

The Relevance of Apocalyptic Studies to the Church and Society

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Abstract

Phenomenal events, however natural and/or catastrophic, may not be unconnected with the Great Designer of the universe. Could there be an end to these natural disasters, and if so when and how? The apocalyptic, with its content of vengeance and vindication, appears to give a clue to these inexplicable distortions of the human race and environment. Hence, content of the apocalyptic, in relation to the inhabited universe, appears to be enigmatic. Ordinarily, one is expected to eradicate adverse circumstances that spell doom on humans, rather than highlight their inevitability and relevance. However, a trace of the degree of relevance of the topic under review, could classify it as a worthwhile subject for further research.

Introduction

The significance of apocalyptic studies to humanity cannot be overemphasized in a society of tensions and crises. The writing of an apocalypse (an unveiling), is very relevant and significant for that could be the only means by which hope is vented out to mankind full of limitations, crises and uncertainties. The ideology of C. Van Biesen (1970:6) has it that the seer (the apocalypticist) urges his audience to remain true to their Christian

faith and to bear their troubles with fortitude. He encourages them with the promise of an ample and speedy reward. He assures them that Christ's Triumphant Coming is at hand. Both in the beginning and at the end of his book, the seer is most emphatic in telling his people that the hour of victory is nigh, while judgment awaits the disobedient and unbelieving.

This serves a dual purpose; that of encouraging feeble Christians to be more responsible and committed in the faith, as well as a just recompense to the wicked of the earth. Reviewing David M. Russell (1999:266), reveals that the objective of this study is to demonstrate that the apocalyptic motif of the New Heaven and New Earth preserves an important and positive role for the present creation. It is an unveiling of the fact that man is not the final arbiter to his existence.

In other words, God's redemptive purpose includes the cosmic order where man dwells and apocalyptic literature registers this fact prominently. Russell (1999:334) further stated that without apocalyptic literature, redemptive theology collapses into anthropology. Hence humanity expecting development must first take into cognizance his allegiance to the creator, before the protection of the world which sustains every human. As C.S Lewis wrote, "because we know that the natural level is also God's creation we cannot cease to fight against the death that mars it". Undoubtedly, apocalyptic literature is the phenomenon that creates this significant awareness that the cosmic order belongs to the creator and must not be bastardized without an accompanying and commensurate consequence.

Equally important is the fact that the apocalyptic lends itself to scholarly investigation hence enriching New Testament studies with aspects of contemporary thoughts or concepts yet unfathomed in Biblical literature. Admittedly, an apocalyptic study becomes necessary and relevant, in our time. This article is an attempt to excite critical research into what an apocalyptic

literature is all about and how it challenges us in our earthly life in terms of responsiveness and commitment to Christ Jesus and the society.

So then, the apocalyptic could be a level of expression within a group of persons in relation to the end of an undesirable time and the beginning a period of euphoria ushered in by the Wholly Other. The apocalyptic is never an abstraction but a phenomenon that elicits a social-political context. If that be the case, why do some humans see themselves as the final arbiter? and when do we expect lawlessness to be checked? How do men know that the bulk ends with the creator? are some of the pertinent questions demanding response?

An outstanding principle in the writing of this article is the viewing of the meaning of Apocalyptic in the context within which it was spoken. Undoubtedly, also the futuristic approach enables the apocalyptic literature to be relevant not only to the audience of the author, Onwu opines (1991:27), but also to every succeeding generation. The invaluable historical method is equally applicable since concrete persons and events are involved. Some form of exegesis and descriptive analysis is equally employed in making the necessary components contemporarily relevant.

The Apocalyptic- Then

The term “Apocalyptic” is derived from a Greek word, apokalupsis, meaning revelation and, could refer to a body of literature, or the ideas of a particular literature e.g. eschatology of any type of religious movement. Technically speaking, Apocalyptic refers to literary genre or style of writing the Apocalypse; while apocalypses would refer to revelation, which discloses the secrets of the beyond in general, and the end time, in particular. By critical analysis, Hennecke (1965:584) says, “The apocalyptic is a book of wisdom, a collected literature, but the fervor of the expectation and the strength of the future hope

are genuine”. Giving a descriptive analysis of Apocalypse, Felix Just (2001) says, that ‘apocalypse’ in popular terminology is a catastrophic event e.g. Nuclear holocaust; while in Biblical terminology apocalypse is not an event, but a revelation that is recorded in written form. Giving a scholarly explanation of apocalypse, Felix Just has it that “Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality, which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial, insofar as it involves another supernatural world.

Besides, the *New Dictionary of theology* (1988:33) has it that “the term Apocalyptic derives from the word ‘Apocalypse’ and primarily describes a body of literature. Also, the term can refer to a type of religious movement, which produces apocalyptic literature and is motivated by apocalyptic eschatological expectations”. Further more, Ralph Martins (1978:1) states that the New Testament literature represents varied types of writing apart from the gospel. In his words, these may be classified as acts, letters and apocalyptic writing... They represent the literary deposit of a set of Christian community, pulsating with life in Christ and conscious of an identity which marked them off from the other religious groups in the first century”.

The Origin and Development of the apocalyptic in N. T. Studies

To begin with, Metzger (1965:17) opines that “it is indeed necessary for the student of the New Testament to have a background of Palestinian Judaism to better appreciate and understand both the writers of, and the writings in, the New Testament”. Nevertheless, the philosophical and religious setting of Greco-Roman paganism adversely affected the Jewish life and thought patterns. Metzger (1965:61) further explains; that the message of Christianity encountered the philosophies and

religions of the Greco- Roman world, like the Epicureans, stoics and the religion of Artemis (Arts 17:18; 19:23 – 41).

Thus Christianity is indeed the monumental growth of a purpose-driven New Testament and it is the significance of this literary import, and the content of this dynamic testament, that is our concern. Subscribing to the foreings, Ralph Martins (1978:1) has it that the New Testament represent the literary creation of the apostolic assemblies that conserved the best of the past, ensuring continuity and yet were responsive to the spirit's direction in new situations and challenges. Thus tradition and freedom became the spring board for the New Testament letters and apocalypse.

Undoubtedly, the New Testament is traceable to Jeremiah's prophecy, Jeremiah 31:31 – 33 which states that God will make a new covenant to be established in the hearts of men. The apocalyptic essence of the New Testament is thus not hidden. It is, therefore legitimate to ascribe to the gospel of Christ, the term covenant as in (1st Corinthian 3:4), because even Jesus at the Last Supper portrayed same, when he said, This is my blood of the Covenant which is shed for many 1st Cor. 11:23; John 6:53 – 55. To this end Scott (1949:2) upholds that the twenty-seven volumes of the New Testament illuminate and supplement each other.

Again, assessing the literary value, rather than the religious, Scott (1949:16) believes that the New Testament writers did not aim at reproducing literature, rather their objective was to reach their immediate public and to get practical results in the shortest possible time. Thus summing up the literary value of the New Testament, Scott (1949:17) has it that the content of the New Testament is unique and most valuable a treasure for the Christian religion and its future adherents. This, in a nutshell, is the literary milieu from which the apocalyptic has emerged, and the necessity arises whether or not such literary genre ever

existed before the studies of the New Testament began and if so, in what form:? Buttressing the above, Ralph Martin (1975:96) has it on record that Jewish literatures served as a commensurate backdrop to the New Testament writers. To the pivotal aspect of Jewish literature as it affects humanity we now turn.

The Origin and Development of the Apocalyptic in the Intertestamental Period

Bearing in mind the fact that the Apocalyptic is not only the documentary format but also the content of an apocalypse, it will not be out of place to say that Jewish literature served as a launching pad to the apocalyptic writers of the New Testament. However, R.J. Bauckham (1988:34) differs in his specifics, when he opined that this genre of religious literature originated in the late Old Testament period and persisted relatively until the Middle Ages. In other words, though there could be some form of apocalyptic scattered here and there in the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel is very conspicuous, besides Ezekiel and Zechariah, as the only accepted work having the same literary style as apocalyptic. These write-ups were no abstractions, but having to do with the Jewish nation and the ruling Empires.

Conversely, Ralph P. Martin (1975:105), based on his research, cited three outstaying scholars' opinion about the causes for the rise of apocalyptic: (1) The dissatisfaction of the Hasmonean theocracy, (2) The temple cult which resulted in the apocalyptic expectations and (3) The effect of the exile resulting in a state of abandonment and subsequent reliance on apocalyptic anticipation.

The above three opinions, for the rise of the apocalyptic, sound plausible and credible since they are all possible factors to the origin of apocalyptic. Hence H.H. Rowley (1963:21) is of the same opinion that the "the rise of apocalyptic is not unconnected with political revival and religious awakening of which the Maccabean revolt is an example". It could be recalled that in the Maccabean age, men suffered because they refused to practice

what they believed to be law of God. As per the dating of apocalyptic literature, Bauckham (1988:34) stated that this continuous literary tradition occurred during the Intertestamental period (between 200 B.C AND 200 A.D.). It was a remarkable time in all of Jewish History because there was a suspension of prophecy. The lion Handbook of the Bible recaps (1992:651)- that the prophet were off-stage without the realization of the long expected golden age. It was at this period that the distinct literature known as apocalyptic emerged.

It will not be out place to say that the apocalyptic was a child of circumstance. It was, indeed, a period of sporadic and prolific writing. The Jews, as it were, resorted to this body of literature as an “Intermediate Testament” since God was to be farfetched in the Old Covenant/Testament and the New Covenant/Testament prophesied by Jeremiah 31:31 – 33 was nowhere to be found. It was to this phenomenal literary movement that Frank Moore Cross (1992:165) highlighted that the apocalyptic communities of the last century B. C gave rise to rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.

This literary spirit of the Jews upheld their uniqueness and world view. Apocalyptic literature and studies, therefore, have provided and streamlined not only the future, of the Jewish race, but also that of humanity. It won't be outrageous to opine that the religious life of the Jews was based on apocalypticism. Indeed, the apocalyptic inclination of the nation of Israel hinges primary on the knowledge offered by these literary works, otherwise called spurious books i.e validating their message by using the name of any of the Old Testament Patriarchs or Prophets as the authors of the said apocalyptic literature. Thus the Jewish nation sought for relevance and identity in the non-canonocal works. These apocalyptic literatures gave credence to Israel in the committee of nations with global recognition.

The Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal writings

Inasmuch as the time frame of apocalyptic resurgence is between 2004 B.C and 200 A.D; a period of influx of the non-canonical apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings, it is noteworthy that the Jewish literary spirit did not ebb within the silent years of intertestamental period. They produced literatures of lesser quality and authority called apocrypha or pseudo-epigrapha. It will be recalled that besides the significant influence of the synagogue and its worship, the intertestamental apocryphal books (about 15 in number which I refer to as Intermediate Testament) held sway. It is to the aforementioned point that Metzger (1965:39) now subscribes; that these writings produce necessary information about the development of Jewish life prior to the beginning of the Christian era.

In sum, Rowley (1963:920) says the apocrypha highlights issues of the *eschaton*, the destiny of the righteous and the evil, with a specific flow of thought. The Old Testament is their foundation from which their ideas flow into the New Testament. The emphasis here is that the society was greatly influenced by this genre, although the pseudepigrapha may be inferior to the Apocrypha as regards simplicity, clarity and Naturalness, while the pseudepigrapha could be Superior in that ... they are richer more varied and full of content.

Beside the above conspicuous variance, it is evident that the rules of the inhabitants of the Qumran community-the Essenes, were absolutely apocalyptic. Every aspect of their daily life was a preparation for, and an expectation of, the kingdom of God. While their communal life depicted the activities of the end of the world, it also shared of the age to come. Their concept about the kingdom, was the “already and not yet” stance. This is the rendition of Frank Moore’s apocalyptic exegesis (1992:26.27):

For the apocalyptist of Qumran, the keys to these future mysteries was at hand... In

apocalyptic exegesis, three principles should be kept in mind. Prophecy openly or cryptically refers to the last days. Second, the so-called last days are in fact the last days of Sect's life. And finally, the history of ancient Israel's redemption, her offices and institutions, are prototypes of the events and figures of the New Israel.

The effect of the apocalyptic on the Qumran community was therefore, making them live in anticipation of God for corresponding reward or punishment. Theirs was a society impacted by apocalypticism. In the absence of the voice of God, which became the conscience of the Israelite society, through the prophets, various aspects of the apocalyptic literature became the parameter by which life and conduct of the average Jew was mortgaged. During the intertestament period, it was necessary to note that expectations for reward and punishment will not be far fetched from the average Jew.

Their Value to their contexts

What is context? One may ask. Undoubtedly, context is technically speaking the Sitz im Leben' within which every activity evolve and operate. Contexts are potent enough to elicit programs and activities that are just suitable for it. Contexts are influential enough to selectively dictate who goes where and what happens how. Situations of injustice and marginalization, drunkenness and debauchery, tribalism and nepotism, persecution and oppression, and lack of the fear of God in the Church and society could bring about an enabling environment for apocalyptic prophecies and literature to thrive very prominently. The above cinerio are equally the antics of society today. Thus the apocalyptic is contemporarily relevant.

The apocalyptic incontrovertibly, could serve as 'checks and balances' to these unforeseen moments in the society, were men

see themselves as final arbiters; and on the other hand bring succour to those in despair and distress. The apocalyptic genre of the intertestamental period, though apocryphal and pseudepigraphal, are relevant to their contexts and beyond. As a crisis literature, the apocalyptic elicits hope in the midst of despair. It is a hope that looks up to someone who is the absolute peace to mankind rather than the moments of relative peace. Shorter (1983:100) also; further stated that the apocalyptic experience is that of wrestling with the problem of cruelty, pain inequality and injustice. These social vices are prevalent in our society and sometimes in the churches. Hence, when the apocalyptic is experienced, roles will be reversed, the saint will rejoice and sinners will be punished. It is an ardent yearning for an objective utopia.

This article is not much concerned about the religious, as it is about the literary value to humanity. Scott wraps up (1949:17) by saying that the apocalyptic is not to produce literature, though, but to reach their immediate target audience with results in the shortest possible time. The apocalyptic is capable of keeping the mind in suspense for want of an adequate response to man's dilemma. It was this unquantifiable worth of the apocalyptic that was being observed when Richard Bauckham (1986:113) reiterated that all the three later streams (the Christian Apocalyptic, the Hebrew Merkabah and the Hebrew Apocalypses) can only contribute reliably to the study of ancient apocalyptic if they are first of all understood in their own right, as literature of their own period.

Therefore, the apocalyptic then could cast greater illumination or light on the meaning of other ancient documents of antiquity, and as well serve as a reservoir preserving ancient tradition and by so doing, reflect the content of ancient apocalypses. And possibly the apocalyptic of the period under review could contain an expression of a yet unidentified ancient worldview that are limitless in their application. This is because Martin (1975:101)

ranged the values from “encouragement to stand firm in the hope of immortality, a warning against those who had abandoned the faith, assurance for those facing acute trial and suffering, to a demonstration of the folly of idol – worship and a proof of the superiority of the Jewish faith. A literature of such immense value must have had an impact on the development of the apocalyptic concept in the New Testament. If the apocalyptic, then, had a parallel context with our society, it behooves us giving credence to the apocalypse.

The Apocalyptic- Now

The society today is that of an apocalyptic premise. There are two New Testament Greek verbs that portend the meaning of apocalyptic to buttress the fact and they are:

- (1) Apokaluptein which means to unveil, to take cover off something and let it be seen. In the New Testament; apokaluptein is always used of God’s act of revealing; and never used in a human or secular sense. For instance, the Greek words akatakalyptos and anakaluptein which means to uncover or unveil a woman’s head are used as opposed to apokaluptein which has divine implications.
- (2) The Greek word, phaneroun means to make manifest something formerly hidden or unknown. Alan Richardson (1958:53,54) quickly comments, that “this phaneroun, is for every day usage, ordinarily as in 1 Cor. 12:7 and 2 Cor. 4:2, (but) the word apokalupsis means the Parousia, the revealing of Jesus Christ at his coming at the end of the age”. The political undertone of the apocalypses, therefore, cannot be far-fetched, since it has to do with the sudden arrival of Jesus, putting an end to this age and setting up the beginning of a new one. The fact of finitude is embodied in these theological concepts.

Felix Just, (2001:definition page) while giving the definitions and related terms of Apocalypse, presented a contemporary stance of the apocalyptic as follows: apocalyptic as an adjective

originally referred to anything “revelatory”; now usually refers to catastrophic violence or disasters. And Apocalypticism is seen as a worldview with strong apocalyptic expectation; social movements that expect the end of the world. This was the concept muted by E.N. Onwu in one of his lectures that “Jesus” message is not unconnected with hope in the Apocalyptic. And Hope, not a miraculous on earth, but a ‘cosmic catastrophe’. Moreover, Thomas W. Gillespie (2002:2,3) tied up the September 11 episode on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (the economic nerve center and military might, both of the United State of America) with little apocalyptic. Gillespie here made apocalyptic synonymous with catastrophic or cataclysmic. It is with this contemporary world view of the apocalyptic concept that we now turn to see what could be gleaned of its New Testament constituent. Equally important is the fact that the Tsunami of 2004 at Indonasia and the recent Haitian earthquake of 2010 must be referred to as apocalyptic in essence.

On the contrary, however, Stanley Hauerwas and Miroslva Volf grounded their theological argument for non- violence firmly in eschatology. They strongly believe that being a Christian is synonymous with non- violence; and here Stanley (1999:262) speaks of war as the act of getting rid of God and claim to be final arbiters to our destiny. Thus Christians are meant to forgive, to end violence which virtue is difficult to maintain or emulate. The foregoing citation notwithstanding, the consensus scholarly opinion stands with regards New Testament eschatology which teaches that God is in firm in control of both the beginning and end of human history, but not without violence or catastrophe. Admittedly, we can no longer feign ignorance of the presence of Apocalypticism in the New Testament and in the now. The New Testament is not only a database for the gospels and epistles but also for the apocalyptic- the Book of revelation. Besides, late Judaism and Early Christianity grew out of this unique milieu of apocalypticism. And it is this literal phenomenon that Frank

Moore Cross (1992:163) presented as a symphony of apocalyptic range; of earlier apocalypse in Isaiah 24 – 27 and the Book of Daniel to the literature and eschatology of Qruman, where the final war of Armageddon is purported to have commenced. Indeed, it is that God was about to act as the sovereign Lord.

The atmosphere described in the aforementioned citations are not at variance to the socio – political and economic stance of our 21st century dynamics. There are crises at virtually every continent. Some key nations are on a high alert for want of apocalyptic intervention. Thus, the relevance of the apocalyptic cannot be under-estimated.

The Apocalyptic Features

The extensive nature of the apocalyptic genre had such a phenomenal impact upon the content and form of ancient writing that movements like Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, Gnostic and Persian influence had apocalyptic features in their major sacred or secular life and literature. Undoubtedly, it was this near-universal effect of apocalypticism that compelled G.K. Beale (1999:40) to formulate an all-encompassing definition of apocalypse as a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework where revelation is interspersed with a human recipient on one hand, and a transcendent reality of the wholly other, on the other hand.

From the above citation it is evident that the style of writing an apocalyptic would be generally figurative and many of the characters are drawn from Biblical writings. The above are some of the unique features that characterize the apocalyptic literature. Others are enumerated as follows:

- (1) The apocalypticist is usually overwhelmed by the immediate situation about him.
- (2) The use of pseudonyms; since they have no authority in themselves, to give credence to their collection.
- (3) The apocalyptic message is always a

blended message of despair and hope. (4) The apocalyptic pattern is dualistic in nature, a struggle between righteousness and wickedness. (5) The apocalyptic describes the past, and sometimes present, history in future form the concept of God, determining world history irrespective of the prevailing circumstance. (6) The otherworldliness of apocalyptic literature earns for it the natural use of symbolic and dynamic expressions. Thus, Henneck (1965:585) says that the description does not employ clear references (names of peoples, countries, etc), but uses a code with images, symbols and allegories, generally has attaching a comprehensive interpretation to it.

With the above analysis of the concept of apocalypticism, it would be proper to admit, like Felix Just, that apocalypse is a crises literature about the past, present and future in highly symbolic terms.

Its Contribution to Scholarship

Inasmuch as the book of Revelation is an integral part of the New Testament Canon, the exploitation, and exhaustive treatment of only the gospels and epistles by outstanding scholars to the utter neglect, of the apocalyptic texts, will ultimately produce a lopsided New Testament Scholarship. This kind of scholarship will never be forgiven by posterity. Drawing a parallelism between John's apocalypse and the polemicists of every Christian history, Paul Barrett, (1989:119), narrates; that the more we know the Greco-Roman context which is seen to correspond polemically with the apocalypse, the higher esteem we would have for John's audacity. This is because John the prophet of Patmos became for Christians of Asia what the classical prophets of Israel had been centuries before in their denunciations of nations surrounding Israel.

The polemicists, during the eras of the Apostles and church fathers played the significant role of defending nascent

Christianity through articulated apologies (orally or documentarily). These were scholars of their day and time who academically provided irresistible evidence that demanded a verdict; and the Johannine apocalypse is no less a resource materials for every scholar in New Testament Studies in particular and religion, in general. In our days and society, where the dignity of mankind, the right and respect for human life and the ideal concept of morality are relegated to the background; a knowledge, and sometimes practice, of the apocalyptic could add meaning to life on earth. Could this not be the corollary drawn between catastrophic/cataclysmic event and September 11 episode in the United States of America? Where in an article, William Stacy Johnson (2002:37) enunciates the words: “In short, September 11 was not merely an American catastrophe but an international catastrophe whose ripple effects are still being felt”. A trace of the Sizt im Leben of apocalyptic genre brings to light an evocative socio-political environment. Although G.K. Beale (1999:40,14) categorizes scholars’ ideologies between the social and literary functions of apocalyptic literature; reference was made to A.Y. Collins who is of the opinion that “John wrote out of what he only perceived as a crises since there was no outright persecution at the time of Revelation’s composition”. On the contrary, L.L. Thompson is “contending that a clear distinction between the two should not be made; if something is literary, then it is social’. Inasmuch as the apocalyptic is eschatological in nature, it hinges on universal concerns socio-politically, and thus needs not to be superficially handled; rather a critical analysis of the above phenomenon could provide an accurate hermeneutical rendering of apocalyptic effects. Thus, the relevance of the apocalyptic is obvious and conspicuous in that scholars have drawn attention to apocalypticism in the church and society.

The Significance of the Apocalyptic to the Church

The two major characteristics of the apocalyptic is ‘Vengeance and Vindication’ or ‘Reward and Punishment’. The church, a

called out assembly of adherents, stand to benefit from the positive aspect of the apocalyptic message. As long as the church upholds the moral standard of God, she is bound to be vindicated by God, of any form of opposition. Morality, therefore, is an integral ingredient to the realization of God's vindication. An apocalyptic text has it that "if you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the Land: But if you refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it (Isaiah 1:19 – 20). Could it be that there is a relation between obedience to the Creator God and apocalypticism? The descriptive and figurative analysis given to the Land of Canaan could infer apocalypticism: (1) A good spacious land (Exodus 3:8, Deut 8:7 – 10). (2) A land flowing with Milk and Honey (Exodus 3:8). (3) A Land of Briers and Thorns (Isaiah 7:12 – 15) (4) A land that devours its inhabitants (Numbers 13:17 – 20).

On the other hand, immorality would be an essential ingredient to the realization of God's vengeance. Furthermore, if the reduction of the twin towers and Pentagon in US of September 11th, 2001 is apocalyptic in nature and essence; then the Tsunami that hit the Indonesian Islands of 26th December 2004 and the Haitian Earthquake of 12th January, 2010 will be no less apocalyptic. Natural disasters that would claimed nearly 230,000 lives in about 14 countries, and the Haitian catastrophe that claimed almost same number of lives cannot be termed otherwise. As the US Geological Survey and National Earthquake Information Centre grapples with the scientific cause of the Haitian Earthquake, it is only proper to equally search into the moral precursors of these contemporary apocalyptic events in our history. The relevance of the apocalyptic cannot be sidelined, for any reason in every generation.

The Significance of the Apocalyptic in Our Society

The significance of the apocalyptic in New Testament Studies and our society in particular, therefore, cannot be over-emphasized. Ralph (1955:426) reiterates that "since the

apocalypse is not evangelistic, it describes the destruction of the world and God's triumph over it". This article shows that apocalyptic literature flourishes in times of persecution, "giving hope for a reversal of misfortune and promising the putting right of present wrongs. The apocalyptic sees conflict between good and bad as ushering in the new order. It also proclaims the finality of history, the universal and eternal reign of the saints", were Shorters' (1983:96,97) factual argument. The apocalyptic is contemporarily relevant because the Johannine apocalypse of its time, and for every succeeding generation, had similar effect. Having a divergent opinion, Hennecke (1965:624) maintained that the aim of Johannine apocalypse was to strengthen Christians in the Domitianic persecution to remain true to their confession. This is due to the fact the entire apocalypse is characterized by a strong expectation (Rev. 1:1,3;3:11; 16:15; 22:7, 10, 17, 20), more intense than it is in the synoptic apocalypse of Mark 13 and its parallels. Significantly, when and if the September 11 episode is viewed from the apocalyptic perspective a sober reflection of mankind without the help of God becomes visible and this could subsequently result in a realistic approach to life and God the Creator. Relating the event of September 11 to the theology of the Cross, Migliore (2002:54), in an attempt to give meaning to the event, made these salient words:

If I am asked about God in relation to these events, my initial desire is to keep silent for long while, when it is time to speak, I want my remarks to be continue, and end with reference to the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Migliore is rather calling for a rethink of the Christians- Muslims relationship using the theology of the Cross as an interpretative key to September 11. Herein lies one of the major reasons for his article. Felix Just (2001: home page) has it that "whether the information found in the apocryphal literature is correct or not, is

not necessarily the issue at stake. These historical documents give scholars the valuable insight into what some Jews and Christians believed in at various times". Richard Bauckham (1988:34) speaks of the significance of the apocalyptic by assuring believers that, despite the apparent dominance of evil in the world, God is in control of history and is bringing it to a triumphant conclusion. This kind of apocalypse helps to sustain faith in times of crisis and persecution.

This message is very much needed today, in the face of the gross uncertainty and instability plaguing the African continent in particular, and the universe in general. Crises moments are all around us, one cannot shy away from the implications and applications of the apocalyptic to present day events. African nations should have a rethink of doing and applying religion apocalyptically.

Summary and Conclusion

Drawing an inference from the three articles of Gillespie (2002: 1-10) Bulletin, apocalyptic studies should be observed by all, and would-be, scholars of the New Testament in order to truly give theological meaning to societal ills. The apocalyptic, therefore, is a constant reminder that nothing is static, so long as the earth lasts. Catastrophic events should be a pointer to the fact that human endeavors and achievements notwithstanding, mankind in the universe is faced with imminent fragility. The apocalyptic reminds us not only to refocus on God the Creator alone, because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein (Ps 24), but also to compulsorily acknowledge the fact that the indispensable administrator of judgment and reward, as indicated in the apocalyptic studies, is Jesus Christ. For it is written (John 5:22,23) moreover the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honor the son does not honor father who sent him. It will be

foolhardy for crises instigators and brokers to think of themselves as final arbiters, in the light of the apocalyptic.

A serene, humanity and, society could only be attained by the true hermeneutical knowledge of the apocalyptic. It is that God in Christ Jesus is in control no matter the religious inclination. Summarily, the apocalyptic is the enunciation of realistic hope and a call for allegiance to God in Christ at all times, which of course, is the keynote address of the Johannine apocalypse. It is a clarion call on people to the fact of judgment based on how one executed his activities towards God and man. The apocalyptic studies henceforth, pose a challenge of a responsible living here on earth. There is, therefore, the need for this, old but new area in New Testament studies to be fully explored.

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