

Literal Sense of Scripture and the Trend of Biblical Preaching: A Quest for Convergence

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Abstract

Biblical preaching today and pastoral ministry confront the bible with meaning and significance which seem alien to the biblical texts employed. There appears to be conflict between what the text was meant to communicate by the inspired human authors and today's readers' understanding of the text. This paper seeks a balance in biblical criticism between what the authors of biblical books directly expressed as their message and the meaning given to the texts by today's audience. It uses the a descriptive analysis method of investigation and concludes that the novelty of detecting scriptural meaning beyond the literal especially in preaching cannot be overlooked, but such uniqueness must not be entirely exclusive of the original sense of the texts. Biblical research should give priority to discovering, through exegesis, the meaning expressed by biblical authors in the text of Scriptures.

Keywords: Literal Sense, More-than-Literal Sense, Hermeneutics, Exegesis, Preaching

Introduction

The methodological options for interpreting the bible were at a time condensed into two schools of thought: the Alexandrian and the Antiochene schools. The Alexandrian school represented by Origen (185-254) was concerned with allegorical interpretation and emphasized the spiritual sense of Scripture based on its divine authorship. The Antiochene school emphasized the literal/historical interpretation of the bible; it sought to identify the literal meaning of the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament event. This method of investigation was promoted by the historian Eusebius. Augustine (354-430) used both the allegorical and literal exegesis and insisted that the two lead to the ultimate meaning of all Scripture derived from the great commandment to love God and neighbour. Thomas Aquinas sustained that meaning consisted in the literal significance of the biblical words and in the spiritual significance of the things which the bible expressed.

The Middle Ages witnessed the use of Scripture as support for the development of church doctrines. Reformation and Post-Reformation (1500-1700) recognized in Scripture a superior authority for its self interpretation and with its principle of "sola scriptura" insisted on freeing Scripture from ecclesiastical tradition and scholastic theology. This however led to the understanding of biblical theology as the use of "proof-texts" from Scripture to support traditional "systems of doctrine" in early Reformation Orthodoxy (Hasel 1978, 17). One of the

representatives of this understanding was Abraham Calovius (1612-1686). This understanding of biblical interpretation as the systematization of the thoughts of the Reformation theologians in the manner of Aquinas amounted to a too intellectual or scholastic approach to faith and the bible. It led to a re-emergence of emphasis on doctrine over and against the bible and was considered arid and detached from spirituality by the Pietists. Against this Post-Reformation Scholasticism of the Protestant dogmatics, Pietism, represented by Philipp Jacob Spencer (1635-1705) insisted on a pure and simple approach to the bible and understanding of Christianity that is spiritual/pious rather than intellectual and geared towards the needs of the common person. Against over-emphasis on a merely pious approach to interpretation of the bible, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have with the use of the historical-critical method of study insisted on a more scientific approach to the interpretation of the bible. Exegesis has therefore been made to seek to discover the literal sense of the bible as the basis for understanding and actualizing Scripture as the word of God.

Christian ministry, especially preaching reflects this orientation; however, the hermeneutical insistence on relevance tends to condition biblical preaching today to reflect a development which though not new confronts the bible with meanings which appear alien to biblical texts employed. Approach to the bible through preaching has become, though realistically, more interested in solving the problem of today's audience that it is manifesting signs of a too simplistic understanding of the bible and a return to biblical pietism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This quest for relevance has made preaching almost entirely oblivious of the original meaning of the biblical text it seeks to explain. There is conflict between what the text was meant to communicate by its authors and its final redactors and what it means to today's reader. There is a conflict between 'the literal sense' of Scripture and 'the more-than-literal sense' of Scripture.

This paper therefore emphasizes the need to reconnect biblical preaching with the meaning intended by the original biblical authors. This connection remains the context for an authentic actualization of biblical texts in Christian ministry. To be relevant to ministry biblical research should pay more attention to discovering the meaning or sense expressed by the biblical authors in the text of the bible. Using the method of descriptive analysis the work explores the meaning and functions of the literal sense of Scripture in biblical interpretation. It identifies exegesis as the means to discovering the literal sense of Scripture and underscores the role of exegesis and the exegetes in the Christian ministry of preaching. It explores the understanding of preaching in relation to the bible and identifies circumstances that condition today's preaching. It recommends dialogue between biblical preachers and exegetes and the repositioning of biblical studies in the universities.

Understanding the Bible: Interpretation, Meaning and Relevance

The Bible in the hands of its reader remains a document that seeks to be understood, this implies the science of interpretation. As written document it is a continuation of the quest on the part of the God of Israel to make himself known to his people; it is a continuation of the pre-literary desire in the Christian context of the Jesus of Nazareth to be comprehended by his people as the revelation of God and the manifestation of the divine imperative to self communicate. The bible as a

document of the Church is an expression of the early Christians' belief in and understanding and interpretation of Jesus as the Christ sent by God to save humankind. It is the representation of Jesus as God's eschatological presence and action in the midst of his people. This understanding informs the canonical composition of the Christian bible as both the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and the New Testament. In it the Hebrew Scripture is represented and interpreted as preparatory to the New Testament. The New Testament on the other hand is understood as the fulfilment of the Old Testament and completion of the revelation therein.

This link between the Hebrew Scripture and Jesus constituted the primary hermeneutical task for the Jewish/early Christians after their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. They saw their acceptance of Jesus as imposing on them the necessity of relating him to their own reality and history. It implied making their experience of Jesus relevant to their history so that the Jesus event served as a key to interpreting their past. This interpretation of their past by the Christian Jews was with a view to reforming the present and shaping a Christian future without necessarily abandoning their reality and origin. They sought to make Jesus the interpretive framework for understanding their history by employing terminology and imagery from the Hebrew Scripture to describe and proclaim Jesus. Consequently, they read the presence of Jesus back into the events recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus Isaiah 7:14 is interpreted in Matthew 1:23 as foretelling the virgin birth, and Jesus is understood in Hebrew 1:1-2 as the manifestation of God's continuous self communication with the forebears and prophets of Israel. He is represented in this passage as casting light on the Old Testament. This Jewish Christians' attempt at interpreting Jesus is the outcome of the hermeneutical encounter between their Christian experiences and their pre-Christian reality as Jews. It depicts a hermeneutical circle which in turn challenges and leaves room for the continuation of this same quest for meaning and relevance among present cultures in their dialogue with Christianity. It was varied and included approaches that may best be described as typology, *sensus plenior*, allegory and accommodation (Brown and Schneiders 1994, 1153).

The interpretation of the bible and the question of its relevance are therefore, as old as the bible itself and cannot be said to have been completed. The exercise is dynamic, continuous and an imperative; it is synonymous with every contact with the bible. In their oral and written forms the books and contents of the bible are attempts by their authors, editors, and editors of editors to communicate their understanding of God and his Christ in the divine encounter with men and women. In its canonical form the bible is proposed by the Christian community as guide to an understanding of the history of the relationship of God to his people Israel. The understanding is meant to assist present Christians identify God in their own history, constitute a platform for the Christians' response to their own reality and serve as the standard of faith and practice. The original authors especially of the New Testaments books were informed principally (though not exclusively) by the question of communicating an understanding that was enlightened by the faith context of their receiving Christian communities. The canonical composition of the bible on the other hand is informed principally by the questions of meaning and

relevance enlightened by faith in the context of the Church as a wider Christian community. As written word, the text “overcomes the particularity of the event (narrated) and universalizes it for universal appropriation” (Montague 1979, 7). The task of the canonical critic therefore implies identifying not just the meaning of text as tradition but how it shaped the faith community that valued it and preserved and made it into a canonical event.

The overriding question posed by the bible is an understanding and meaning which in the context of its receiving Christian community the original author directly expressed. But as a text in front of a reader, with or without the intended or original audience, and out of the hands of the original author and its implied audience, the bible in modern literary criticism possesses a quality of an interactive encounter of its own. This possibility places it in a position to convey meaning beyond that which was intended by its original author thus enlarging the horizon of continuous generations of readers and audience. The development which is the result of advances in linguistic and literary theory of the seventies lays emphasis on a ‘text-immanent exegesis’ and approaches the text not necessarily as the product of history but basically from its stand point as a network of relations. In other words, an awareness of the sense or message expressed by the author is a wholesome part of the process of validation but it must not be made the absolute norm for a valid interpretation because the text harbours meaning beyond the sense intended by the author. Outside the realm of modern literary criticism however, this new dimension in understanding and insistence on the autonomy of biblical texts as analytical objects taps into the nature of the bible as the inspired word of God. Thus as a book with both divine and human authorship the bible is the “word of God in human words” and as ‘word of God’ it speaks to different ages and people of different circumstances and from the stand point of their realities and thus makes room for an “excess or surplus of meaning.” It is evident therefore that the text must be seen both as the end of the process of producing communication and the beginning of the process of interpretation.

The implication of all this is that before a text of the bible, the interpretive enterprise involves at one point, historical-criticism, literary criticism, structural criticism and linguistic criticism to attain the aim of discovering the sense of the text. At the other point it implies the use of historical and sociological approaches to attain familiarity with the social reality of the successive faith communities. Canonical criticism is employed to analyze, interpret and appropriate the social situation of these successive faith communities in relation to the sense of the text and in the context of contemporary receiving communities of the text (Bergant 2002, 6).

Literal Sense of Scripture

As a historical document each book of the bible has its author and the audience; there is therefore the question of the sense intended by the author for his audience in the text; what the text meant for the intended audience rather than what it may mean for today’s audience. This is understood as the literal sense of Scripture while the latter is identified as the ‘more-than literal sense.’ Thus in I Corinthians 5:9 the author indicates the purpose for which he writes to the Corinthians as that of not associating with immoral persons. In verse 11 he directly expresses in his text

what he means by an immoral person against what he may be misunderstood to mean in verse 10. In this instance the meaning directly expressed by the author for his audience is readily perceptible for today's reader (see also 1 John 2:1). There are however portions of the bible where these meanings are not easily discoverable for modern readers and are therefore subject to meticulous and critical study and consequent exegetical discoveries. One example would be Luke 19:8; it is debatable if the author intended the first person present indicative active Greek verb *didōmi* to imply future actions or routine actions that started in the past (Naseri 2012, 1-20).

Intention of the Author and the Expression of Meaning by the Author

The term literal sense *sensus literalis* was used in the middle ages to refer to the meaning expressed by the words of Scripture against the sense harboured in the 'things of Scripture (Aquinas, *Quodlibetales* 7, q. 6, a. 14). The term 'literal' was therefore used independently of the human authors and their intention, to depict all that the words of the bible seemed to convey. This implied an extensive interpretation of the literal sense which became oblivious of the link between the meaning identified in a text and that which the author intended. The justification for this understanding came among modern literary critics from their insistence on the near impossibility of historical-critics arriving at discovering the authors' intent. For literary critics the use of 'literal' therefore implies the meaning perceived in reading a text because meaning is always the outcome of a dialogue between the text and the reader. The history of the understanding of 'literal sense' is therefore dominated by the debate between historical critics and literary critics. To keep open the communication between the two groups, R. Brown and S. Schneiders suggest a working definition of literal sense as "the sense which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed" (Brown and Schneiders 1994, 1148).

Brown's definition still leaves open the audacity of the claim to know completely the meaning intended by an author. Given that one's intention is only exhaustively known to the subject; a third party may only claim to know it and such knowledge may not be exhaustive. An attempt at circumventing this dark hole regarding the authors intention has prompted some authors to prefer an understanding of the literal sense of Scripture as 'the meaning directly expressed by the inspired author in the text' rather than 'the meaning intended by the author.' It is a change from *intentio auctoris* to *expressio auctoris* (Vignolo 1998, 282-283). Given that the bible is an inspired document, it is sustained that this sense expressed by the inspired author is equally intended by God the principal author of the bible. 'Literal sense' must not however, be confused with the 'literalist sense' which derives from the effort especially by fundamentalists to translate and take a text word for word.

The use of the adverb 'directly' suggests a distinction between the sense of the author and the various significations which, unknown to the author, his words may take in the canonical context of the bible and in the context of the changing times and circumstances of the readers. The references to the authors and meaning underscore an essential presupposition behind every text; those who wrote the books of the bible wrote them for the people of their times and had specific

messages for their intended audience or readers. Contact with the biblical text on the part of today's readers implies knowledge and consciousness of these messages. The meaning of the text today may undoubtedly surpass what it meant then but the authenticity of what it means now depends essentially on the degree of its relationship to what it meant then to the first readers.

The task of critical scholarship on the bible is therefore to seek to establish this sense of the original author which is directly expressed in the text through a meticulous analysis of the text in its literary and historical context. Behind this task is the awareness of the distance of time, differences in circumstances and worldview between a text transmitted orally and written almost 1900 years ago and the present day reader. The ancient text is a product of theological and anthropological systems that may not have been as organized as the ones in use today. The question of authorship equally brings to bare the movement from the original authors to the editors and final redactors, each of which has in one form or the other conditioned the orientation of the significance of the text either by placement, emendation or redaction. This implies the sense the text had with its original author and the sense it has acquired with the redactors/editors. The message of the author is communicated through the written words and they make sense in the context of the audience or readers envisioned. Thus, understanding the nature of the audience/readers plays an important role in comprehending this message of the author. The simple, primitive or complex nature of the intended original audience rather than of present audience determines the interpretation of the sense meant by the original author.

Discovering the message meant by an ancient author for an ancient audience and arriving at the authentic interpretation of such a text by getting to know the historical context of the ancient audience are not as simple as they may appear. It implies keeping in check as much as possible the tendency of the interpreters' background and theological or anthropological systems or the interpreter's presuppositions. It requires an expertise and in the context of extensive and combined stages of investigations none of which may be compromised or overlooked; this expertise is provided by exegesis and the exegete.

Exegesis and the Exegete

Understanding the bible implies drawing out the meaning contained in a particular biblical text. This involves the science of interpretation which is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation ranges from the recognition of speech as the expression and translation in language of one's intention, identity, and being. It gives priority to linguistic communication as the basis for the expansion and growth of being, intention and knowledge and in fact the coming into being of one's identity and person. The motif of speech as an interpretation informs the writing and representation of the bible which as 'word of God' is an expression of the divine will, mind, person and being. Biblical hermeneutics however acknowledges the complexity of the human historical biblical languages to actually and effectively communicate the mind of God. Hermeneutics from the Greek *hermēneia* equally includes the process of making intelligible the content of an unintelligible language by means of translation; what Paul identifies in 1 Corinthians 12:10 as a charismatic gift; the interpretation of tongues or languages *ἐρμηνεία γλωσσῶν*. This involves a dialogue between

cultures and world views (Brown and Schneiders 1994, 1147). The interpretation envisioned by hermeneutics may equally be arrived at in terms of explanation and commentary.

The foregoing reveal, from the stand point of the Socratic notion of words, three essential levels in which hermeneutics as theory of interpretation operates; “‘speech’ as the faculty of logical formulation and articulate expression, ‘translation’ as the ability to channel meaning from one medium or context to another, and ‘commentary’ as the clarification of the obscure or unfamiliar” (Lategan 1997, 149). Interpretation is, in the Heideggerian expansion of the horizon of hermeneutics, the *modus* in which reality is brought into being or revealed and in this context language plays an important role as the house of being; it is constitutive for being itself. As an attempt to contend with the human quest for understanding, interpretation is therefore communicative, epistemological and ontological. In relation to the bible this theory of interpretation implies specific hermeneutics identified as exegesis. It flows from and at the same time enriches general hermeneutics. While the later concerns theory and method of interpretation exegesis employs these theories and methods in practice to arrive at the meaning of the biblical text.

Meaning of Exegesis

The term exegesis is derived from the Greek verb *evxhge,omai exegeomai* which means ‘to explain, to expound, to interpret, to reveal.’ Exegesis therefore means explanation, interpretation and exposition. It is evident in John 1:18 where Jesus is represented as the exegesis of the Father; the one who reveals the Father and makes him known and comprehensible. Historical and critical investigation into the meaning behind biblical text is the sphere of biblical exegesis; it is a scholarly engagement with the bible as the word of God in human words. It seeks with the help of proven procedures, to ascertain as accurately as possible the meaning of the biblical text as a historical document and to give the results an inter-subjective verifiability (Egger 1996, 7). Its Greek verbal form means to elaborate, explain, report, and reveal; it is concerned with the task of unearthing and revealing that which the text holds and seeks to communicate. It is the human inquisitive response to the nature of biblical text as a structured coherent whole seeking to communicate and be understood. Exegesis of the Christian bible seeks to reveal how the exercise of the role of revealing the Father by Jesus is understood, interpreted and expressed in biblical texts by biblical writers and their faith communities. This is done by establishing the content, context and purpose of the text, as a result of which the gap between the text and the present reader is bridged. The person who undertakes the exegetical task is known as *exegete evxhghth,j* and means interpreter.

The target of the *exegete* is the ‘thought’ of the biblical writer which notably, is expressed in a language different from the *exegete*’s own. Biblical exegesis gives attention to specific texts of the bible as subject of inquiry; it identifies the textual uncertainties essential for interpretation and seeks to resolve them through the skill of textual criticism. This makes the understanding of the syntax and vocabulary of the original authors possible. Exegesis provides the possibility of identifying the structure and patterns of a text and the history behind it. The historical awareness provides the basis for interpreting the text in the light of its ancient and

contemporary social and literary contexts. Exegesis seeks to reproduce as accurately as possible this ‘thought’ of the writer and it is said to have taken place when this sense is reproduced in the manner it was conceived by the original author of the text. It is therefore a reproductive process which calls strictly for faithfulness to the original author’s sense. It must be objective, and allows for no novelty or originality of thought or speculation or inventiveness on the part of the exegete. It seeks neither less nor more than the information contained in and expressed by the biblical text; failure of which the exercise ceases to be exegesis and becomes eisegesis. Eisegesis means ‘reading into’ rather than ‘drawing out of’ which is exegesis. Exegesis is therefore about intentionality; it seeks to unravel the intention of the author; the sense directly expressed in the text by the author; it is about the ‘Why’ and the ‘What’ of the biblical text. The ‘Why’ implies the literary and historical context while the ‘What’ suggests the content.

Integral Exegesis and the Context of Christian Exegesis

There is a relationship between exegesis and hermeneutics; the latter is the science of interpretation and philosophical hermeneutics seeks especially to identify and establish meaning as an existential reality; it seeks to identify what an ancient text means to today’s reader. Exegesis applies practically the principles of interpretation offered by hermeneutics to arrive at the meaning contained in the text for the intended audience. While philosophical hermeneutics lays emphasis on the meaning of the text to later audience, exegesis emphasizes what the ancient text meant to its intended audience (Fee 2002, 1). However, the Christian bible as canon makes ‘what the text means for today’s audience’ equally the concern of the exegete. In this context therefore, exegesis has much to gain likewise from the contributions of philosophical hermeneutics. It is in this light that exegesis aims at interpreting Scriptures so that the past becomes alive and illumines the present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation (Wink 2010, 1-2). One then speaks of and advocates for “integral exegesis” as an exegesis which includes not just ‘what the text meant’ to the original audience, but equally ‘what it means’ to the present audience or reader; an exegesis whose interpretation encompasses not just the historical but equally the theological or pneumatic dimension of the text (Gilbert 1995, 291-298). It seeks ‘total reading’ as a movement of interpretation from ‘what the text says’ to ‘what the text is talking about’ (Martin 1988, 587). It is an ‘integral process of interpretation’ which seeks understanding in the fullest sense of the word (Schneiders 1999, 127). It is a scholarly analysis completed by an explanation of Scripture’s meaning as the word of God for the Christian faith which shaped yesterday’s faith community and shapes today’s faith community (Williamson 2003, 329). The aim of exegesis at the end is to come to terms with the intention and message of the ancient authors, its effect on the author’s contemporaries, and its possible relevance for the present audience. It is a call from scholarly understanding to directions for appropriations in terms of application and relevance for present receiving and interpretive faith community.

The objectivity proper to an exegetical task and the inter-subjective verifiability of exegetical findings imply that the exegete must be objective in his findings. This objectivity of Christian exegesis involves the presupposition of the Christian faith; the faith of the Christian community from and for which emerged

the Christian bible. This implies that the conclusions of the exegete cannot contradict what this Christian bible and faith represent. Exegesis must therefore be done in the context of the Christian community and in line with the nature of the bible not only as a historical document but also and principally as a document of faith. As document of faith the bible is a unique collection of sacred writings divinely inspired. It is this consciousness or presupposition which will guard the exegete against conclusions that may contradict the nature and purpose of the Christian bible as a faith document. Only a Christian or properly put only a person uniquely founded in the Christian faith can be an authentic exegete. For there to be an authentic exegesis the exegete must be a person of faith. In relation therefore to the nature of the bible as a sacred text for the Christian faith community it is difficult to speak of a 'presuppositionless' exegesis; outside of this, it must be objective from the point of view of faithfulness to the meaning contained in and expressed by the text as the language of the original author.

Pastoral Ministry: Preaching and Proclamation Today

Pastoral ministry connotes activities aimed at enabling members of Christian communities translate into their daily lives and activities the experiences and recommendations drawn from the bible. This implies actualization; the bible is viewed by the faith community as the word of God addressed to it just as it was addressed to the ancient community that first received it. Scripture fulfils a normative and a material role in the pastoral ministry of teaching and preaching; it provides the standard for which preaching and teaching are exercised and is equally the content which preaching and teaching aim at communicating. It is both the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* as long as preaching seeks to communicate the religious message contained in the bible. The biblical text possesses richness of meaning for which it is capable of making sense in the context of the historical experiences of the present audience. To be able therefore to speak to the present audience, there must be a transition from meaning in the context of the circumstances and language of the original audience to the circumstances and language of the present audience. This transition is identified as actualization; making the message of the bible as Scripture relevant to today's listeners; making Scripture the word of God in the activities of those to whom it is addressed now. It takes place through teaching, preaching and catechesis within the faith communities. For a proper actualization to take place there must first be proper interpretation which is the exclusive function of exegesis from whose findings preaching formulates relevant application, and exhortations.

Biblical Preaching and the Question of Relevance

Preaching in the context of a Christian community implies an explanation which may involve the doctrines, prayers and creed of the Christian community concerned. This however may begin with the bible, given that it is the soul of Christian theology. Biblical preaching on the other hand refers to the conscious attempt at discovering the meaning contained in a biblical text for the life of the community in its contemporary situation; an explanation of the meaning of the word of God or the kerygma; it implies signification and re-signification. Preaching in this context involves the exercise of announcing the event of salvation as documented in the bible, and exhortation *parakalein* and teaching *didaskain*

consequent on the imperative of that announcement. It assists in explaining the contemporary and theological meaning of the text; in other words, it is a task which seeks to make the text respond to the religious challenges of the audience. This meaning must not be totally taken as implying that proclamation is derived from questions raised by the listeners. This will lead to a discontinuity with what the meaning was for the first audience; a discontinuity with the findings of exegesis. There is always a message to be proclaimed, the kerygma, and from this message attempt is made to find elements that address the questions posed by the audience. This implies that not every text of the bible can provide answers to the questions posed by today's audience. It is only after the religious message of biblical texts has been deduced that the question of relevance is sought, it begins with the text and ends with contemporary questions and not vice versa. The question posed by today's hearer ought not to be the ultimate source or the entire content of preaching, but it cannot be ignored because the response and achievement of every person in relation to the Christian vocation is in the context of the person's existential situation. Preaching that is biblical must however be primarily accountable to the biblical text.

The basic principles necessary for actualization to take place include receiving the word from within one's own concrete situation, identifying dimensions of present circumstances which the text is capable of addressing or which are highlighted or reflected in the text, taking advantage of the richness of meaning which the bible possesses as a text by identifying those elements in its texts which are capable of authentically addressing the present situation as God's word and will. In as much as actualization is a necessity for every Christian community, it must not be arbitrary. It behoves on preachers and teachers of the bible to make the transition smoothly and accurately so that their audience can find the elements that address their situation. Preaching in this context may be understood as pastoral actualization, it is a ministry of making Scripture speak to contemporary conditions or circumstances.

Audience-centred and Preacher-centred Approach to Biblical Preaching

The Post-Second World War experiences, the devastating effect of natural disasters, oppressive systems of governments and the consequent culture of poverty and imbalance in the distribution of wealth have raised more and more the question of meaning regarding human existence. Readers of the bible turn to it for solution to all problems associated with life, and this same motive informs their presence in churches, religious crusades and Christian fellowships. These in turn direct the question of relevance not only to the bible, but equally to the churches, ministries, and preachers/interpreters of the bible. Ministries within and outside the churches are consequently directed primarily towards addressing this question. This responsibility is felt especially in religious discourses or preaching at faith community gatherings. Thus the emergence among others, of 'Healing Ministries' and 'Prosperity Gospels' and in each of these, justification is sought accurately or inaccurately from within the bible. Biblical preaching in this context is therefore characterised by the desire to make Scripture texts address the problems of sickness and poverty and thus provide solutions to all human predicaments.

This approach to preaching essentially involves also the interest of the preacher/minister; there are instances wherein the overriding interest of the preacher conditions the nature and content of religious discourses. Liberationist and feminist preachers are drawn towards texts that provide the spark for their emphasis. Prosperity gospel ministry equally conditions a minister who is inclined towards enriching his or her ministry to shape his preaching of the word in a manner that responds to the minister's needs and cravings by encouraging the audience to give more using indiscriminately near relevant texts of the bible. It is worth evaluating if the original context and meaning of those texts actually allow for their use in these circumstances. These activities in preaching are sometimes done accurately and in accordance with the meaning expressed by the biblical authors in the text; but most times however, these quests and interpretations are at variant with the sense expressed in the passages of Scripture used. There is absence of genuine dialogue between the text and the reader so that preaching becomes merely an exercise in which a text is being made into an occasion of readers talking to themselves about their own preconditions. This raises the question of hermeneutics, exegesis and eisegesis, the question of religion, gullibility and exploitation and the question of control and supervision. While preaching's overriding intention is to translate biblical events into the practical lives of the listeners, this must however be done in alliance with what the biblical text meant for its intended audience. Even the very hermeneutics that raises the question of relevance presupposes a basic rule of interpretation which sustains that "a passage cannot mean now what it could not originally have meant: that is, there is no valid modern application of a passage that was not also a potentially valid application of the passage for its original audience" (Stuart 1992, 687; see also Stendahl 1984, 9-10).

Convergence: From Exegesis to Biblical Preaching

Rigorous exegetical scholarship and theological commitments are ideal partners in the task of rendering the religious message of the bible intelligible to the audience today. Exegetes have the responsibility of making their investigations and findings available to the public and consequently influence the common views about biblical passages and events and the religious messages contained in the bible. There is need among biblical scholars to identify principles of interpretation which may serve both the exegetes, theologians, preachers and lay people. These can function as criteria for evaluating interpretation and provide effective teaching tools for the universities. Of note is the fact that the bible is a foundational tool for every Christian ecumenical dialogue. It is the common basis for the rule of faith among Christians. The non denominational dimension of the methods and approaches in the study of the bible remains an irreplaceable tool in uniting Christians in the common task of interpreting the bible as the basis for the emergence of every Christian community, shaping and sustaining it.

Actualization belongs ultimately to preaching and teaching within the faith community, but not to the exclusion of exegesis. To be meaningful exegesis must be directed towards actualization and to be authentic actualization must flow from the literal sense of the text discovered by exegesis. Consequently, the exegete and the preacher must remain in constant dialogue of interdependence. Preachers must be disposed to rely on the findings of exegetes in their quest for relevance regarding

the religious message of the bible. This will lead them to an authentic actualization which accords with the aim and nature of the bible as word of God for the Christian community then and now. They must be ready to make distinctions between 'preaching for the times' and 'preaching of the spirit of the times.' The first is about actualization and is determined by the biblical text itself and falls within the confines of Christian exegesis enriched by philosophical hermeneutics. The second is an ideology and seeks rather to determine the sense of the biblical text from without, and is eisegesis. Exegetes on their part must be conscious of and tap into the sensitivity of preachers to the contemporary needs and situation of the audience. This will help them overcome the risk of confining the bible and its message to the past. The implication of the foregoing is that preachers must be exegetes or at least be in constant dialogue with exegetes; exegetes on the other hand must be preachers or at least be in constant dialogue with preachers. The novelty of giving new and contemporary meaning to biblical texts especially in preaching is an integral and acceptable part of Scripture as the inspired word of God, but it must acknowledge first the original sense of the text as intended by its original author. Consequently biblical research should give priority to discovering, through exegesis, the meaning expressed in the text by the biblical authors.

Conclusion

Like every piece of literature the bible is the product of the quest for communication and is consequently, communication. As communication it is a text seeking to be understood and is therefore the language of its various authors, redactors and editors. Literal sense of Scripture is the meaning a biblical author intended to communicate to the original audience. Exegesis aims at the discovery of this meaning, and as much as it seeks to unearth a meaning hidden in an ancient document exegesis is at the service of hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics however, requires an ancient text, independently of its original author, to speak and make sense to present readers in their existential situations. Integral exegesis is seen to involve not merely the identification of 'what a biblical text meant' to the then faith community but 'what it means' to today's faith community. Not only 'what the text means' but also what the text is 'talking about;' the sense of the text and the reference. This second meaning or sense comes within the realm of 'surplus or excess of meaning' identified in biblical criticism as 'more than literal sense' of Scripture. Biblical preaching in the context of pastoral ministry is meant to make the transition from the literal sense of Scripture to the text's relevance for the listening audience. To achieve this, the preacher is conscious of the *Sitz im Leben* of the listening audience and seeks to apply Scripture to this context by identifying aspects of the interpreted biblical text that address the circumstances of the audience. To arrive at the literal sense of biblical text the biblical preacher is equally indebted to the findings of exegesis and requires the assistance of the exegete who alone has the expertise necessary to undertake a meticulous analysis of the text in its literary and historical context.

Reliance on the exegete does not however mean the restriction of profitable reading of Scriptures to a select few; rather it calls for an acknowledgement of different capabilities and expectations of those who receive or read the Scriptures and proposes collaboration as a means of breaking the impasse. Because even the

learned biblical interpreter who efficiently deduces what the biblical authors meant for their intended audience may lack in some cases the religious appreciation of what the text may mean now for his or her time. In this context the exegete with the expected intellectual orientation equally requires the pastoral experience of the preacher whose engagements with day to day ministry exposes the minister to existential situations of contemporary biblical audience. Exegesis as a scholarly exercise is not a discipline for all those who must approach the bible; there are other legitimate possibilities for identifying what the text conveys. These include personal and unrestrained reading of the bible, appropriating the word of God at worship and church preaching, discussions and practical bible study (Egger 1996, 8). Even at these levels, reliance on the findings of the exegetes remains indispensable. However, because of the nature of its investigation, exegesis cannot be taken as a sermon; an exegetical essay put forward as a sermon would be dry and less inspirational. An abundance of critical materials unearthed by exegesis would generally make a homily or sermon uninteresting and bankrupt. Consequently, there is always a need after an exegetical investigation and discovery, to step down the understanding of the text to the circumstances of the world and vital Christian community in front of the text. This implies a movement from exegesis to theology, from text to sermon; a movement from exegesis to preaching, from the exegete to the preacher. The exegetes are not necessarily preachers and may never be, but they provide material which preachers can make use of for their sermons. Besides primarily being a work of scholarship exegesis is therefore, essentially an apostolate to the ecclesial community which implies pastoral service or ministry. There is need for affinity between the life of the exegetes as members of the ecclesial community of faith and their studies. This implies importantly participation of the exegetes in the very life and faith of the believing community. The exegete becomes therefore the modus by which the church's preaching meditates on and applies biblical texts as the written deposit of faith. Exegetes are inevitable for the life of the Church, their findings and interpretations are irreplaceable sources for the continuous understanding of divine revelation. They have a charism to exercise for the edification of the Christian community (1 Corinthians 14:26). Ignoring them or their absence would impoverish the Christian ministry. They are necessity in the Nigerian academic environment, given especially that they are different from Christian preachers.

The relevance of the Christian bible to contemporary audience is inevitable and is sought through teaching and preaching the bible. Teachers and preachers require the services of exegetes in cases where they are not exegetes themselves. Exegetes can only be made in an academic environment; Nigerian Universities should in the context of departments of Christian studies become places where such levels of formation are provided. There is need for universities to go beyond a re-reading of biblical passages and events; this practice is sometimes devoid of scientific exegesis that aims at identifying the literal sense of biblical texts. Two reasons for these lapses are the error of misunderstanding exegesis as sermon or homily, and an academic programme which requires every biblical study to reflect a dialogue with a particular culture. This second is important but most often, the students or authors do very little of biblical criticism and spend greater part of their

work exposing a particular culture; an endeavour which can as well be done successfully without reference to the bible. There is need therefore, for universities to encourage proper exegesis of texts of the bible at the preliminary levels without necessarily insisting on relating them to the Nigerian or African culture. It implies the teaching of exegesis in the context of a more comprehensive programme of biblical studies and the creation in future of a separate department for the study of Scriptures. It involves the study of biblical languages, like Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic at the institutional level and especially and compulsorily at the post graduate level for all students of the Old and New Testament. Knowledge of biblical languages is an imperative because scientific exegesis can only be done authentically in the original language of the bible. All of these constitute among others, the means by which exegetes can be formed who are Nigerians. At this level of richness universities can function as watchdogs for the seminaries and biblical colleges affiliated to them for degrees in religious studies.

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