Theological Implications on the Ontological Interpretive Missing Links in the New Testament Biblical Literature

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ABSTRACT: Concepts in the New Testament Biblical literature cannot be deciphered aptly without rationalization for successful interpretation. This needs a key to unlock the knowledge in it due to the fact that the language used to address specific issues in a particular society might be misunderstood literally by other societies otherwise, without proper contextualization. In this article, however, it was discovered that reading the New Testament Biblical literature with a parochial attitude is misleading and distorting. Scholars have affirmed that a mere conventional approach to the study of the New Testament Biblical literature is an injustice in literary terms and hence the need to tackle it. In tackling such issues, the study analyzed literary works by a variety of authors by use of the phenomenological approach. Different literary genres such as figurative speeches, parables, symbols, types and antitypes, proof texts, narratives, Epistles, allegories, metaphors, among others were discussed. Linguistic issues surfaced herein and played a pivotal role in resolving unnecessary conflicts. The study found out interlink between contextualization and proper interpretation of the New Testament Biblical literature.

KEY WORDS: Theological, Theological Implications, Ontological, Interpretive, Missing Links, Biblical Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

It's critical to analyse Biblical literature with an understanding that God chose humans to write His Word using many different literary genres (2 Timothy 3:16-17). According to Fee & Stuart, (1993), they were moved to write in "narrative history, genealogies, prophecy, laws of all sorts, parables, letters, poetry, proverbs, biographies." In their book *Fifty Major Philosophers (2ⁿᵈ Ed.)* Diané and Plant (Diané & Plant, 2006) have written on St. Augustine's argument concerning faith and reason, "Although religion begins with first believing, St. Augustine holds that faith, that is the prerequisite for a Christian philosophy, is simply a kind of blind assent unless it is consolidated and made intelligible by means of reason." This article argues that reasoning well in matters of faith helps humans in the acquisition of true knowledge which in turn quenches the thirsty of the curiosity to set humans free. Methodologically, it's worth noting that integration of language and literature are phenomenal tools for acquiring new knowledge in this research.

In the book *Descartes' Metaphysical Reasoning,* Florka, (Florka, 2001) writes on Descartes' discourse on method and states that one must ensure that the ideas he is investigating are clear and distinctly known by the intellect ("cogito") prior to carrying out a reconstruction and a subsequence synthetical analysis that will culminate in an accurate and justifiable truth. This article considers the use of language as a powerful tool to communicate the above said ideas. Therefore, the type of language and literature one employs in a particular Biblical text is determined by its context (Chapman, 1994; Adams, 2008). For instance, an *exventu* in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus Christ makes a mention of the Church (ἐκκλησία) yet, this is a concept that's explicitly original with the Apostles in the primitive Christian community (Acts 8:1; 11:19-25). This is consistent with history of Christianity. In Greek version it reads, "*κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι ᾅδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.*" (Mackinley, 1881:39). "And you are *Peter*, and on this rock, I will build my *Church* and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it." This is not "*Ipsisima verba Jesu"* or 'the very words of Jesus himself' (an expression used by commentators making a claim for the authenticity of such words, as opposed to words attributed to him by the evangelists) (Oxford Biblical Studies Online, 2009), but παράδοση (tradition), in relation to apostolic succession, an idea that dominated throughout the Medieval era, having been initiated by St. Augustine (Frhlich, 1989; Wallace, 1996; Bauer, 2000). Axiomatically, the New Testament Bible is written in Greek language however, Jesus Christ never spoke any Greek, but Aramaic (Brown, 1975:50), an issue that makes it difficult to substantiate for instance, Aramaic idiomatic expressions in Greek.

Salient issues such as referring Christ as "carpenter" or "son of carpenter" emerged in this study. After Jesus had taught them in His home town, they were astonished and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:54-55). Studies by Brown (1975) explain broadly the meaning of carpenter as a technical term used to denote Christ's substantive wisdom. Accordingly, Brown says that in Sanskrit "*taksan*" denotes a wagon-builder, and that is also

the literal meaning of our English word "carpenter" (which is related to "car", which is a Celtic word). In other words, an old-world carpenter was not so much someone who worked with wood (as would a modern carpenter) but rather someone who assembled things. In Greek the word "*tekton*" means the same thing, and hence describes Jesus's vocation in the New Testament. In Latin the verb *texere* means to weave, and thus in English words like texture and text derive from the act of weaving, and hence words like technology and tectonic from the idea of producing or assembling.

In the context of the New Testament literature, it's important to realize that to the Greeks there was a close relationship (or rather: no distinction) between the bringing forth of children - and although the respective contributions to the process obviously differ widely, both the father and the mother "brought forth" children - and the bringing forth of works of art and literature. Hence in his *Symposium*, Plato could famously speak of "those who are only pregnant in the body" versus "souls which are pregnant". And he added, "And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor. But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of States and families..." (Bury, 1909; Howatson & Frisbee, 2008; Feuerbach, 2014).

The Romantic tradition has made of Jesus a humble carpenter, but that's a fairy tale. He was a highly skilled master craftsman, a producer, and his vocation is emphasized in the New Testament literature possibly because of the association with statesmanship (and with Socrates), but most obviously because the "first creation of creation", namely "wisdom" was the "master craftsman" by God's side (Proverbs 8:22-30). Although wisdom cries out in the street (Proverbs 1:20) and the Servant of the Lord typically doesn't (Isaiah 42:2), wisdom is the created equivalent of the uncreated Word of God (Colossians), and its purpose is to take the scattered elements of creation and slowly but surely assemble them into the City of God (Psalm 46:4, 87:3, Hebrews 11:10) also known as the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12, 21:2). Our noun τεκτων combined with the prefix αρχι, in this case meaning chief, creates the familiar noun αρχιτεκτων, hence our word "architect"), meaning chief of the master craftsmen. This word occurs in the Bible only in 1 Corinthians 3:10, where Paul applies it to himself. That would mean that Jesus, for whom Paul worked, could be considered a τεκτων the way a general could be considered a soldier (Mackinley, 1881; Liddell, et al., 1940; Brown, 1975).

Some commentators have argued that Jesus was born not into a family of wood workers but rather one of stone masons, as this would explain the many references to stonework in the New Testament literature and the absence of any references to woodwork. Socrates, to whom the above quote was addressed, was a stone mason in his youth and the authors of the New Testament were highly skilled literary artists who were intimately familiar with Plato and clearly shared his appreciation of the statesmanship which Plato so generously dubs the fairest sort of wisdom. Christian enthusiasts often forget that Christianity has been a purely religious enterprise for only the last few centuries. Prior to roughly the Renaissance, Christianity was predominantly a political affair, spiced up with scientific pursuits and of course the arts but very little Scripture Theory. It was in the hardly concealed interest of the "Christian" elite (popes and kings and the likes) to keep the plebs from reading the Bible. Because anyone who takes time to actually look at the texts will swiftly conclude that besides its purely theological concerns, the gospel of Jesus Christ represents a peaceful but vehement resistance against totalitarianism in general and Roman imperial theology specifically (Feuerbach, 2014).

2.1 Implications of Figurative Speeches on the New Testament Biblical Literature

A figurative speech can be defined as, "a word or sentence thrown into a peculiar form, different from its original or simplest meaning or use". For example, a simile, which is a comparison between two things that explicitly resemble each other does apply. The use of words such as "as", "like", or "than" is applicable. 1Peter 1:24 states, "All men are *like* grass"; Revelation 1:15 "And His feet were *like* burnished bronze" (Zuck, 1991; Fee & Stuart, 1993; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2015: 1403). Some figurative speeches are also in a form of metaphors. It involves "comparison in which one thing acts like or represents another (in which the two are basically unalike)" such as Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world" and "You brood of vipers!" (Matthew 3:7), the later indicating Christ's hatred of the Pharisees' and Sadducee's righteousness (Resseguie, 2009). Addressing an issue "as if it were a person or an absent or imaginary person as if he were present", is a figurative speech popularly referred to as apostrophe (Hendricks & William, 1991). An example of an apostrophe is in 1Corinthians 15:55, "O death, where is your victory?" In order for Bible readers to be able substantiate truth from error during translation, Zuck (1991) points out to the use of hypo-catastasis. He defines the hypo-catastasis as, "A comparison in which the likeness is implied by a direct naming." For instance, John 1:29 "Behold, the Lamb of God".

Furthermore, Zuck (1991) and Fee & Stuart (1993) explain the relevance of using deliberate exaggeration in Biblical literature referred to as hyperbole. According to these scholars, "More is said that is literally meant in order to add emphasis". For instance, in the Bible (Luke 6:41-42) explains that when Jesus says that a judgemental person has a "log in his eye" and doesn't know it, He is saying something physically impossible". "…It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter in the kingdom of God." (Matt. 19.24). This expression has a lot of linguistic implications. Accordingly, Rocco (1987) uses the Aramaic language to demystify the above concept:

> The word *GAMLA*, has three meanings: '*a camel,*' '*a rope,*' and '*a beam*.' The proper translation is determined by its context, and in this passage Jesus' reference to 'needle' clearly establishes that context. Interestingly, Eastern women often refer to a very thick thread as a rope. Among Aramaic-speaking people of the Near East…say, 'When we met, it was like

a rope passing through the eye of a needle, '[they mean] 'We had some difficulty seeing eye to eye.' Jesus in this particular statement taught that the wealthy must learn to share their riches in order to enter the kingdom of God, however, he knew that it would not be easy for many of them to do this. Therefore, he used the term 'rope' to suggest difficulty, and not 'camel' which would imply impossibility.

Anthropomorphism or attributing human features or actions to God is a figurative language used to communicate metaphysical realities. For example, the faith paradox is finds consummation in the *pleasure of God* (Hebrews 11:6). Biblical literature also contains personification with an aim of emphasizing some aspects of religious knowledge (Hendricks & William, 1991). For example, Isa. 55:12 "And all the trees of the field will clap their hands". Aside from the above, Zuck (1991) identifies euphemism (to substitute an inoffensive or mild expression for an offensive or personal one) as a technical language for articulating issues in the Bible. For example, in 1Thessalonians 4:13-15, death is referred to as falling asleep, pass on or gone home. A similitude, according to Fee & Stuart (1993), is taken from everyday life to illustrate the kind of the kingdom of heaven is like. For example, "The Sower" (Luke 8:11-15), "The Yeast" (Luke 13:20-21), and "The Mustard Seed" (Luke 13:18-19).

In his book, *From Literal to Literary: The Essential Reference Book for Biblical Metaphors*, James Rowe Adams (Adams, 2008) explains how Biblical imagery has meanings beyond simplistic or literal understandings. For example, the use of the 'Star of Bethlehem'. Adams reveals that in ancient times stars were thought to be living beings. Furthermore, "belief that stars were intelligent beings, perhaps angels, was present within Christianity until the sixth century. It wasn't until 553 CE that a church council decided that stars were not intelligent beings." In addition, in the book of Revelation 1:20, 'stars and angels' are said to be the same, "the seven stars are the angels of seven churches," (Paul, 2001: 31). "If Matthew had an angel in mind in writing the story about the star, the account makes sense in the context of the time." On this note, both Adams (2008) and Resseguie (2009) argue, "Rather than a star traveling through the sky and resting just a few feet above a dwelling place, the "star" could be a literary image suggesting a light-being, an angel guided the Magi to the Christ child".

Virginal conception of Jesus Christ would be an interesting yet, a complex phenomenon. Study findings by Adams (2008) affirm this ontological complexity:

> Matthew and Luke tell the story, and both are written more than 50 years after the birth of Jesus by people who did not witness it. In Matthew's version, he refers to a prophecy in Isaiah. The story in Isaiah says that a "virgin" will conceive. Isaiah was talking about his own time and not predicting the future. Additionally, Matthew is using the Greek version of Isaiah that uses the Greek word for virgin, but that word was used to translate the Hebrew word for young woman. In Hebrew, the language Isaiah would have originally been written in, the prophecy is that a young woman will have or already has an important child, Matthew's story of a virgin is based on the wrong Greek word for the Hebrew tale!

Adams' argument is, "the egg cell wasn't discovered until 18th century and therefore ancient views of reproduction different from our own" and "they didn't know that each parent contributes an equal number of chromosomes to the child". Accordingly, "ancient heroes were often described as having been conceived in miraculous ways." Adams gives examples of such miraculous conceptions to include Lao Tzu and Alexander the Great. He states, "Tzu's mother was impregnated by a shooting star and carried him for 80 years; and the mother of Alexander the Great was impregnated by a lightning bolt." In addition, Adams explains, "Miraculous or even divine conceptions were common ways of affirming that great heroes were special from birth and were destined to be great." Adams argues further, "Both Matthew and Luke trace Jesus' royal ancestry through Joseph, which indicates that even they might not have taken the virgin conception story literally but were simply making a point about Jesus' significance".

When interpreting figures of speech in Biblical literature, the reader should account for the following conditions by Zuck (1991):

> Use the literal sense unless there is good reason not to. Use the figurative sense when the passage indicates doing so. Use a figurative sense if a literal meaning is impossible or absurd. Use a figurative sense if the literal meaning would involve something immoral. For example, cannibalism versus the Eucharist in John 6:53-58. Use the figurative sense if the expression is an obvious figure of speech. Note whether a figurative expression is followed by an explanatory literal statement. Sometimes a figure is marked by a qualifying adjective, as in "Heavenly Father" (Matt 6:14).

2.2 The Relevance of Parables in the New Testament Biblical Literature

A parable is defined by Rosscup (1988) as "facts in one realm which the hearers know one cast alongside facts in the spiritual realm so that they will see, by analogy or correspondence what is true in this realm." A similar opinion is held by Virkler (1981), "It is something placed alongside something else for the purpose of comparison and meant to emphasize or clarify an important spiritual truth." To clarify the above, Fee & Stuart (1993) have given examples of such parables as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24).

When interpreting the parables, learners should be able to underscore the natural meaning of the story. Zuck (1996) provides evidence of the above argument by stipulating some specific examples of the parables: Fishing net (Matthew 13: 47-50), a vine

yard, a wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14), oil lamps (Luke 8:16-18), talents of money (Luke 19:11-23), a fig tree still barren after three years (Luke 13:6-9), the value of a single coin to a housewife (Luke 15:8-10), and the people's despicable attitude toward tax collectors (Luke 18:9-14). In addition, learners should determine the specific problem during interpretation. Examples are given below such as answering a question, "Why do we the Pharisees often fast, but your disciples fast not?" (Matthew 9:14); "answering a request - the parable of the Rich Fool" (Luke 12:16-21); "answering a complaint" (Luke 7:40-43); "stating a purpose" (Luke 18:1); "parables of the kingdom because of Israel's rejection of Jesus" (Matthew 12; 13); "parables following an exhortation or principle" (Mark 13:33); "parables to illustrate a situation" (Matthew 7:24); "parables with the purpose implied but not stated" (Mark 4:26-29) (McQuilkin, 1983; Rosscup, 1988). Furthermore, apart from comparing the parable with other passages for building understanding, learners should "begin with the immediate context; the verses before and after it" (Fee & Stuart (1993).

2.3 The Purpose of Types and Antitypes in the New Testament Biblical Literature
"A 'type' has the basic idea of an impression." Tan (1978) informs that "the New Testament writers use a 'type' to designate a pattern or a model or an example." On the same note, Virkler (1981) describes a 'type' as "an old institute, event, person, object or ceremony which has a reality and purpose in Biblical history, but which also by divine design foreshadows something yet to be revealed." In order to understand how a 'type' works, one must conceptualize the idea of the 'antitype' which Virkler calls the prefigurement of the Old Testament which finds fulfilment in the New Testament. Examples include: "Old Testament type - Passover" (Exodus 12) - "New Testament 'type' - Christ our Passover" (1Corinthians 5:7); "Old Testament 'type' - Bronze serpent that when looked upon, brought healing - New Testament 'type' - Jesus' death that brings salvation."

When interpreting types, learners should observe the following guidelines: Firstly, "there must be a resemblance, similarity or correspondence between the Old Testament 'type' and New Testament 'antitype'." Secondly, "do not look for hidden meanings in the Old Testament text." Thirdly, "a 'type' must have a predictive or foreshadowing element to it. It must look ahead and anticipate the antitype." Fourthly, "look for a heightening of the type." Examples include: "Christ is superior to Melchizedek" (Hebrew 10:11-17); "Christ's redemptive work is greater than that of the Passover" (1Corinthians 5:7). Fifthly, "there must be evidence that the type was appointed by God to represent the thing 'anti-typed'." Finally, "Scripture must indicate in some way that an event, person, object or institute is a 'type'" (Rosscup, 1988; Zuck, 1991).

2.4 Implications of Symbols and Symbolism on the New Testament Biblical Literature
A 'symbol' is "an image that evokes an objective, concrete reality and prompts that reality to suggest another level of meaning." Therefore, "the symbolism of a text enables it to evoke levels of meaning that augment or transcend its literal sense." In addition, by means of its symbols, "a text can resonate with multiple levels of meaning" (Tan, 1978). For Tan, a symbol is considered to be "a representative and graphic delineation of an actual event, truth, or object; the thing that is depicted is not the real thing but conveys a representative meaning". Examples of symbols in the New Testament include: "Bread and Wine are symbols of Christ's body and blood" (Luke 22:19-20); "Dragon symbolises Satan" (Revelation 12:3-17); "Water symbolises the Holy Spirit" (John 7:38-39), the "Word of God" (Ephesians 5:26) and regeneration (Titus); "Lion symbolises either Christ the King" (Revelation 5:5) or "Satan" (1Peter 5:8).

As already been mentioned, 'bread' symbolizes the body of Christ. Consistently, Rocco (1987) highlights on the symbolism of bread:

> When Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life, he refers to the…goodness of his teachings, which nourishes the hearts and souls of [humankind], bringing peace, prosperity, and a living, loving relationship with God who is Life Itself. In the Lord's Prayer, or Model Prayer, or Prayer Jesus Taught Us, there is the phrase "Give us today our daily bread." Bread represents food in general which is a symbol of provision, nourishment, the meeting of basic needs. The daily bread is a reminder of God's presence which is ever with us and provides for all our needs.

Symbols need interpretation for better understanding of issues in the Bible. Accordingly, Tan (1978) states, "Learners should identify the symbolic object or action, the referent and the connection between the symbol and the referent." In addition, Tan conditions learners to, "See if the scripture explicitly describes the meaning of the symbol." For example, "the fine linen" in Revelation 19:8.

Studies by Ramm (1970) indicate, "If scripture does not explicitly reveal the meaning of the symbol, learners should consult parallel passages, search out the nature of the symbol and try to determine what major characteristics the symbol and the referent have in common." Furthermore, Ramm instructs learners to, "Look for the one major point of comparison between the symbol and the referent and thus avoid attributing wrong characteristics to the referent." For example, 1Peter 5:8, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring *lion* looking for someone to devour," and Revelation 5:5, "Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See the *Lion* of then tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

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Bible Scholars have argued that learners ought to "realise that one referent may be depicted by several objects." For example, Christ is said to resemble a 'lamb', a 'lion', a 'branch', a 'root', etc. "The Holy Spirit is symbolized by 'water', 'oil', 'wind' and a 'dove'." In prophetic literature, however, Tan's argument suggests that the reader "should not assume that because a prophecy contains some symbols, everything else in that prophecy is symbolic." With prophetic literature, Zuck concurs with Tan's view on restricting learners from symbolizing descriptions of the future that are possible or plausible. In addition, learners are directed to be "reluctant to symbolize the numbers of scripture" (Davis, 1968; Tan, 1978; Zuck, 1991).

2.5 The Relevance of Allegoric Expressions in the New Testament Biblical Literature

"An allegory is a narrative or word picture which may or may not be true-to-life with many parts pointing to symbolic spiritual realities" (Virkler, 1981). "It is a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another; or a symbolic narrative." Virkler substantiates the difference between an allegory and a parable in that "a parable typically keeps the story distinct from its interpretation or application, while an allegory intertwines the story and its meaning." Examples include: "Armour of God" (Ephesians 6:11-17); "Jesus as the True Vine" (John 15:1-6); "Sarah and Hagar" (Galatians 4:21-31); and "Not muzzling an ox while it is treading out the grain" (1Corinthians 9:9-14).

Another vivid example is the casting of demons using the name of Jesus Christ. "In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will handle snakes; and if they should drink any poison of death, it will not harm them; and they will lay hands on the sick and they will be healed" (Mark 16.17-18). Accordingly, Rocco (1987) denotes, "To cast out demons means to cure mental illness". He further states that "handle snakes" means "to deal with opponents," and that "drinking poison without harm" means, "they will overcome vicious gossip and attacks against their character." As for the meaning of "in my name," Rocco argues as follows:

> The Aramaic expression *BESHEMI*, 'in my name,' means 'in my way, method, or system of doing things.' And to help illustrate the meaning more clearly, let us consider the work of Albert Einstein. By using Einstein's system, his 'formula,' scientists learned how to split the atom. However, scientists do not speak to the atom and say, 'In the name of Einstein: atom, split!' Yet many sincere believers use Jesus' name in this very manner and expect something magical to take place. Sometimes things do happen for those sincere believers. Then again, other people have prayed using Jesus' name and have wondered why nothing happened at all. Merely saying his name will not bring about the desired results any more than saying the name of Einstein will cause the atom to split. What produces results is practicing and understanding Jesus' 'formula,' or method…The so-called secret of 'Jesus' name,' then, is to realize, to experience, and to understand [what Jesus understood]: that God…is a loving presence; and that this presence is everyone's source of all good and all joy; that every individual is fully capable of demonstrating the good he/she truly anticipates from that very source.

This study found out what learners were required to do when interpreting allegories contained in Biblical literature. According to Morgan (1956), learners need to note "the points of comparison that are explained or interpreted in the passage." In addition, learners are strained from "attempting to interpret details in allegories that are not explained, but to determine the main point of the teaching in an allegory."

2.6 Relevance of the Book of Revelation in the Modern Christian Society

The book of Revelation is a truly unique in the New Testament, and it is precisely this reason it is also the most misunderstood book. In support of this view, Bandy (2010) argues, "How one approaches the interpretation of these symbols impacts the entire reading of John's vision." In *Let There Be Light,"* Dr. Rocco Errico states, "The Aramaic word for Revelation is *Giliana* which means vision or dream." "Its root is *GLA*, which means 'to uncover'; 'to show'." Rocco further emphasizes that "the visions in the book of Revelation should not be taken literally." "The Eastern imagery used by the author is symbolic representation of spiritual and historical events" (Rocco, 1994).

According to Beale (1999), the book of Revelation starts by stating how its content was made known: it is written that Jesus Christ "*signified by sending his angel to his servant John, who witnesses the Word of God and the Witness of Jesus, all that he saw*" (Rev 1,1). Beale informs that there are two verbs in this sentence that imply that this Revelation was communicated primarily by means of visual images, or visions, which the author then transcribed into words. This is confirmed in the text, when the author is twice commanded to "*write in a book what you see*" (1,11; cf. 1,19) and also later, in the narrative, with the endless repetition of the phrase "*And then I saw*", or "*And then was seen*", followed by another vision.

Another view about imagery is held by Bauckham (1993) that, "Imagery, is not a secondary feature of the book of Revelation, but instead represents the origin and foundation of most of the text. Except for the small amount of oracular (e.g., 1,8; 2,1-3,22; 13,9-10; 14,13; 16,15) and narrative prophecy (e.g., 11,3-13) in the text, every word is either directly related to, or dependent upon, the visionary material revealed to the author." In support of this viewpoint, Boxall (2006) argues, "From the very first reading of the text, it is the imagery that makes the greatest impact on the learner." It has been variously described by scholars as "bizarre, surreal, vivid and often grotesque, strange and sometimes weird or even monstrous." In addition, "the images that compose John's visions are described in various combinations of literal and figurative (non-literal) language, which includes forms such as simile, metaphor, allegory (extended metaphor), metonymy and personification" (Sweet, 1996; Paul, 2001; Biguzzi, 2003).

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Previous researches show that "the book of Revelation often speaks loosely of its 'symbolism' and 'symbolic language', thereby implying that all the images found there are symbols, or that they all have the same symbolical value." However, other scholars have cautioned, "Despite the extensive symbolism of the vision reports, much of the imagery of the Apocalypse is doubtless not symbolism" and "it should be obvious from a reading of Revelation that the author's imagery and symbolism are not all of a single kind." Moreover, "All symbols are images, but not all images are symbols. Since not all the images of Revelation are symbols, it is preferable, when speaking generally about the image-evoking language of Revelation, to refer to its 'imagery', rather than to its 'symbolism'" (Barr, 1984; Court, 1999).

Studies by Bandy (2010) reveal, "It is undeniable that John's Apocalypse contains a legion of symbolic and metaphorical images." Furthermore, "when it comes to interpreting these symbols two divergent hermeneutical approaches surface: (1) primarily literal and secondarily symbolic; or (2) primarily symbolic and secondarily literal." Other scholars like Zuck (1991) and Walvoord (1993) contend that interpreting the Book of Revelation should be "primarily in a literal manner unless it is impossible to do so." This view is encapsulated in the hermeneutical dictum, "when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense." Moreover, "while still recognizing the presence of symbols, this view restricts the identification of a symbol to something that is incomprehensible if understood literally (e.g., Jesus does not have a literal sword protruding from his mouth)."

Proponents of this approach include *Tim LaHaye*, (LaHaye, 1999), who maintains that we must "take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate text, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise." These interpreters, usually classic dispensationalists, argue that "non-literal interpretations result in an unchecked polyvalence based on human imagination." However, "If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost" (Ryrie, 1995).

Advocates of this approach, according to Zuck's findings (Zuck 1991:52) maintain that they are guarding against subjectivism which is defined as "the view that knowledge comes by one's own experience, or that the supreme good is the realizing of a subjective experience or feeling." E. D. Hirsch, (Hirsch, 1967) argued, "Because the literary text does not have a special ontological status that absolves the reader from the demands universally imposed by all linguistic texts, it is possible to construe both correct and incorrect interpretations." Therefore, "If criticism is to be objective in any significant sense, it must be founded on a self-critical construction of textual meaning, which is to say, on objective interpretation."

Philosophically, learners may wish to make a deliberate inquiry on Biblical literature as a scientist who simply acquires the facts of an object free from any biases. However, Thomas (1995) has a different view; for Thomas, the problem is that one who claims to "suppress his own viewpoints regarding what he thinks the passage should mean, so as to allow the exegetical evidence from the passage under investigation to speak for itself, appears to ignore the indelible impact that worldview, preunderstanding and presupposition has on an interpreter." In this case, *epoche* plays a pivotal role on dealing with issues in Biblical literature.

Wright (1992) analyzes things that are critical in seeking knowledge:

> The observer only looks from one point of view; all humans inevitably and naturally interpret the information received from their senses through a grid of expectations, memories, stories and psychological states; and the lenses through which one looks is greatly influenced by the communities to which he belongs.

The above analysis by Wright indicates that rationalization is a crucial process in Biblical literature. Consequently, when interpreting prophetic messages in Biblical literature, learners must "take the words of prophecy in their normal grammatical sense." Prophecy should be viewed as "focusing primarily on the Messiah and the establishment of His reign" (genre of *Testimonia* in hermeneutical sense) (Perkins, 1996). According to (Barr, 1984), "Learners should recognize the prophet's use of figurative and symbolic language; they should look for God's built-in interpretations and take care to note if and how the prophecies have been fulfilled." In addition, "There has to be recognition of the place of unconditional covenants." Moreover, Zuck, (1991) guides the learners to "recognize the principle of "foreshortening". In conclusion, Davis (1968) directs the learners to interpret numbers literally in prophetic literature.

2.7 Relevance of Proof Texts in the New Testament Biblical Literature

Many different Bible scholars have written ways in which the New Testament uses the Old Testament. The reason for this is to: First, "point up the accomplishment or realization of Old Testament prediction." For example, according to Matthew 1:22-23, Jesus' virgin birth was in fulfilment of the prophecy given in Isaiah 7:14. Second, "confirm that a New Testament incident is in agreement with an Old Testament principle." For example, Gentile salvation in Acts 15 is implied by Amos 9:11-12. Third, "support a point being made in the New Testament." For example, in Mark 10:8, Jesus speaks against divorce by emphasizing that a husband and wife are no longer two but one (Genesis 2:24). Fourth, "illustrate the New Testament truth." For example, destruction of the wisdom of the wise in 1Corinthians 1:18 versus Isaiah 29:14 and cited in 1Corinthians 1:19. Fifth, "apply the Old Testament to a New Testament incident or truth." For example, support for church leaders 1Corinthians 9:9 vis-à-vis Deuteronomy 25:4. Sixth, "summarise the Old Testament concept. Seventh, draw a parallel with an OT incident." Finally, "relate an Old Testament situation to Christ" (Zuck, 1991). On the same note, however, Dyer (1994) guides, "When interpreting the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, learners need to be careful with the term "fulfilled", besides, looking for Old Testament meaning first."

Theological Implications on the Ontological Interpretive Missing Links in the New Testament Biblical Literature

2.8 Relevance of the Epistles in the New Testament Biblical Literature

Epistles according to Fee & Stuart (1993), are "letters written by an apostolic leader to a definite target audience." They add that "some Epistles were meant for only one hearer (1&2 Timothy, Philemon) and some were meant for the general church public (Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews)." Contextualization here is key to understanding the meaning of these Epistles. This fact must be taken into consideration when studying the epistle. A question such as, "Who was it to?" is relevant. Other scholars have concurred, "The Epistles were not written to teach Paul, Peter, or John's theology; they were instead written to address a particular question, problem, doctrinal error, or need of the person or the region written to." In relation to this, Felix (2018) informs, "It is critical to know that each Epistle was written to solve or speak into a very real situation in the 1ˢᵗ Century church." In addition, Felix warns, "If we try to understand the teachings of the Epistle out of its context of why it was written, we will miss the point."

When interpreting Epistles, learners need to "discover the author's target audience." It's also important to "read the whole letter at one sitting." In support of this, Fee & Stuart (1993) inform on the kind of questions learners need to ask:

> What is revealed about the audience the author was writing to? What are the author's attitudes like? What are the main points of the letter? What are the natural divisions of the letter? Once the reader has done the above, he is ready to study a passage or even a verse. As he studies the passage out of the Epistle, such as Philippians 2:1-11, he must ascertain the following things: How does it fit into the overall letter? What is the context of this short passage? What was the situation that caused Paul to write these thoughts? What is his main point? How should then live?

In his book *Understanding and Applying the Bible,* McQuilkin (1983) guides the learner to "attempt to discover the reason why the Epistle is being written." Commenting on the same, Felix (2018) guides learners to follow the right procedures in discovering Bible truth. These procedures are relevant to asking contextual questions such as, "What was the situation in Timothy's life? What was the situation being spoken into in Corinth or Ephesus? What was happening in Colossae that Paul was addressing?" In addition, "A text should not mean to us what it never meant to the author or his original readers". Adams (1998) negates, "We do not need to come up with a new doctrine for today". However, Adams reminds the modern Christian church saying, "Whenever we share similar life situations with 1ˢᵗ Century hearers, God's word to them is the same as God's word to us."

2.9 The Relevance of the Book of Acts and other Narratives in the New Testament Biblical Literature

"Narratives are purposeful stories retelling the historical events of the past and are intended to give meaning and direction for a given people in the present." For instance, the Book of Acts and Gospel narratives are sets of narrative stories in the New Testament (Calvin, 1949; Fee & Stuart, 1993). When people study the book of Acts, it usually has at the root of their study a desire to see how the Holy Spirit interacted with men and how the early church lived and operated. Relevant to the above, Adams (1998) admits, "This is a great desire, but many have misinterpreted the book and which has led to major error or distortion of scriptures."

The primary message of the book of Acts is the movement of the Gospel and the church constantly forward into new territory, new lives, and new regions. It's important, however, for the reader to note that we cannot form a normal way of Christian living or ministry from a single story in Acts.
Fee & Stuart (1993) affirms that:

> The book of Acts is the record of how the Holy Spirit worked in these days and in these cultures, but does not necessarily mean it is the only way He will move today. These stories should serve more as guides for our life and ministry than definite norms. We should not form firm rules for how church should operate or how daily Christian life should be led based upon these stories. It does not tell us how to have church, how to minister every situation. If things are repeated within the book, it could be assumed that we can learn basic patterns of life and ministry. In this way, the reader gains a good understanding of how human beings relate to Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts.

Moreover, Fee and Stuart envision, "One of the overriding purposes of the book of Acts is to convince men that the Holy Spirit wants to flow through them with power to the world". However, even in this, the two authors hold, "We cannot limit the Spirit to just what we see in Acts for in these stories, He was moving in new and living ways that they had never seen or heard of before." Both writers have suggested guidelines for interpreting Biblical narratives. First, learners "must be aware of who is the main character of the story; was it an apostle, a teacher, a prophet, or a member in church? Each of these abilities has different abilities and responsibilities. To say that we should be like all is not biblically correct." Second, learners "cannot conclude that their church today should be structured or built like the Acts churches because it was never stated that they should be. These churches were set into particular cultural settings of the day and so should ours." For example, the Jerusalem and Antioch churches were very different because of their cultural setting. Third, "just as they build city taking churches by the leading of the Spirit that fit within their cultural framework, so should we." Finally, "we should seek to emulate their doctrine, teaching and preaching, power, love, and results in a culturally relevant church today."

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study took position that Bible scholars need to possess a critical and rational attitude that might facilitate Bible knowledge. Here, rationalization becomes a critical tool in separating truth from error and addressing issues in their right contexts. This is only possible if scholars can integrate the use of language and literature during analysis of the Bible message. Consequently, this strains scholars from treating Biblical literature with pessimism and simplicity; an attitude that leads to vagueness, ambiguity and distortion of the meaning of faith in the name of spirituality. Undermining the processes that are instrumental in facilitating the right interpretation of Biblical literature is needs the employment of reason; without which the process is rendered not only vicious and erroneous, but also injustice to scholarship. This is a challenge that needs to be tackled through observing universally acceptable set standards for analysing Biblical literature. These skills might equip scholars in dealing with conflicts or schisms in religious discourses that arise as a result of variations or discrepancies in interpreting the Biblical literature. In order to deal with biasness and simplicity, this study recommended that Bible scholars should embrace rationality and interpretive procedures in disseminating religious metaphysical realities. Future researchers are recommended to consider using the phenomenological approach to investigate on underlying issues in Biblical literature and related areas with a resolute and reflexive mind.
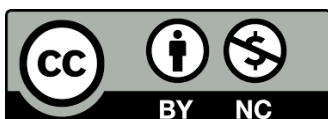
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