me
    Because I have no son living.

Chapter 7

IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL/SPIRIT

In the previous chapter, we learnt that physical death leads to a separation between the soul/spirit and the body, with the latter placed in the grave where it decomposes and returns to the ground. Of course, many are cremated when they die and their ashes disposed of in many different suitable ways. In other words, the onset of death necessitates the disposal of the corpse in a manner suitable to the context in which the death occurs. What happens to the soul/spirit after death? Does the soul/spirit survive death? Many people have given reports of near-death experiences. However, near-death experiences cannot tell us what occurs after death. They are only glimpses of what the experience of dying may be like. For one to tell what happens after death, that person has to die and come back to life. That will be a resurrection. Only Jesus Christ has resurrected in that sense and hence only he can give us that experience. In this chapter, we invite you to a discussion on what the Bible teaches about the "immortality of the soul/spirit."

Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul/Spirit

This section deals with how the soul/spirit has been conceived by Greek, Jews and Christians. This is intended to give a contextual background to what we find in the Bible regarding the subject. This will enable us to appreciate the nuances of the data the Bible presents on the subject.

The soul/spirit in Greek Thought

The concept of the immortal soul/spirit was introduced into human

discourse at the earliest beginnings of human history. Secular history reveals that the concept of the soul's (and spirit's) supposed immortality is an ancient belief embraced by many pagan nations like ancient Egypt and Babylon, Persia and Greece. Certainly, the idea of the immortality of the soul/spirit did not originate from the Jews; it came to them from the Greeks. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended"[299] Ancient Greeks conceived the soul/spirit as something that departs from the body at the point of death and something which is endangered in a battle. In *Illiad,* Achilles is reported to have said that he continually risks his soul/spirit. In Homer, the soul/spirit and body are considered distinct. However, the soul/spirit is hardly conceived as possessing a substantial existence of its own. In fact, without the body (considered real), the soul/spirit is a mere shadow or shade, incapable of energetic life.

Plato (427-347 BC), a Greek philosopher and student of Socrates, in his famous *Phaedo,* argued that the soul/spirit is distinct from the body just as Homer taught. For Plato, however, the rational soul/spirit or *nous* was real, divine and immortal whereas the body was made of inferior or shadow material, and subject to decay and corruption.[300] This is a direct opposite to what Homer taught. He further claimed that the soul/spirit returned to the heavens from whence it came immediately a person dies. Since the soul/spirit, according to Plato is indestructible, it sometimes returns to earth as another person[301] - this is an expression of reincarnation. In Plato's rational metaphysics, it is only the rational that is real and if something is irrational then it is of a lower kind of reality. Hence, the soul/spirit is immortal and incapable of being destroyed but the body is mortal and subject to decay.[302] In *The Republic,* Plato expressed a tripartite view of the soul/spirit namely

[299] Kaufmann Kohler "Immortality of the Soul" www.Jewishencyclopedia.com (accessed 4/4/16); Robert Bellani, *Man From Earth Made From Heaven: Soul & Spirit! Are You All In There?* (Np: Np, 2013), 43.

[300] Hoekma, *The Bible and the Future,* 86.

[301] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 87.

[302] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 87.

reason, spirit and appetite. Plato's student, Aristotle, also believes that the survival of the soul/spirit is connected to its connection with the body. For him, the soul/spirit dies when the body dies.[303] Epicurus Garden and the Stoa expressed arguments that the soul/spirit was corporeal which came from heaven.[304] Gnosticism was prominent in the first century AD. Gnosticism was characterised by a marked dualism between the soul/spirit and the body. Picking up Plato's idea Gnostics contended that the body was a prison house for the immortal soul/spirit, which (according to them) had forgotten its origin.

The Soul in Jewish/Old Testament Thought

The Hebrew word translated "soul" in the Old Testament is *nephesh,* which simply means "a breathing creature." The soul/spirit is the principle of life that animates the body. For this reason, when the soul/spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. For instance, Genesis 35:18 (KJV) says of Rachel that "her soul/spirit was in departing, (for she died)." Actually, the life of a person never ceases to be. W. E. Vine defines *nephesh* as "the essence of life, the act of breathing, taking breath … The problem with the English term 'soul' is that no actual equivalent of the term or the idea behind it is represented in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew system of thought does *not* include the combination or *opposition* of the *'body'* and *'soul'* which are really Greek and Latin in origin."[305] In other words, *nephesh* refers to "a living, breathing conscious, rather than an immortal soul."[306] *Nephesh* also denotes a person's being or his or her distinctive essence as a person created in the image of God. That *nephesh* does not refer to an immortal soul can be seen in the way the word is used in the Old Testament. In Gen. 2:7, *nephesh* is translated as "soul" or "being" in reference to humankind. Regarding animals, it is translated as "creature" (Gen. 1:24). *Nephesh* is also translated as "body" in Lev. 21:11 where it is used to refer to a human corpse. The Hebrew Scriptures state plainly that, rather than possess immortality, the

[303] Bellani, *Man From Earth Made From Heaven,* 36.
[304] Bellani, *Man From Earth Made From Heaven,* 36.
[305] W. E. Vine, V*ine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* edited by Terry Kulakowski (N.p: Reformed Church Publications, 2015), 372.
[306] Bellani, *Man From Earth Made From Heaven,* 34.

soul can and does die. "The soul [*nephesh*] who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, Ezek. 18:20).

Rather than a belief in the immortality of the soul, the Old Testament Jews believed in bodily resurrection. The difference between the Jewish view and the Greek view was that the Greeks believed in soul immortality, the Hebrews believed in a bodily resurrection upon a new physical earth. According to Donelley,

> Twentieth-century biblical scholarship largely agrees that the ancient Jews had a little explicit notion of a personal afterlife until very late in the [Old Testament] period. Immortality of the soul was a typical Greek philosophical notion quite foreign to the thought of ancient Semitic peoples. Only the latest stratum of the [Old Testament] asserts even the resurrection of the body, a view congenial to Semites.[307]

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia comments on ancient Israel's view of the soul: "We are influenced always more or less by the Greek Platonic idea that the body dies, yet the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the [Old Testament]."[308] "The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture."[309]

The Soul in Christian Thought

Early Christianity was influenced and corrupted by Greek philosophies as it spread through the Greek and Roman world. By A.D. 200 the doctrine of the immortality of the soul had become a controversy among Christian believers. The idea filtered into Western thought through Greek philosophy. The question of the immortality of the soul brought much controversy in the early Catholic Church. Origen (ca. 185-254 AD) subscribed to Plato's idea of "the preexistence of the soul as pure mind (*nous*) originally, which, by reason of its fall from God, cooled down to soul (*psyche*) when it lost its

[307] Donelley, as cited in Bellani, *Man From Earth Made From Heaven*, 39.

[308] As cited in William West, *A Resurrection to Immortality: The Resurrection, Our Only Hope of Life After Death* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2011), 588.

[309] Kohler, "Immortality of the Soul"

participation in the divine fire by looking earthward."[310] With such platonic flavour, Origen subscribed to the concept of the immortality of the soul, arguing also that the soul, upon death, would depart for an everlasting reward or everlasting punishment at death. The following quoted from Origen reflects his belief:

> … The soul, having a substance and life of its own, shall after its departure from the world, be rewarded according to its deserts, being destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness, if its actions shall have procured this for it, or to be delivered up to eternal fire and punishments if the guilt of its crimes shall have brought it down to this …[311]

Augustine, another influential Christian theologian and admirer of Platonic philosophy, was profoundly affected by Christian thinking. For Augustine, death meant the destruction of the body, but the conscious soul would continue to live in either a blissful state with God or an agonising state of separation from God. In *The City of God,* he wrote that the soul "is therefore called immortal because, in a sense, it does not cease to live and to feel; while the body is called mortal because it can be forsaken of all life, and cannot by itself live at all. The death, then, of the soul, takes place when God forsakes it, as the death of the body when the soul forsakes it."[312] According to Richard Tarnas, "… It was Augustine's formulation of Christian Platonism that was to permeate virtually all of medieval Christian thought in the West. So enthusiastic was the Christian integration of the Greek spirit that Socrates and Plato were frequently regarded as divinely inspired pre-Christian saints …"[313]

Centuries later Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) solidified the doctrine of the immortal soul in his *Summa Theologica.* He taught that the soul is a conscious intellect and will and cannot be destroyed. Aquinas' doctrine is briefly as follows:

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[310] Walter A. Elwell (ed.), *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2001), 1037.*

[311] Oliver J. Thatcher (ed.), *The Library of Original Sources: Volume IV: Early Mediaeval Age* (Hawaii: University Press of Pacific, 2004), 32.

[312] Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (np: Catholic Way Publishing, 2015), np.

[313] Richard Tarnas Jr., *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped our World View* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991), 103.

1. the rational soul, which is one with the sensitive and vegetative principle, is the form of the body;
2. the soul is a substance, but an incomplete substance, i.e. it has a natural aptitude and exigency for existence in the body, in conjunction with which it makes up the substantial unity of human nature;
3. though connaturally related to the body, it is itself absolutely simple, i.e. of an unextended and spiritual nature. It is not wholly immersed in matter, its higher operations being intrinsically independent of the organism;
4. the rational soul is produced by special creation at the moment when the organism is sufficiently developed to receive it. In the first stage of embryonic development, the vital principle has merely vegetative powers; then a sensitive soul comes into being, educed from the evolving potencies of the organism — later yet, this is replaced by the perfect rational soul, which is essentially immaterial and so postulates a special creative act.[314]

A few centuries later the leaders of the Protestant Reformation generally accepted these traditional views, so they became entrenched in traditional Protestant teaching. Luther expressed his hope of eternal life not on the basis of the immortality of the soul, but on the belief in the resurrection in the "last day" when all believers would be awarded eternal life. He reclaimed the long discarded biblical teaching on death and the resurrection of the dead. Later discussion will prove that Luther was right in arguing that the soul is not inherently immortal.

In the 20th century, William Newton Clarke (d. 1912) argued that the immortal spirit exits in the mortal body and lives on after death. He rejected the idea of the bodily resurrection in the life to come, arguing that Christ's kingdom is spiritual, not carnal and as such no physical bodies are needed to inherit it. He stated, "the present body, belonging wholly to the material order, has no further use or destiny after death has detached the spirit from the material order, and is abandoned, to be known no more."[315] Today, most

[314] Catholic Encyclopedia s.v. soul http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm (accessed on 4/4/16)
[315] William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 457.

evangelical Christians express belief in the presence of an inner naturally immortal soul which, being separated from the body at the moment of physical death, continues to exist forever, either in the enjoyment of God's presence or in the everlasting torment of hell-fire. In *Peace with God: The Secret Happiness,* Billy Graham shows his support for this assertion when he writes, "The Bible teaches that you are an immortal soul. Your soul is eternal and will live forever. In other words, the real you — the part of you that thinks, feels, dreams, aspires; the ego, the personality— will never die. The Bible teaches that your soul will live forever in one of two places— heaven or hell."[316] Later in the book, he continues "The Bible teaches that whether we are saved or lost, there is conscious and everlasting existence of the soul and personality."[317]

It is worthy of note, that in examining the debate, one can find that those who claim the soul is immortal have two other ideas guiding their logic. First, they realise that there is such as thing as the immaterial part of the human person that lives on after physical death. Second, they assume a bipartite division of the human person. If we argue for a tripartite division of the human person (which the Bible supports), we would come to the conclusion that it is the spirit of the human person (God's life-giving agency in the person) that survives death, not the soul. This is why in the early portions of this chapter we have consistently written "soul/spirit" to point to the immaterial part of the human person. But what does "immortality" mean in the context of the debate? We examine this in the next section.

Meaning of the Term "Immortality"

In this section, we discuss some connotations of immortality to avoid any possible confusion. There are at least four connotations for the word immortality.[318] First, immortality refers to "the condition of not being mortal, thus being deathless, undying or everlasting."[319] In the strict sense

[316] Billy Graham*, Peace with God: The Secret Happiness* (Tennessee: W. Publishing Group, 1971), np. See chapter 6, paragraph 25.

[317] Graham*, Peace with God,* see chapter 6, paragraph 28.

[318] Berkhhof, *Systematic Theology,* 672-673.

[319] Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition: Revised and Expanded (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 159

of the word (as used in 1 Tim. 6:15, 16), immortality belongs intrinsically to God alone. Philosophically, immortality and the afterlife are not the same. The afterlife is the continuation of existence after death, regardless of whether or not that continuation is indefinite. Immortality implies a never-ending existence, regardless of whether or not the body dies. In discussing the doctrine of immortality it must first of all be established that the term "immortality" has a variety of meanings. Second, immortality refers to a continuous or endless existence. In this usage, it is also ascribed to all spirits, including the human soul. "Immortality" is used theologically to refer to that state of a person who is entirely free from the seeds of decay and death. In this sense of the word, Adam and Eve were immortal before the fall. Third, "immortality" can be used in reference to human condition before the fall of humanity. Humankind was free from decay and death before sin entered the world. Finally, "immortality" is used eschatologically to refer to the state of a person in which he/she is impervious to death and cannot possibly become its prey. The human being will become immortal after the resurrection.

The Philosophical Arguments for Immortality

The idea that the soul is immortal has been defended by philosophers. We present four of their arguments. First, the psychological argument is based on the simplicity, immaterial essence, indivisible and hence indestructible nature of the soul. It is argued that if the soul is self-existent and indestructible, then it must live forever.

Second, the teleological argument holds that in this world, the human soul does not, and cannot develop or use all the natural abilities it is endowed with. For this reason, it is required that the soul continues to live to fulfill its aspiration through further developments of its abilities.

Third, the cosmological argument is that since in the natural realm there is the law of gravitation which binds the heavenly bodies together and yet, there is no basis for the communion of the people of those other worlds, there must be another mode of existence to fulfil the possibilities of human life.

Fourth, the moral argument holds that in this life people do not usually receive justice. Yet, the mind has a conception of a moral Ruler of the universe who will exercise justice. The wicked prosper and "enjoy" life and so there must be a future state of existence where God's justice will be meted out to everyone.

Does the Bible teach Immortality of the Human Soul?

As we have hinted above, the Old Testament does not teach the immortality of the soul. In fact, the Old Testament contains no specific term for immortality. The term *olam,* meaning "everlasting" or "perpetual" seems to be the closest term to "immortality." Yet, *olam* does not carry the sense of the indefinite state of being, beyond death in the heavenly presence of God.[320] It occurs in Gen. 17:13, 19 to show that the Abrahamic covenant is "everlasting." The New Testament equivalent for *olam* is the Greek word *aionion*— from the Greek root, "aion," meaning "age"— is translated "eternal," "forever," and "forevermore" when describing fire (Matt. 18:8) or torment (Rev. 20:10).

In Greek, two words that often refer to immortality are *athanasia* and *aphtharsia*.[321] The former, meaning "deathlessness", "without death," "imperishable," and "incorruptible" and hence, unending existence, or exemption from death, occurs three times in the New Testament and is usually rendered simply 'immortality' (1 Cor. 15:53-54; 1 Tim. 6:16). In 1 Tim. 6:16, the word *athanasia* refers to God as the source of immortality, in contradistinction from humans upon who immortality is imputed. In the New Testament, *athanasia* means "more than deathlessness; but a quality of life enjoyed as death is swallowed up by life [2 Cor. 5:4]"[322] In 1 Corinthians 15:53-54, the immortality points to events at the Second Coming of Christ, when believers, who are still alive will be clothed right here on earth with immortality. They will be transformed and there will

[320] Stephen D. Renn (ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014), 510.

[321] Vern A. Hannah, Death, "Immortality and Resurrection: A Response to John Yates, 'The Origin of the Soul" in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 62:3 (1990), 245.

[322] W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* vol. 1 edited by Terry Kulakowski s.v. immortality(np: Reformed Church Publications, 2015), 522.

also be a resurrection for the dead.[323] Three features can be derived from the immortality of which this 1 Corinthian passage speaks. In this passage, (1) the blessing of immortality mentioned refers only to believers; (2) the blessing of immortality is not currently possessed by anyone; it is to be taken at the Parousia and (3) the blessing of immortality is not only for the soul/spirit but for the whole person; its emphasis is on the body[324] (immortality applies only in believers resurrected (bodily) state, meaning God gives immortality to some creatures). The fact that "immortality," as used of humans in the New Testament, does not refer only to the soul/spirit but to the whole person, body, soul and spirit, in the resurrected state makes the New Testament concept of "immortality" contrast the platonic view, which claims immortality only for the soul.

The platonic view of the immortality of the soul is not biblical. According to the Bible, "(1) The soul is not indestructible. (2) Immortality refers to the body, soul and spirit. (3) There is no duality of soul and body, but a unity of the two."[325]

The second, *aphtharsia,* sometimes rendered "immortality" or "incorruption" occurs seven times and in all but one of these contexts translated "immortality" (Rom.2:7; 2 Tim.2:10; 1 Cor.15:53, 54). It points to the believer's true hope (Rom.2:7; glory, honour, immortality and eternal life), which Christ brings. Four times it is used in 1 Cor.15:42, 50, 52 and 53 about (1) things which the perishable/corruptible body cannot experience (v.50); (2) the sowing of the body in corruption and it being raised in incorruption (v.42); (3) the incorruption with which the present perishable body must be clothed in the resurrection (v.53, 54).[326] Not once in this passage does it point to the soul in all of this.

The cognate adjectival form of the word, *aphthartos* also occurs seven times in the New Testament, describing varied situations and even God (cf. Rom. 1: 23; I Tim. 1: 17; I Cor. 15: 52; 1 Cor. 9: 25; 1 Pet. 3: 4; 1: 23; 1: 4). Again, none of its occurrences points to the soul. After a

[323] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 87.
[324] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 88.
[325] Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 536.
[326] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 88.

careful study, Hannah notes, "Nowhere in either Testament is the idea of immortality attributed as a natural quality or right of humankind. Rather, we are told that 'God alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16)."[327] The foregoing leads to the fact that Scripture does not use the expression "the immortality of the soul." Nor does it teach the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

Nonetheless, we are still confronted with the question. Does the Bible teach that the soul of a person is immortal? John Calvin, the great Reformer, in his commentary on 1 Cor. 15:47 taught that Adam had an immortal soul and in his *Institutes of Christian Religion,* Calvin accepts the claim to immortality of the soul as a doctrine which can be admitted. Yet Calvin concedes that immortality was not original to human souls; it was imparted to them by God.[328] Herman Bavinck and G. C. Berkouwer observe that most Christian theologians point to immortality of the soul, under the influence of Plato (perhaps unwittingly/inadvertently) based on reason rather than on the Bible. Berkouwer, for instance, further argues that the Bible is never interested in independent immortality as such, let alone in the immortality of a part of humankind.

From the foregoing discourse, it is apparent that these Reformed theologians fail to agree on immortality of the soul as biblical teaching for reasons stated by Hoekema as follows.[329] First, the Bible does not use the expression "immortality of the soul." Earlier, we did a word study and the result pointed in this direction. Second, the Bible does not teach the continued existence of the soul by its inherent indestructibility. Human beings were created by God to depend on God for their existence, whether in this physical world or in the life to come. The soul, unlike God, is not intrinsically indestructible. Scripture nowhere teaches that the soul, (which is merely a part of the person) will continue to exist howbeit, independently after physical death, based on a certain feature of the indestructibility of its own. Immortality is a divine gift. If the soul/spirit survives after death it is simply because it is kept and sustained by the power of God and not

[327] Hannah, "Death, Immortality and Resurrection", 245.

[328] Others such as, A. A. Hodge (*Outlines of theology*), W. G. T. Shedd (*Dogmatic Theology*) and Louis Berkhof (*Sytematic Theology*) among others claim that the idea of the immortality of the soul is consistent with biblical teaching.

[329] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 89-91.

because it is inherently immortal. Third, the Bible does not point to any desirable hope of a mere continuous existence of the soul (or even spirit) after physical death. Rather, the Bible points to life in fellowship with God as the greatest good of human persons. The Bible stresses that to live apart from God is death but to live in fellowship with God is true life (See Phil. 1: 21-23 and 2 Cor. 5: 8). While the concept of the immortality of the soul gives no idea about the quality of life, the Bible entreats all people to seek life in Jesus Christ to avoid the coming wrath or judgement. Any conception of the immortality of the soul that does not take into consideration divine judgement must be rejected as unscriptural. Finally, the central affirmation of the Bible regarding the future of humankind is the resurrection of the body. It is at the resurrection that the body will be made immortal. Rather than the Greek idea of the body being inferior to the soul, the Bible considers that both (body and soul) or all (body, soul and spirit) entities are real and essential for human existence. This means that the biblical concept of immortality is applied not to the soul or spirit alone but to the whole person. Even this kind of immortality comes only after the resurrection. Concluding on the issue, Hoekema observes as follows:

> We conclude that the concept of the immortality of the soul is not a distinctively Christian doctrine. Rather, what is central in biblical eschatology is the doctrine of resurrection of the body. If we wish to use *immortality* with reference to [humankind], let us say that [person] rather than [his or her] soul is immortal. But a [person's] body must undergo a transformation by means of resurrection before [he/she] can fully enjoy that immortality.[330]

It is safe to conclude that, the idea of immortality of the soul, as if it would possess an independent existence of its own is a Greek philosophical thinking dating back to Plato. As mentioned earlier, Greek philosophy viewed death as a liberation of the soul from imprisonment to a corruptible body and thus cannot accommodate the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, a central Christian doctrine. In Biblical Theology, the body is not inferior to the soul/spirit. Nor is the body a tomb for the soul/spirit, but the temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in Christian Anthropology, the human being is incomplete without the body. If we wish to use immortality in

[330] Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future,* 91.

Christian Anthropology to refer to the eschatological blessing of believers, it will be most expedient to say that the believer lives after physical death and not merely the believer's soul. To experience this immortality however the believer's mortal body needs to be transformed using the resurrection before entrance into glory. R. C. Sproul has noted that "the soul survives the grave is not a testimony to its indestructibility or of its intrinsic immortality. The soul as a created entity is mortal. It survives the grave only because it is sustained and preserved by the power of God."[331] It is preserved for eternal felicity for the redeemed; it is preserved for eternal punishment for the damned.

African Christianity and the Immortality of the Soul

The discussion of the immortality of the human soul from the perspective of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures is that the human soul is not inherently immortal; it derives its immortality from God along with the body and the spirit. The African concept as we will explain shortly agrees with that of Christianity. In the African primal worldview, the soul/spirit is quite active and exercises a great influence in the affairs of the living. After death, each person's soul is judged in accordance with his/her deeds. The soul/spirit may become an ancestor depending on the criteria outlined earlier in this book or become a wandering soul/spirit which may hurt the living. Whatever the case may be, the fact still remains that Africans believe that the soul/spirit of the dead is alive. It is for this reason that the dead are referred to as "living dead." The living dead surround the living like the cloud of witnesses that the writer of Hebrews mentions (cf. Heb. 12:1-3).

African belief in the immortality of the soul/spirit is expressed in a number of ways. For example, the Akan Adinkra symbol *Nyame nnwu na ma wu* ("God won't die for me to die") stands as a symbol of God's immortality and the perpetual existence of the human soul/spirit. It expresses the idea that the human soul/spirit is part of God's spirit and hence since God does not die, the human soul/spirit does not die either. The assertion that "God won't die for me to die" underscores the fact that

[331] Robert C. Sproul, *The Origin of the Soul,* accessed April 5, 2016. http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-origin-of-the-soul

the only way I can die is for God to die; but since God never dies, I also cannot die. This immortality might have been given to humanity when God breathed his breath into the nostrils of Adam (and by extension into the nostrils of Adam's descendants). In Egypt, the immortality of the soul/spirit is also manifested in their artworks.

The African belief in reincarnation and ancestral spirits also supports the immortality of the soul/spirit. If a person's soul/spirit can be reborn into the world several times, then it stands to reason that the soul/spirit exists forever. From the foregoing, it is clear that African belief in the immortality of the soul/spirit is rooted in the belief in God's immortality. The human soul/spirit derives its immortality from God.

Conclusion

In the strict sense of the word, only God is immortal. The supposed immortality of humankind is a gift that God will give at the resurrection of the body. Christianity, due to Greek influence, adopted this terminology, "immortality of the soul" to explain the character of the human soul/spirit. Contrary to the Greek view, we have demonstrated that immortality is associated with the whole person—spirit, body and soul— rather than just the soul. The soul in no way is intrinsically immortal. Rather, it continues to live after death because God sustains it by his power. In African Christianity, life is understood as endless, whether on this earth or in the spirit world. It is cyclical, as life leads to death and death leads to life, immortality. But it is firmly understood also that the human person (body, soul and spirit) is immortal only because God, who gives life to people, is immortal. Since God does not die, human beings to whom God gives life will live forever.

Review Exercise

1. "The soul of a human is not inherently immortal." To what extent do you agree with this assertion?
2. Discuss the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul.
3. In what sense can it be argued that the Bible does not support the idea

of the immortality of the soul?

4. What is the position of ancient Israel on the immortality of the soul?
5. What was the Reformers' position regarding the immortality of the soul?
6. State and explain any three philosophical arguments in support of the immortality of the soul.
7. Explain the contribution of African Christianity to the doctrine of the immortality of the human person.

Chapter 8

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

In 2014 there was an incident at the funeral rites of a man in one of the villages in the country. At the graveside, the only daughter of the deceased asked the officiating minister: "Where is Daddy now? Is he with Jesus already? Is he in Paradise? Is he aware of what we are doing? What is he doing?" Answers to such questions are of crucial importance to the one who is asking them because they serve as a source of comfort and encouragement. Unfortunately, the only thing the minister could say was: "My daughter, do not worry about the dead. Death is inevitable." The failure to obtain satisfactory answers to her questions made the young lady very sad, more curious and uncomfortable. Aware of the difficulties that Christians go through in dealing with questions of this nature, we have devoted this chapter to investigate what happens to a person from the time of death to the resurrection of the body at the *parousia*. In Christianity, this points to the period known as the intermediate state.

Intermediate State Defined

Enough biblical evidence points to the fact that the human person does not enter into the final state at death but awaits the resurrection of the body. The resurrection, which is yet future, proves an intermediate state for the present dead. By intermediate state, we mean the state of the person between physical death and the resurrection of the body at the Second Coming of Christ. The term "intermediate state" can also refer to the time between death and the future bodily resurrection. This theological concept speculates regarding what kind of "body", if any, believers have while they await the resurrection. To further outline the mystery of the intermediate

state, people raise questions about how a dead person who was cremated after death and their ashes thrown into the sea (for instance), might just be resurrected bodily at the Second Coming of Christ.

The Doctrine of the Intermediate State in the History of the Church

At first, the early church was so much occupied by the idea of Christ's imminent return that, they did not discuss much the intermediate state. Later, as many believers began to die, the church realised that Jesus' return was not as forthcoming as they thought. Their interest in matters pertaining to the intermediate state arose and the church began discussions on the issue. From that time, the doctrine of the intermediate state became prevalent in the church, as is shown by the numerous references to it in the writings of the Church Fathers.

The early church had a hard time combining the idea of individual judgement and retribution at death with the general judgement and retribution after the resurrection. In the view of Berkhof, ascribing too much importance to one of these would depreciate the significance of the other and vice versa.[332] The majority of early church theologians attempted to deal with the difficulty by assuming that there is a distinct intermediate state between death and the resurrection.[333] Consequently, for many and for the church, the intermediate state was believed to be a slightly reduced version of ultimate retribution. The belief was that the righteous in subterranean Hades received a measure of reward not equal to their future heavenly reward and the wicked received a degree of punishment not equal to their future hell punishment.[334]

Aside from the above prevalent view, there were other views expressed by Church Fathers. Some of the Fathers (influenced by later Judaism and Greek philosophy) taught that Hades was an underworld where the dead are kept to receive partial rewards and punishments. Justin Martyr, for example, was of the view that the righteous take up a better place while

[332] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 753.
[333] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 753.
[334] Addison as cited in Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 753.

the wicked take up a wretched place awaiting the time of judgement.[335] He opposed any idea that the righteous go straight to heaven. Tertullian (220 AD) believed that only the martyrs went into the presence of the Lord. For him, other saints did not lodge in Paradise but in Hades.[336] Irenaeus also criticised the Gnostic idea that the soul goes immediately to God upon death. He argued (like Hippolytus and Tertullian) that only martyrs go directly to God at the time of death. Contrary to the view of Tertullian, Cyprian (258 AD) opines that believers immediately go into the presence of the Lord after their death.

Seeds of the purgatorial doctrine were planted in the early church. The Alexandrian School spoke of the soul's gradual purification in the intermediate state as preparation for heaven, an idea which became the foundation for the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory which was dogmatised later in the 6th century. In a similar vein, Origen (254 AD) taught that Christ, through his death and resurrection, not only transported the righteous to Paradise but also brought to an end the power of Hades to hold the righteous captive.[337] Platonic influence on Origen made him think that at death, "the preexistent soul" infused into the body would be released from its cage (the body) and restored back to God. For this to happen, the soul needs to be purified by the remedial fires of hell. He also believed that there would be a series of ages of creation, fall, judgement, and purgation until all the dead (including the devil) are purified from sin and are ultimately saved.[338] Origen's idea that everyone will eventually be purged and saved (universalism) was rejected by the Council of Constantinople in 543 AD.

The late Church Fathers of the 5th century expressed purgatorial thoughts as well. Gregory of Nyssa posits that the sinner "cannot be admitted to approach the Divinity until the purifying fire shall have expiated the stains with which his soul was infected."[339] Ambrose said (based on 1 Cor. 3:15), "he shall be saved yet, so as by fire." By this statement, Ambrose

[335] As cited in Willey, *Christian Theology*, 227.
[336] Willey, *Christian Theology,* 227.
[337] Willey, *Christian Theology*, 277-228.
[338] Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine,* 86.
[339] As cited in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 448.

meant purification by fire was a necessary means to the end of salvation. Augustine maintained that "the period which intervenes between the death and the final resurrection of [a person] contains souls in secret receptacles, who are treated according to their character and conduct in the flesh."[340] He further contended that carnal Christians, after their death, are required to experience purifying fire before admission into heaven. Christian theology has, since the time of Augustine, taught that after death human persons rest or are afflicted while waiting for the completion of their salvation or the consummation of their damnation.

In the medieval era, under Pope Gregory I (about 593 AD), the Catholic Church propounded the doctrine of purgatory to explain what happens between death and resurrection.According to this doctrine, baptised Catholics who, at death, are not good enough to enter heaven are kept in purgatory to go through purification for their sins to be removed before being allowed to enter heaven.

By the thirteenth century, the doctrine of purgatorial fire prior to entering heaven was firmly established in the church. In the late medieval period, Aquinas propounded a five-fold view of the unseen spiritual realm: heaven (a place of bliss), hell (a place full of eternal punishment), purgatory, the *limbus partum* (temporal abode of Old Testament saints) and the *limbus infantum* (abode of children who die without being baptised).[341] The Catholic Church accepted the doctrine of purgatory as an official dogma at the Council of Florence (1439) which declared:

> Also, if truly penitent people die in the love of God before they have made satisfaction for acts and omissions by worthy fruits of repentance, their souls are cleansed after death by cleansing pains; and the suffrages of the living faithful avail them in giving relief from such pains, that is, sacrifices of masses, prayers, almsgiving, and other acts of devotion which have customarily been performed by some of the faithful for others of the faithful in accordance with the church's ordinance.[342]

[340] Shedd as cited in Willey, *Christian Theology*, 227.

[341] Each of those concepts are discussed briefly below.

[342] Daniel L. Akin, David Paul Nelson and Peter R. Schemm (eds.), *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2007), 699; Brett Salkeld, *Can Catholics and Evangelicals Agree about Purgatory and the Last Judgment?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011).

In the 16th century, the Reformers agreed with the Catholics on the conscious existence of the soul/spirit in the intermediate state. However, they strongly rejected the Catholic doctrine of purgatory as an explanation for what happens in the intermediate state. The Reformers expressed the common idea that the righteous entered the bliss of heaven and the wicked descended to hell immediately after death. Yet, there was no agreement regarding the bliss of heaven and the judgement of hell before the final judgement. In his *Psychopannychia,* Calvin contended against the doctrine of "soul sleep." He declared that, for believers, the intermediate state is one of blessedness and anticipation. This means that the experience of bliss in the intermediate state is provisional and incomplete. This experience will become complete after the resurrection. Barth records that Calvin saw the doctrine of "soul sleep" as "simply a metaphysical version of the attitude to life that by passivity, renunciation of all things, abandonment of all thinking, willing and doing, finally thinks that by the mystical death of the soul in God can attain to the supreme summit of human striving."[343]

During this time, some Socinians and the Anabaptists argued that the soul sleeps from the time of death to the resurrection of the body.[344] This view is held today by Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Reformers disagreed strongly with the Anabaptists' doctrine of soul sleep. Luther stated that, "[i]n the interim [between death and resurrection], the soul does not sleep but is awake and enjoys the vision of angels and of God, and has conversed with them."[345] With regards to Gen. 35:18, Luther stated that when Rachel died, she was received into the heavenly glory.

In the face of Protestant criticisms of the doctrine of purgatory, the Catholic Church firmly maintained their purgatorial position at the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent, Session VI (1547), Canon 30 declared "infallibly":

> If anyone says that after the grace of justification has been received the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out for any repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be paid, before access can be opened to the kingdom of

[343] As cited in Akin et. al, *Theology for the Church*, 881.
[344] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 754.
[345] As cited in Ray S. Anderson*, Theology, Death and Dying* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 117.

> heaven, [let him be anathema].[346]

In 1563, the Council revisited the issue and decreed on purgatory as follows:

> The Catholic Church instructed by the Holy Spirit in accordance with sacred Scripture and the ancient Traditions of the Fathers, has taught in the holy Councils and most recently this ecumenical Council that there is purgatory and that the souls detained there are helped by the prayers of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar [The Mass]. Therefore, this holy Council commands the bishops to be diligently on guard that the true doctrine about purgatory, the doctrine handed down from the holy Fathers and the sacred Councils, be preached everywhere, and that Christians be instructed in it, believe it, and adhere to it. But let the more difficult and subtle controversies, which neither edify nor generally cause any increase in piety (See 1 Tim. 1:4), be omitted from the ordinary sermons to the poorly instructed.[347]

The above declaration points to the seriousness of the issue of purgatory in Catholic circles. In the 19th century, the idea that the intermediate state is a state of further probation for those who have not accepted Christ in this life was propounded by theologians, especially in England, Switzerland and Germany. The disagreements resulting from the debate over the intermediate state are further complicated by the use of the terms "heaven" and "hell", "hades" and "paradise" often without qualification. Each of those terms need unpacking to clarify the issues a bit more.

What the Bible teaches about the Intermediate State

The Bible teaches the conscious existence of people in the intermediate state. In the Old Testament, it is clear that God is the source of all life and that death is in the world as the result of sin (Gen. 1:20-27; 2:7, 22; 3:22-23). The Old Testament considers the death of the righteous as a "rest" in company with the fathers (Gen. 47:30; Deut. 31:16; 2 Sam. 7:12). In Exod. 3:6, God made it clear to Moses that he was the same God who revealed himself to the patriarchs when he said to Moses "I am … the God of

[346] Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* translated by Linda M. Maloney (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 213.

[347] Anthony Josemaria, *The Blessed Virgin Mary in England: A Mary-Catechism with Pilgrimage to her Holy Shrines,* Vol. 1 (Bloomington: iUniverse Inc, 2008), 160.

Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." In his encounter with the Sadducees, Jesus quoted this passage to explain the resurrection of the dead. Jesus concludes that God by saying to Moses, "I am…the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6) indicates that the God who revealed himself to the patriarchs is the same God who made himself known to Moses in a new way. Jesus later quoted this text to clarify the resurrection of the dead and draw the conclusion that God "is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive" (Matt. 22:32). By this statement, Jesus meant that even though the patriarchs died long ago, they still live, for God is the God of the living and not the God of the dead.

In biblical times, it was a common practice for people to consult the spirit of the dead. In the Old Testament, we find the prohibition of this practice, necromancy (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 7; Deut. 18:10-11; cf. Isa. 8:19). The existence of consciousness after death might be the possible reason for banning necromancy. "Mediums" and "spiritists" sought to call up persons from the realm of the dead and communicate with them. For example, the spirit of Samuel appeared both to the witch at Endor and to Saul (1 Sam. 28:1-19). In this experience, Saul recognised Samuel (vv. 14, 20) who foretold Saul what was about to happen, which in effect was fulfilled (vv. 18-19). This passage demonstrates Israel's belief in consciousness after death.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also intimates that a departed person has the benefit of consciousness after death— There is consciousness in the intermediate state. The New Testament refers to the soul (Greek: *psyche*) controversially as that aspect of the human being which cannot be killed by those who can kill the body, but which is nevertheless subject to destruction in hell (Greek *Gehena*) . Does this imply that the soul lives after death? In Matthew 10:28-29, Jesus teaches his disciples saying, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell." It is clear that it is human beings who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; God can destroy both the body and the soul in Gehenna. This is in line with our earlier African Christian thought that unless God dies, the one to whom God gives life can also not die. Earlier, we mentioned that Jesus taught that even though the

patriarchs died long ago, they still live, for God is the God of the living and not the God of the dead (Matt. 22:32). In Rev. 6:9-11, we learn that life and consciousness belong to the "souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given" for they cry: "How long?" We admit that the preceding text, coming from an apocalypse infused with visions and symbolism could prove tricky in interpretation. However, these verses, at least indicate that the spirits, the dead martyrs, are conscious and they interact with Christ as they wait for the full resurrection. Jesus' parable in Luke 16:19-31 also shows that the dead are in conscious existence. We recognise and admit that being a parable, Luke 16:19-31 cannot be pressed too far in its details. Moreover, we are aware of the debate whether the text is a parable or a narrative. Whether a parable or a narrative, it is clear that the text teaches that the righteous dead and the wicked dead go to different places in the intermediate state. It further teaches that in the intermediate state the righteous are comforted while the wicked suffer. These ideas underscore a certain fact of consciousness for the dead before the resurrection. Since the resurrection precedes the final state, it implies that the dead, whether righteous or wicked do not go immediately after death to heaven or hell respectively.

Where then are the dead? The Bible teaches that the intermediate state for the believer is different from that of the unbeliever. The Old Testament refers to the realm of the dead as sheol (Gen.37:35; 42:38), a word which the KJV renders 31 times as 'hell', 31 times as 'grave' and 3 times as 'pit'. Sheol is derived from *shaal* which means "to be hollow." The term sheol does not mean grave in the sense of the tomb. It certainly means more than merely "go to the grave." The Lord told Abram that he would "be gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8, KJV). Purkiser et. al observe that the phrase "gathered to his people [or his fathers]" signifies "a community of existence after death that no individual grave or tomb could provide."[348] Derek Kidner says, "The expression 'gathered to his people,' which could hardly refer to the family sepulcher where only Sarah was buried as yet, must point, however indistinctly, to the continued existence of the dead."[349]

[348] Westlake T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor and Willard H. Taylor, *God, Man and Salvation: A Biblical Theology* (Kansas City, MI: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), 142.

[349] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: TOTC* (London: Tyndale, 1967), 150.

Geisler agrees with the above scholars. He argues that: the phrase "gathered to" means "a get-together of spirits, not merely a disintegration of the body (as would be the case with solely "going to the grave")."[350] It seems safe to conclude that at death a believer is taken into glory to be united with the faithful patriarchs in paradise (Ps. 73:24). In this sense, the Old Testament concept of sheol is intended to convey the idea that there is personal existence in the realm of the dead after death.

Both believers and the wicked go down to sheol at death,[351] because both enter the realm of the dead (Job 17:13; Prov.27:20; 30:15-16). Scholars differ as to whether sheol is the permanent abode of all humans or whether it holds out a hope of escape for the pious. It is a place of darkness and forgetfulness (Job.10:21-22, Ps.88:12), silence (Ps.94:17) with occasional communication (Isa.14:4-12). At times, sheol is represented as a gloomy, subterranean abode where the inhabitants are shadows, existing in a weak, powerless and dreamy state and all (whether righteous or wicked) will go there. At other times, in sheol, what happens to the wicked at death is different from the fate of believers (Gen.5: 24; Num.23: 10). It was believed that paradise or Abraham's bosom housed dead Jews, or at least those who had been faithful to the Law while sheol housed dead Gentiles. Dead Jews were to be redeemed from sheol by the coming Messiah (during First Advent) while dead Gentiles will live in the abode of darkness forever.[352] The blessedness and locality of paradise are far short of that of the heavens proper and the torment of gehenna is far less intolerable than hell proper.

In the New Testament, hades translates sheol and appears eleven (11) times (Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Cor. 15:55; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14). In all these occurrences, hades refers to the realm of the dead or world of departed spirits, except Luke 16:23 where it represents a place of provisional torment and 1 Cor. 15:55, where it is translated as hell. Lewis and Demarest note the following about hades.[353] Hades is like a prison; it is locked under keys (Rev. 1:18; cf. 1 Pet. 3:19; Rev. 20:7). It takes hold of only the spirits of the wicked (Luke 16:23-

[350] Geisler, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 4,
[351] Purkiser et. al, *God, Man and Salvation,* 142.
[352] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 755.
[353] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 461,

26; Rev. 20:12-15). It is a place of conscious temporary punishment (Lk. 16:24-28; Rev. 6:8) where the unsaved reside prior to the final judgement.

In Luke 16:19-31, we find hades represented as divided into two departments— that of the blessed (a place of positive bliss), paradise, or the bosom of Abraham and that of the lost (a place of positive torment), gehenna[354] (explained below). Concerning the use of hades in Luke 16:19-31, it could be objected that it is a parable and as such has no direct doctrinal teaching. While this objection is legitimate, it is also true that the point of the parable itself is the lot of the godly contrasted with the fate of the wicked after death. Further in the parable, hades refers to the place of punishment, suffering and misery. It may be gathered from the parable that both rest in Abraham's bosom and suffering in torment are possible in hades at the intermediate state. In that case, hades simply means the place of the dead.

The word paradise (*paradeisos*) was adopted into both Greek and Hebrew from Persia. In the Septuagint, it is used to represent the garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8ff). In the New Testament, paradise occurs only in 2 Cor. 12:4 (to represent the "third heaven") and Luke 23:43 (intermediate state of the righteous between death and resurrection) and Rev. 2:7 to signify the "Garden of God" in which grows the tree of life. In the New Testament paradise refers to two realities. First, it denotes the intermediate state of the righteous, between death and the resurrection (Lk. 23:43). In this sense, it is similar to "Abraham's bosom" which is the state of blessedness which the righteous dead enjoy in the presence of the Lord (Lk.16:22-23).[355]

Second, it refers to the eternal state of the righteous (ie. heaven). This is how Paul used the term when he said he was caught up into "paradise" or "the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2-4).[356] However, there is a sense in which Paul's claim may simply point to the Jewish idea of a firmament divided into various layers, the highest being God's owm abode. In Revelation 2:7, we read of the "paradise of God" which contains "the tree of life." This paradise is the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-22:5).[357]Exactly what this "New

[354] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 755.
[355] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 462.
[356] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology,* 462.
[357] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology,* 462.

Jerusalem" refers to is a matter of debate, especially because it is prepared in heaven and sent down to the earth, if read literally (see Rev. 21:1ff).

Jesus' pronouncement to the dying thief on the cross needs consideration too. Jesus said to the thief: "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43). The common exegetical understanding of this statement is that Jesus was telling the thief that when he dies, he will be in Jesus' presence. This understanding has been challenged by the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs). The official Bible of the JWs, The New World Translation*,* punctuates Jesus' words as "Truly I say to you today, you shall be with me in Paradise." From this point, they argue that "today" refers simply to the time Jesus made the statement and not to the time that he will meet the thief in Paradise. For us, the context demands that the "today" refers to when the thief on the cross would be with Jesus in paradise because Jesus is responding to his request in the previous verse: "Jesus, remember me *when you come into your kingdom*!" (Emphasis added). The response, "Today you shall be with me in paradise" can in this context only be taken to mean, "Not only will I remember you when I come into my kingdom, but already today you shall be with me in my presence." More so, "today" (Greek. *séméron*) is used eleven (11) times in Luke and nine times in Acts, to mean the fulfillment of God's plan in the present. Also, same-day fulfilment is consistent with Jesus' statement three verses later: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"—which implies conscious bliss with the Father. (v. 46)

Gehenna, the Greek form of the Hebrew words (*gē hinnōm*) "valley of Hinnom," was located south of Jerusalem, where children were sacrificed and where idolatry was practiced (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 19:6) and where later offal and refuse were slowly burned. During the inter-testamental period, gehenna was used to refer to "…the 'station of vengeance' and 'future torment' (2 Bar. 59:10-11), the 'pit of destruction' (Pirke Aboth 5:19),… the 'pit of torment' (2 Esd. 7:36)."[358] In the NT, gehanna appears twelve times (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6).

The New Testament usage points to three facts about gehenna. First, it is used as a reference to the place of eschatological punishment

[358] William Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 118.

(Matt.23:33; 25:41).[359] Second, it is always placed at the end of the world after the general resurrection (Matt.5:22, 23:33). Third, it is a place where both the body together with the soul/spirit are punished consciously (Matt. 5:22; 10:28; Mark 9:43-48). Jesus used the terms "unquenchable fire" and "never-dying worms" (Mk.9:47-48) when he was using the imagery of conscious suffering described in Isaiah 66:24. Fourth, "the duration of its fiery punishment is everlasting (Matt. 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43, 48)."[360] Fifth, "Satan, demons, the beast, and the false prophet will be consigned to it in the end (Matt.8:29; 25:41; Rev.19:20; 20:10, 14)."[361] Thus, it is not at all clear whether gehenna refers specifically to the intermediate state or if it is the final state (hell) of the wicked. This lack of clarity is similar to what our discussion of hades revealed.

The account of Stephen's martyrdom attests to the reality of the intermediate state. "When they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'" (Acts 7:59; cf. Lk. 23:46). At death, Stephen's immaterial spirit (pneuma), not soul, separated from his material body and passed immediately into the presence of Christ. We further note that 2 Corinthians 5:1-4 points to the naked, unclothed, disembodied person at death in contrast with its state at the resurrection when it will be clothed.

From our discussion of the Bible data regarding the intermediate state, our conclusions are as follows:

1. The Bible affirms that when people die they go to the realm of the dead. They are not annihilated.
2. While at the realm of the dead the righteous will be comforted and the wicked will experience suffering prior to the resurrection.
3. There is consciousness for both the righteous and the wicked after death and before the resurrection.
4. In the intermediate state, the departed person is disembodied (ie. without a body), yet this state is for the righteous, a state of conscious joy and for the wicked a state of conscious detestable suffering.

[359] Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 118.
[360] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 462.
[361] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 462.

5. The disembodied believer enters the presence of Christ in paradise awaiting the resurrection. (2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:23).
6. The disembodied wicked, in the intermediate state, enters hades where it suffers conscious torment (Luke 16:19-31) under constraint and guard (1 Pet. 3:19) until the resurrection of the wicked and final punishment.

Soul Sleep

The doctrine of soul sleep is a contention against the traditional view of a conscious soul, temporarily separated from its body, awaiting its reunion at the resurrection when Christ returns. This view holds that the soul is in a state of unconsciousness from the time of death to the resurrection of the body at the Second Coming. The doctrine of soul sleep is held by those who deny a unified duality of body and soul or who think they can know nothing of humanness ontologically. The Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses are two examples of modern proponents of this position. The Seventh Day Adventists teach that "The soul has no conscious existence apart from the body. There is no text that indicates that the soul survives the body as a conscious entity."[362] Jack Cottrell reacts to this claim: when Adventists "describe the state of the dead as 'a sleep' and as 'a state of unconsciousness', this is misleading since both sleep and unconsciousness imply the existence of a being or metaphysical entity that continues to exist after the body dies. But this is the very thing Adventists deny."[363]

The doctrine claims support from the following. First, it claims support from Judeo-Christian Scriptures which describe the death of a believer as "sleep" (Eccl. 9:5, Acts 7:60, 13:36, 1 Cor.15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; Jn.11:11, 14). Second, it is argued that human existence demands the unity of soul and body. The absence of the body must mean thedysfunction of the soul. The third contention is that a state of consciousness between death and resurrection, characterised by bliss or woe, unwarrantedly anticipates the judgement verdict of the last day.

[362] Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2006), 505.
[363] Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All,* 505.

The discussion in the previous section refutes the idea of soul sleep or soul unconsciousness. The summary of our defense is as follows. First, there are several biblical references to personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection (Lk. 16:19-31; 23:43; Acts 7:59; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9-11). Second, the references to death as sleep simply refer to the cessation of physical life (Matt. 27:52; Jhn. 11:11; Acts 13:36). Third, if the tripartite constitution of humankind is invoked, then "soul sleep" should rather be a doctrine of the indestructibility of the spirit. As we have seen, soul/spirit is the immaterial part of the human person. This immaterial part has no independent existence apart from the body but the same immaterial part is given consciousness in the intermediate state by the God who gives life to all and who by the Spirit will resurrect the dead body, soul and spirit. Finally, if the soul sleep argument is valid, then there can be no joy of salvation in this life either.

Instantaneous Resurrection

This position holds that believers receive the resurrection body immediately at death and therefore there is a disembodied condition between death and the Second Advent. At death, the believer gets a resurrection body and there is then no need for a final resurrection, goes the argument. This view ignores a lot of Paul's teaching (See Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess.4:16-17; Rom. 2:3-16; 1 Cor.4:5; 2 Thess.1:5-2:12; 2 Tim.4:8). We shall discuss this fully in volume two.

Roman Catholic Theology of the Intermediate State

The Roman Catholic Church holds that there are three possible places that the dead go–*Limbus Partum*, *Libus Infantum and* Purgatory. Quite a bit has been said in this book about the doctrine of purgatory. We shall consider each of these concepts briefly below.

Limbus Partum

This refers to the two places on the fringe or outskirts of hell where the souls of pre- Christian saints were held until Christ's resurrection (Lk. 16:22; 1

Pet. 3:18-22). In other words, it refers to a place where the Old Testament saints went, waiting for Christ to come and free them from the grave.[364] It is believed that Christ, during his descent into hades after his crucifixion, delivered the souls of the patriarchs and carried them in triumph to heaven. This is the Roman Catholic interpretation of the Apostles' Creed, that he descended into hell to go and fetch his saints

Limbus Infantum

This is the abode of the souls of unbaptised children, who, neither depraved nor justified, do not experience either punishment or heavenly bliss. It is not regarded as a place either of suffering or happiness. They cannot enter heaven or the kingdom of God (Jhn 3:5),[365] so excluded from heaven; they are on the outskirts of hell, where the fires do not reach. Aquinas states that although unbaptised infants are deprived forever of the happiness of the saints, they suffer neither sorrow nor sadness in consequence of the privation.

Purgatory

As we have noted earlier, purgatory to "a purifying fire wherein souls have removed from them the *obligations,* or *debts,* incurred by venial sins, and also the obligations (debts) of temporary punishment for remitted mortal sins."[366] It is "a place or state in which are detained the souls of those who die in grace, in friendship with God, but with the blemish of venial sin or with temporary debt for sin unpaid"…, "purged, cleansed [and] readied for eternal union with God in Heaven."[367] "Purgatory is the intermediate state of unknown duration in which those who die imperfect, but not in unrepented mortal sin, undergo a course of penal purification, to qualify for admission into heaven. They share in the communion of the saints and are benefited by our prayers and good works."[368] Simply put, it is "the place where the

[364] Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Illinois: Christian Liberty Press, 2003), 139.
[365] Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine,* 139.
[366] Josemaria, *The Blessed Virgin Mary in England*, 160.
[367] George Brantl, ed., *Catholicism* (New York: Braziller, 1962), 232.
[368] P. J. Toner, "Eschatology," *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, Vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913), 533.

souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted into heaven."[369] It can be seen from the above definitions that, Catholic theology perceives a gap between believers' state at death and their state in heaven and it is this gap that purgatory is intended to bridge. Roderick Strange observes as follows: "The Church has perceived a gap between our state at death and the perfect state we must achieve for heaven. We need to be purified, and that process is expressed in the doctrine of purgatory."[370]

According to this teaching, only those who, at the time of death, are in a perfect state of grace and penitence, go directly and immediately to heaven (for example martyrs). Those who die in a state of grace but short of Christian perfection (due to venial sins) go through penal and purifying sufferings as a form of preparation for admission into the supreme blessedness and joys of heaven where they will await the resurrection of the body.[371] On the other hand, those who die in a state of mortal sin go directly to hell. Thus, upon death, a person faces one of three destinies: Hell, or the lake of fire, purgatory or heaven. Catholics categorise sins into two. Mortal sins are those that cause a person to go to hell if s/he dies without confessing them. Venial sins are daily transgressions and imperfections. Even if a person does not confess them, s/he will be saved after spending time in purgatory to pay for them.

Modern Catholic scholarship denies that purgatory is a place for souls and instead, conceives of it more as a process of purifying souls for heaven.[372] Pope John Paul II, for example, asserts that "the term Purgatory does not indicate a place, but a condition of existence" where Christ "removes…the remnants of imperfection."[373] Also, in contemporary times, purgatorial fire is explained in the spiritual sense rather than the physical. In this regard, one catechism reads, "The talk of purgatorial fire is an image that refers to a deeper reality. Fire can be understood as *the cleansing,*

[369] John E. Gore, *A New Look at the Last Things* (Eugene, OR: Resources Publications, 2011), 25. See also, Grudem, 714.

[370] Roderick Strange, *The Catholic Faith* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 163-64.

[371] Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1179.

[372] Geisler, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 4, 1283.

[373] Josemaria, *The Blessed Virgin Mary in England,* 160.

purifying, and sanctifying power of God's holiness and mercy. God's power straightens, purifies, heals, and consummates whatever remained imperfect at death."[374] Thus, in Roman Catholicism, the forgiveness of venial sins can be accomplished in three different ways: (1) By an unconditional forgiveness on God's part. (2) Through suffering (purgatory) and the performance of penitential works (mass, prayers and good works by the living on behalf of the dead). (3) By contrition or outward signs of inner conversion (sackcloth and ashes, fasting, mortification).

The duration and intensity of purgatorial suffering varies in degree depending on the degree of purification one needs or the person's degree of sinfulness. A life full of extra good works would enable a person to be in purgatory only for a short time, or in few cases, skip purgatory altogether. The purification process in purgatory, it is believed, can be assisted by prayers and devotions of the living.[375] Catholics also believe that the Pope has jurisdiction over purgatory and he can grant indulgences if he chooses. When the Pope grants indulgence, he dispenses the extra merits of Christ and the saints constitute a heavenly treasury.[376] Obviously, the power of the Pope to forgive sins goes beyond this world to the next.

Purgatory is not to be taken as a state of probation or a second chance but as purification and preparation for entrance into heaven. Strange posits that purgatory "is not a second chance, a second death; rather we work out the consequences of our decision for Christ, which have previously been impeded, but not annulled, by our sins…But for those who have died in Christ perfectly, for the martyrs, there is no purgatory."[377] The purgatorial suffering includes both being absent from God and being in positive pain. The agonies of purgatory are very severe, surpassing any suffering endured in this life. God used purgatorial sufferings as a substitute for the punishment for sins that Christians were supposed to have received in time but did not. "Suffrages operate in such a matter that the satisfactory value of the good works is offered to God in substitution for the temporary punishment for sins which the poor souls still have to render. It operates by

[374] As cited in Geisler, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 4, 1283.
[375] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 760.
[376] Bernard, *Systematic Theology*, 289.
[377] Strange, *The Catholic Faith*, 163-64.

way of remission of temporary punishments due to sins."[378] The doctrine of purgatory is deeply rooted in the following Catholic beliefs.[379]

1. The atonement of Christ is available for us only in respect to original sin and the exposure to eternal death.
2. For all sins committed after baptism, the offender must make satisfaction by penance or good works. It is believed that all sins committed before baptism are washed away at baptism.
3. This satisfaction must be complete and the soul purified from all sin before it can enter heaven.
4. This satisfaction and purification, if not effected in this life, must be accomplished after death.
5. The Eucharist is a propitiatory sacrifice intended to secure the pardon of post-baptismal sins and takes effect according to the intention of the officiating priest. Therefore, if he intends it for the benefit of any soul in purgatory, it inures to his/her advantage.
6. The Pope, being the vicar of Christ on earth, has full power to forgive sin; that is, to exempt offenders from the obligation to make satisfaction for their offences.

Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of a Purgatory

The main textual support for the doctrine of purgatory is 2 Maccabees 12:42–45:

> And so betaking themselves to prayers, they besought him, that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten. But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and

[378] As cited in Grudem, *Intoduction to Christian Doctrine,* 714.
[379] Slightly modified from Charles Hodges, *Systematic Theology*, 750.

> vain to pray for the dead,) And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them.

Ott rightly points out that, in this text, "the Jews prayed for their fallen [dead] … that their sins might be forgiven them."[380] Another support is Matthew 12:32 where Jesus teaches that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven "either in this age or in the age to come." It is argued that Jesus meant that there are certain sins that can be forgiven in the age to come which refers to the afterlife. As Ott puts it this text "leaves open the possibility that [other] sins are forgiven not only in this world but in the world to come."[381] In 1 Corinthians 3:15, Paul declares, "If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire." According to Catholic interpretation, this text teaches that the souls of the departed are purified by fire in purgatory. Ott says "The Latin Fathers take the passage to mean a transient purification punishment in the other world."[382] More so, in Matthew 5:26 Jesus talks of a judge who will not release his prisoner until complete repayment of debt. Ott comments, "Through further interpretation … a time-limited condition of punishment in the other world began to be seen expressed in the time-limited punishment of the prison."[383] Other Bible texts include Isaiah 4:4; Micah 7:8; Zechariah 9:11; Malachi 3:2, 3; Matthew 12:32 and 1 Corinthians 15:29.

A Protestant Response to Catholic Arguments for Purgatory[384]

The first, most obvious, and, for Protestants, the most decisive argument against the doctrine of purgatory is, that it is not taught in the Protestant Bible. This is virtually admitted by its advocates. Most objective Catholic theologians find no strong biblical support for purgatory. Catholic theologian Richard P. McBrien admits that "there is, for all practical purposes, no (clear) biblical basis for the doctrine of purgatory."[385] The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* admits that "the doctrine of purgatory is not explicitly stated

[380] As cited in Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1284.
[381] As cited in Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1284..
[382] As cited in Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1284.
[383] As cited in Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1284.
[384] Gleaned from Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1284ff.
[385] Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1980), 1143.

in the Bible."[386] "In fact, neither is purgatory *implicitly* taught in Scripture, since the Roman Catholic "use of God's Word to support purgatory does violence to the contexts of the passages employed."[387] From 2 Maccabees, both prayers for the dead and making an offering to God to deliver the dead from their sin are clearly approved. In the view of Protestants, 2 Maccabees is not part of the inspired canon and has no biblical authority. For Catholics, it belongs to the second canon. It is part of the Catholic Bible, to be sure. As we learnt in chapter 2, Protestants reject the Apocrypha as Christian Scripture. Therefore, there is no justification for building a doctrine on such a passage. This fundamentally explains the disagreement between the two camps.

With regards to 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Protestants argue that it describes the fire of final judgement, not a fire of purgation. These verses describe a proving of the lasting good rather than a purging of residual evil. Jesus' statement in Matthew 12:32 about the sin which will never be forgiven "either in this age or in the age to come" does not teach that there are some sins that could be forgiven in the next life. In any event, purgatory relates to only venial sins. It does not cover mortal sins. But this verse is about mortal sin. So, How can Jesus' statement about the impossibility of post-death forgiveness for a mortal sin be the foundation of an argument that non-mortal sins will then be forgiven?"[388] Berkhof believes that the doctrine is founded on the wrong premise. He enumerates some of them as follows:

> It is perfectly evident, however, that these passages can be made to support the doctrine of purgatory only by a very forced exegesis. The doctrine finds absolutely no support in Scripture, and moreover, rests on several false premises, such as (a) that we must add something to the work of Christ; (b) that our good works are meritorious in the strict sense of the word; (c) that we can perform works of supererogation, works in excess of the commands of duty; and (d) that the Church's power of the keys is absolute in a judicial sense.[389]

Finally, the doctrine of purgatory is against the biblical teaching of

386 As cited in Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1285.
387 Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1284.
388 Gleaned from Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 1285.
389 Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 761.

justification by faith. We are saved by grace alone (Gal.3:1-14, Eph.2:8-9). Double punishment is a contradiction to the cross and grace. Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 Jhn1:7; Lk.15:11-32; 23:41-43; Heb.10:14). Our post baptism sins are simply to be confessed and forgiveness sought for them. We are not told in the Bible that such sins would be kept until purgatory where we would be purified of them.

Afterlife and Intermediate State in Ancient Greek Thought

The ancient Greeks believed in a complex system of gods, goddesses, deities and heroes.[390] This complexity extended to their view of the afterlife. With short lifespans and death a common occurrence, the ancient Greeks were very concerned not only with the act of dying but funerary preparations, burial practices and their trip to the underworld.

That the human person as made up of body and soul/spirit has been maintained throughout the ages. However, the issue of which of them is real or a shadow has changed from time to time. Before Plato, it was taught that the body is real and the soul/spirit is a shade or shadow. We have established earlier that ancient Greeks subscribed to the concept of the immortal soul. The Greeks had a dualistic view of humans—that is, the human person is made up of two different substances, a mortal body (Greek: *soma*) and an immortal soul/spirit (Greek: *psyche*).

The Greek conception of the state of the soul after death has changed with time. Homer's two works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were a paradigm for the ancient Greeks. In book 11 of the *Odyssey* (written in the 8th or 7th centuries), Homer tells a myth as part of Odysseus' return from Troy which eventually led Odysseus to the underworld (the ends of the earth) where he and his companions made contact with the dead. According to Homer, after death, the spirit or psyche of the dead journeyed to the underworld ruled by the brother of Zeus called Hades.[391] Upon entering the underworld, the spirits had to cross the river Styx on Charon's ferry to enter their final resting place. They describe that persons were buried with coins

[390] Jennifer Lynn Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2007), 1.
[391] Hades is also sometimes used to refer to the underworld itself.

in their mouths to pay the ferryman to take them to the underworld over the river Styx.

Hades is the land of the dead, the final resting place for departed souls/spirits. It is a dark and dismal realm in which bodiless ghosts flitted across grey fields of asphodel. The dead are shades, ghosts, phantoms–they look like human beings but they are not full human beings, they cannot be touched. The souls/spirits wail and move around, lacking consciousness and are unable to speak until they have tasted blood. The souls/spirits, living under the rule of the god Hades, are constantly tormented and troubled by what they did in their earthly lives. Hades is very horrible, offering no comforts or prospects, only a profound sense of loss. The Homeric conception of death is not a reassuring one, but it underlines the importance of life and distinguishing oneself while still on the earth. For this reason, it was typical of ancient Greeks not to have occupied themselves with speculation about what awaits them after death.[392] Really, it is far better to be on earth, at least and in the sun, than the phantom kingdoms of the dead. Achilles tells Odysseus that he would prefer to be a poor labourer on earth than to rule among the dead.[393]

Rather than the Homeric idea of the body being real and the soul/spirit the shadow of the body, Plato with Pythagorean flavour taught that the body constitutes our lower nature and our soul/spirit, our higher nature—that is, the soul/spirit is real and the body is the shadow.[394] Plato argued that the immortal soul/spirit is imprisoned in the body, it has forgotten its origin and that salvation was enlightenment, a reminder of the true nature of the spirit and a freeing of it from the material world. With this shift in perspective, Hades was now conceived not as a bad place but as a good place, a place where the soul/spirit was set free. When the body dies, the soul/spirit lives on. Yet the Greeks had no belief in bodily resurrection.

The account of Hades by the Roman poet Vergil (70 BC-19 BC), which came much later than Homer's account, is quite different from that

[392] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life* (New York: Project Gutenberg eBook, 2004), 18.

[393] Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*, 17.

[394] George N. Christodoulou (ed.), *Psychosomatic Medicine: Past and Future* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1987), 19.

of Homer. In this account, there is a clear idea that different fates await those who descend to the afterlife in Hades. Upon entering the underworld, depending on their actions in life, there are three possible destinies for the soul/spirit: Tartarus, Asphodel, or Elysium. Tartarus, which is comparable to hell, is for those who had committed sins against the gods and hence are sentenced to eternal torment. Other spirits go to Asphodel, where the dead lived aimlessly. Elysium is reserved for heroes and those whom the gods favoured, for their spirits would live on in an eternal paradise. This is comparable to heaven. Ancient Greeks believed in reincarnation.[395] To be reincarnated means to enter the body again. The Greek term for the cycle of rebirth is *metempsychosis*. In his famous *Phaedo,* Plato contends for immortality from the alternation of opposites: life must follow death as death follows life. He also argues from reminiscence.

The Intermediate State from the African perspective

African religions believe in rewards and punishments for the righteous and the wicked respectively. Africans however, do not believe in people going to heaven or hell in their traditional thought. The closest thought of heaven will be for those worthy dead people who join the company of the ancestors in the world of the spirits. Those who are rejected as ancestors do not quite go to hell to suffer eternal punishment but rather linger around aimlessly as harmful spirits until they have the opportunity to reincarnate and live better lives than the previous one. If they succeed, they could (depending on how they took this second chance), subsequently be able to join the ancestors when they die. Those who do not get the opportunity to reincarnate remain harmful, hovering spirits. This can hardly be thought of as being in hell as is understood in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Nor can the reincarnation previously mentioned be compared with the purgatory of Catholicism. The fact remains however, that the continued existence of the dead either in the other world (spirit world) as ancestors or reincarnated persons, or even harmful spirits depend on the eternal existence of God who gives indestructible life to all human beings.

[395] Emily Williams Kelly (ed.), *Science, the Self, and Survival after Death: Selected Writings of Ian Stevenson* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 203.

Conclusion

The chapter examined how the doctrine of the intermediate state has been developed through various epochs in the life of the Christian church. Various positions have been examined from one extreme, preterism (which claims that resurrection, occurs immediately at death and hence there is no such thing as an intermediate state) to the other extreme, "soul sleep" (the idea that the dead are unconscious between death and resurrection). We have argued in this book that after death, a person lives consciously and temporarily, separated from his/her body, awaiting reunion at the resurrection at Christ's return. That is, at death, the body returns to dust/ashes and sees corruption/disposal but the immaterial component of the human person is given consciousness, awaiting the resurrection when Christ returns. The eternal state follows subsequently. The righteous are received go to the presence of God in paradise where they wait for the full redemption of their bodies. The wicked go to hades where they remain in torment and wait for the resurrection of the wicked and subsequent eternal punishment. As African theologians, we interpret these views from our context to emphasise the point that as long as God the giver of indestructible life lives on, no human being is ever annihilated. They live on because God who gives them life lives eternally.

Review Exercise

1. Critically appraise the Greek way of thinking about life after death under Homer and Plato.
2. How does the Greek concept of life after death compare with the Jewish way of thinking about life after death under Homer and Plato?
3. To what extent is it valid to argue that the biblical patriarchs have hope of bodily resurrection? How did they show their hope?
4. State Jesus' words to the thief on the cross. What does this statement teach about the intermediate state?
5. Describe the verses in Hebrews that points to an intermediate state.
6. Name and critique three Roman Catholic positions on life after death.

7. What is the doctrine of soul sleep? Is it biblical?
8. What is Sheol? What concept in your tribe compares with the biblical idea of Sheol?
9. Where do believers and unbelievers go after death? Explain with relevant texts.
10. How would you formulate an African Christian theology of the intermediate state?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the beginning of this book till now we have aimed at offering a balanced biblical and theological view of Christian Eschatology from an African perspective, to empower believers to be faithful to Christ at all times (even in their trials and sufferings). We have demonstrated that the African consciousness and nuances of eschatological beliefs constitute a core part of African Indigenous worldviews. Africans look to past events in order to discern their way into the future. Yet, we also highlighted certain aspects of biblical eschatology that are not found in the African traditional worldview.

We have established that African Christian eschatological discourses must take place within the African cultural framework. Without taking the African context seriously, no theological discourse can be meaningful to an African audience and appropriate for their situation. It is in view of this that we began the discussion with a contextual framework that spells out key African aspects of the African belief system that must inform African Christian eschatological discourses.

Our discussions so far have explained how certain African practices reveal the African idea about life and the afterlife. One should not rush to conclude that these practices are evil. One rather has to gather enough information about a particular practice (what is done and why it is done) in order to make a fair assessment and any valid conclusion. The "old" idea that everything African is evil has been proven wrong throughout the book. Missionaries must take note of this and redefine their strategies in the face of theological issues, as well as social problems, which occur at all levels of African society. African traditional beliefs and practices that can

enhance African Christian understanding of eschatology must be used as a springboard to propagate the gospel. The Christian gospel is the same in all cultures and everywhere in the world. However, its presentation may differ depending on one's context.

A key aspect of African culture that needs mention before ending our discussions is kingship. We linked African kingship with God's rule and established that God delegates authority to (traditional) leaders. Traditional rulers must therefore rule in the interest of their subjects just as God does. In contemporary African society, there are a lot of challenges that leaders need to address. For example, there is a high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, social vices, conflict, pollution and others. (Traditional) leaders have the responsibility to make their kingdom a place that gives a valid glimpse of what God's kingdom will be. This is the task that God, the Universal, Sovereign and Absolute Ruler, has given them. Therefore, leaders must show mercy, be fair, and seek the welfare of their people rather than living selfishly and causing confusion in their kingdoms. Traditional leaders (as custodians of culture) must develop and promote aspects of African culture that will enhance socio-economic development in our societies while waiting for the consummation of God's Kingdom.

Finally, we note that African traditional eschatology basically centres on the questions of death, afterlife, immortality, destiny, judgement, reward and punishment, and the final destination or eternal "home" of humans. Some of these questions have been addressed in this volume; others will be treated in the next volume. Both volumes provide a foundation for both enculturation and interreligious studies and communication in Africa. We encourage readers to read both volumes to have a complete picture of what Eschatology in the African context looks like.

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INDEX

S

T

U

W

ABOUT BOOK

The main purpose of Introducing Eschatology in the African Context (consisting of two volumes) is to offer contemporary Christians a balanced biblical and theological view of Christian Eschatology from an African perspective, to empower believers to be faithful to Christ at all times (even in their trials and sufferings). It is also to call the attention of unbelievers to the divine judgment that awaits them so that they may be encouraged to respond to the call to repent and be saved. Each chapter is organised into various sub-themes with summaries and conclusions at the end. There are questions at the end of each chapter to offer the reader the opportunity to have a deeper reflection on major issues discussed. Universities, Seminaries and Bible Schools can use this book for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Eschatology. The approach used makes the book relevant for scholars as well as non-scholars who desire to know God's plan for the future of the universe and relate it to their context.

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