

## The Pastor And Biblical Research

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### Abstract

The findings of biblical criticism caused the church to wake from her slumber. With the publication of Pope Pius XII *Divino afflante Spiritu* the Christian world greeted a new era and was delivered from the opium of scriptural interpolation, eisegesis, and fanatical beliefs. Empowered by the Papal encyclical, catholic exegetes applied the tools of literary critical research to the scriptures. This led to a total demystification uncritical beliefs. Humanity graduated from the allegorical to the indubitable truth of exegetical findings. Scientific feats and man's quest for the truth about God challenges the pastor to further researches. Biblical research for the pastor is the primary focus of this article. The research touched the history of biblical research; methods; reasons and importance. Appraisal for further research forms the conclusion.

### Introduction

Every discipline grows with time and new discoveries. Hosea emphasized the importance of knowledge for a pastor (Hosea 4,6). Before Wilhelm Herschel, scientists thought that the planets were limited to six in number. It was not until 1781 that this church organist alerted the scientists on the reality of the 7<sup>th</sup> planet, the Uranus (a giant ball of gas and liquid, 4x the earth diameter) as documented by Davis (2002). Until Galileo concluded his research and risked condemnation by the church because of his revolutionary conclusions, people were fooled into believing that the world was flat. If man must fulfil the divine injunction of Gen 1,26-28, he must insist on research as a continuum to new discoveries. This is even more urgent in the aspect of biblical research as it patterns to pastors who ought to be guardians and directors of others. The blind cannot lead the blind. Since pastors have the single responsibility of helping others understand God's message, the need for persistent research becomes an imperative.

The discovery of the dead sea scrolls in 1948 has made tremendous impact on the understanding and originality of some of the Old Testament texts. Some pastors have continued to work harder for more enlightenment. Dr. David Livingston is the founder of the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR). He has been involved in Christian ministry for over 50 years. David served in the US Navy in the Pacific during WWII. In the early 1950's, he served as a pastor in the UPUSA church, then

went to Korea as a missionary for 12 years, serving as a church planter and founding president of a Christian college for 5 years. David founded ABR in 1969, primarily in response to the scholarly assertions that the Biblical city of Ai showed no evidence that Joshua conquered and burned it. Through careful investigation, he ascertained that scholars had wrongly identified the location of Ai, and he worked vigorously to correct the error and identify the Lost City of Ai in Israel. Part of this work included correcting another scholarly blunder: the misidentification of Bethel. Properly identifying Bethel was the key to finding Ai. David determined that Ai was at Khirbet Nisya, directing 15 seasons of excavations there.

Pastors are directors of souls. Since the blind cannot lead the blind, 1Pet 3,15 must always be the concern of every pastor. He must have reasons to give for his belief otherwise it will be like groping in the dark. Sound reasons are only tenable through serious and empirical researches coupled with openness and docility to evidenced results. This paper, confined itself in the main to an excursus into the history of biblical research; statement of the problem; the methods adopted; reasons and importance of the research and then a general appraisal for further researches.

#### Statement Of The Problem

The bible is the word of God. Yet, it is written in human language and by human authors. Divine inspiration of the authors is generally believed but evidently, there was no direct dictation. The fact that there was no direct dictation gives room for possible errors. Even if one insists on direct dictation, the possibility of omissions and imperfections are indubitable for the perfect can never come from the imperfect. Again, the constant copying, preserving the parchments and transporting the copied ones to people far and near make aporias and mistakes human facts. Some notable problems are glaring: involuntary variants i.e non-intentional additions, omissions or mistakes like dittography or writing twice eg. 2Kgs 18,17; haplography or writing once eg. Luke 10,31 and 32 (in the Greek text); homoioteleuton or similar endings eg Isa 4,5-6 in 1Q-Isa; Jn 17,15 (Codex Vaticanus). There are also intentional variants like suppression eg. Luke 23,32 says, "there were also other malefactors led with him". Some manuscripts suppressed 'other' to avoid the implication that Jesus was also a malefactor; explanation and harmonization.

In the maze of all these possibilities and facts and considering the factuality of the separation by time and space between the bible times and our age; the gullible nature of the people our age, the world depends on the pastor to give her the true and accurate teaching. Getting to this accurate and true knowledge so as to impact it on others remains a taunting issue. Evidently, thorough research remains the unique solution. This is what our predecessors did. The need to carry on from where they stopped does not need to be over emphasized.

### History Of Biblical Research

It is a common and accepted opinion that the bible is the product of many human authors who lived at various times and places and wrote in several different literary genres; yet all wrote under divine inspiration and so God could be said to be the principal author. Thus, over and above the adoption of philological, archaeological, historical and exegetical methods of researches, it is theological so as to give room to an understanding of the divine message. Biblical research is as old as the bible itself. Whealon (1967) observes that the only difference is that every age has its own characteristic research orientation.

The quest to understand the OT and use it in their prayers and worship lead the Jews in diaspora in Alexandria to demand for a Greek version. This lead to the translation of the Hebrew TANAK into Greek. Hence the birth of the Septuagint Version of the bible.

Further researches into the validity of the OT are evidenced in the citations made of the OT by the NT authors. Scholars record about 200 direct quotations from the OT in the NT. Of these, about 118 are seen in the Pauline epistles. In fact both direct and paraphrased references to the OT add up to about 350 in the NT. The simple implication is that the authors, namely, the apostolic fathers or pastors researched deeply into the material available to them to lead their audience convincingly into the new faith. The result of their researches lead to allegorical method so venerated by the ancient interpreters and by the Alexandrian Jew, Philo. Dodd (1963) believes that their extensive use of the OT is a proof that they were not unmindful of the historical setting of the texts. Davis (1948) and Dodd (1952) conclude that citation of the OT by the NT authors are pointers to the fact that they used the facts of the OT as basis for argument. This explains why according to Daube (1998) the events recorded in the NT and the manner in which they are recorded, naturally reflect the speculations current among the Jews.

From the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D could be regarded as the Talmudic period. The Jews of this period were concerned with researching into the true meaning of the OT texts and to determine the basis of the *halakah*. The result of their researches is found in the Mishna, Tosephta, Gemarah, Talmud and Midrashim.

In 8<sup>th</sup> C A.D., a jewish sect – the Karaites rejected the Talmud and demanded for return to the bible understood literally. This lead the Rabbis to research into the grammatical and lexicographical studies of the Hebrew bible in order to explain their literal meaning (*p<sup>e</sup>s'1%*) in conformity with orthodox judaism. Two other factors lead them into such deeper research, namely, contact with Arabic scholars in Spain and growing interest in Aristotleanism among Jews and Christians of the era. The result of such deep and challenging research was marveling. The exponent, Gaon Sa'adia ben Joseph made the first translation of the Bible into Arabic, produced the first Hebrew dictionary and first Hebrew grammar.

The Patristics were not left out this wave of research. We have people like Origen (c.185-254) who made the first critical study of the LXX and concluded platonically that the bible has three parts: the historical or corporeal sense, the psychic or moral sense and the spiritual sense. Others are of Alexandrian stock like Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius and Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius and Didymus the blind, Cyril of Alexandria and the Cappadocian Fathers. Scholars from the school of Antioch and Latin Fathers like Jerome (the first translator of the LXX to Latin, Vulgate), Augustine, Peter Chrysologus and Gregory the Great are also worthy of note. All these were bent on digging deeper into the bible for richer meaning. This gave birth to the allegorical interpretation of the bible.

In the medieval era, such wonderful brains like Venerable Bede, Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Lyra made valuable in-puts in the history of biblical research. In the 13<sup>th</sup> C, Stephen Langton with his painstaking researches opened the eyes of the world to glosses on the books of the OT and the NT.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> C., with the challenges of reformation and renaissance, biblical scholars were pushed back to their drawing board with a new emphasis on the study of Greek and Hebrew. The researches of Johann Reuchlin, Johannes Buxtorfs and the Anglican John Lightfoot provided the world with better Hebrew grammars, dictionaries, Hebrew and Aramaic concordances and better knowledge of rabbinical literature. Their contribution flowered into eventual publication of the first polyglot bibles.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> C., the biblical scholar, Simon Richard discovered the biblical historical criticism and organic development of the OT books.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were the era of literary criticism of the Pentateuch. Johann Gottfried Eichhorn offered the documentary hypothesis and added other sources to the Yahwistic and Elohist. The school of Wellhausen proposed its thesis of the literary sources of the Pentateuch. The period was also greeted with rationalistic exegesis, quest for historical Jesus, form criticism and demythologizing of Rudolf Bultmann.

In the period following the council of Trent, apologetics characterized the catholic interpretation of the bible because of the polemical writings of the protestants. Exceptions to this apologetic system were great commentaries by J. Maldonatus and the N.T. commentary by Cornelius a Lapide. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> C more learned and scientific biblical works began to appear in the catholic world. National and international congresses were organized. Credit for this new impetus must be given to the Roman Pontiffs: Leo XIII for his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, Benedict XV and his *Spiritus Paraclitus*, and above all Pius XII for his *Divino afflante Spiritu*. With this pontifical backing a new generation of NT scholars with high-tech researching spirit arose giving birth to centers for biblical studies as Rome, Jerusalem, Louvain, Paris and Washington D.C. Hot brains like B.M. Ahern, P. Benoit, M.E. Boismard, R. Brown, S. Lyonnet, B. Rigaux, K.H. Schelkle, R. Schnackenburg, C. Spicq, D.M. Stanley, B. Vawter and A. Voegtle researched and

made meaningful contributions to such tintillating questions as the historicity of the gospels, the nature of the Evangelical parables, the unfolding and development of Pauline thought and many thorny questions on the interpretation of the fourth gospel, the bible and tradition and nature of biblical inspiration.

Based on the evidences above, the researcher modifies Wood (1967) to evaluate the history of biblical research that no age has ever remained simply a spectator. Every age stresses the need for faith as well as scientific research for improved understanding of the inspired word of God.

#### Reasons And Importance

R.M. Grant (1963) succinctly documents that "...when scripture is regarded as completely sufficient for doctrine, and at the same time the needs of the contemporary situation are quite different from needs long past, some means has to be found for relating the ancient book to the thought and life of a later day. This task is performed by interpretation". It must be added that there cannot be proper interpretation without adequate research. This is because, researches connect the past with the present and underscores the future by opening up hidden treasures of a particular discipline. An ignorant pastor ends up a chronic and confused fanatic irrespective of his faith. A faithless but knowledgeable pastor is simply an empty gong. He is only intellectualistic and is better a professor than a pastor. A true pastor must have faith and knowledge and both are rewards of sound researches.

Again, the bible is like an ocean. It speaks to people of every age in different ways according to their peculiar situations. Thorough research reveals the hidden treasures of the bible and adjusts them to suit the present. Results of thorough research serve as ancillary to smart decisions. For instance, the issue of birth control and the means to achieve it have remained a taunting issue in the recent past. Professionals in the field of medicine have their views. Social workers are not left out. Quoting the bible may not be sufficient to convince the audience as to its evil nature and repercussion. Only deep rooted research can really expose its effect on the spiritual life of man.

Research is very necessary for the pastor if he must widen his purview. It brings him in contact with other fields of experience and enables him to be a master in his own field. The findings of the archaeological discoveries sets him on a footing to situating and understanding biblical claims. It arms him with academic tools to sift the wheat from the chaff. The pastor is a guide and so ought to know better his subjects. He is also a teacher and so ought to teach the fact. Research is the unique and only means to expand his view and be better equipped to lead, teach and direct others.

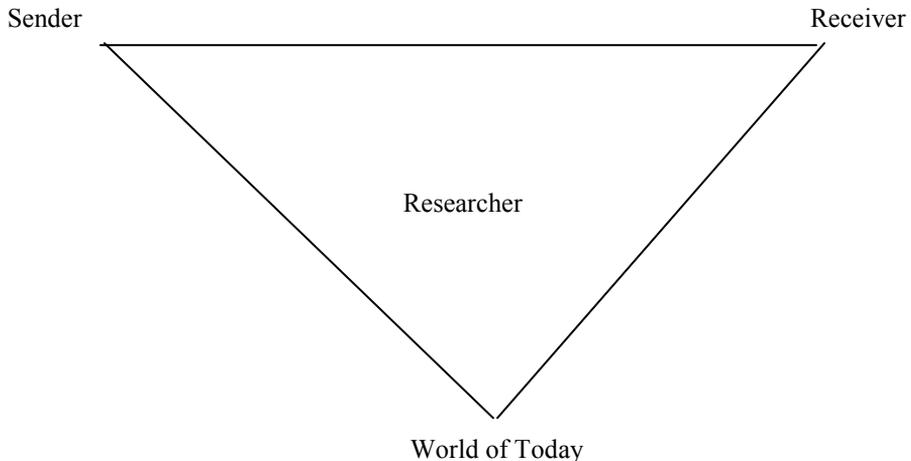
Every discipline grows and develops. Biblical studies can never grow or develop without a corollary studies. As custodians of the bible, the pastors have the onus and impetus to lead in this biblical research revolution. Much has been done already in biblical research. Many more remain enigmatic. Consider for instance the pre-historical stories of Gen 1-11. Creation story is today challenged by the theory of evolution. Brown (1983) says that some may try to use paleontology to disprove

evolution often on the assumption that the theory of evolution is incompatible with the thesis of a Creator God. In 1955 and 1959, according to Baily (1978), Fernand Navarra, a French industrialist, designed to verify the medieval thesis that the resting place of Noah's Ark upon the mountains of ARRT (Gen 8,4) refers to Mt. Ararat on the Turkish-Russian border. There are seven different traditions as to the where about of the Ark. Only a thorough research can unravel such mysteries. Gasque (1966) teaches that the travels of Sir William Ramsay in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century showed how the study of the ancient cities that were visited by Paul in his journeys clarified the details of biblical accounts. However, the ambience information is general in character and is not specific. A reading through the bible meets one with many things yawning for clarification. Take the account of the crucifixion for instance. Apart from the Jewish and Christian references to it, there is no first hand evidence of such gruesome punishment. A recent publication of two Dead Sea texts mention hanging of men to die on a tree, the same expression used in Acts 5,30. Fitzmeyer (1981) documents the discovery in 1968 of the bones of a crucified man in a first century A.D. tomb near Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem. From the discovery, it is clear that the nails were driven through the wrists and one was used to attach the two legs to the cross. In this century, an inscription was discovered at Nazareth containing an ordinance of the Emperor that graves must remain intact and that death penalty awaits one who would violate a burial place. Scholars believe that probably that the charges about stealing the body of Jesus in Matt 28,11-15 must have contributed to such edicts. The Shroud of Turin discovery, Wilson (1978) is yet another milestone in the biblical development. Such discoveries are only possible with researches. They have catalyzed the growth of biblical knowledge. The Pastor will be doing himself a great good and indeed the world at large if he furthers his researches since they widen his purview, enhances his knowledge and arms him with facts for his job as a shepherd and teacher.

Again, we are separated from the facts of the Bible by time, language and culture. It is only a proper research by the pastor that can now bridge the gaps and phenomenally transports the past to the present, makes it relevant and so transforms the present.

There are multiple texts and manuscripts of the Bible. Some are considered as sacred. Many are classed as apocryphals. The fact is that though a manuscript could be an apocrypha it may still contain some truths that may not really be in the canonicals. An empirical research balances these shortcomings and helps us get as closer as possible to the original. The copies of the oldest manuscripts we have today are copies made long after the original documents were made. Some have been lost and some mutilated. The recent discovery in 1948 of the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave near the Dead Sea region of Palestine contain manuscripts that show considerable differences from the standard Hebrew text we have. Since this is so, one can imagine the success we shall achieve if more researches are done by pastors who have the responsibility of interpreting the bible.

The reason and importance of research is underscored by the triangular flow of facts from the sender (author) to the receiver (audience at the time) and then the world of today. Only a good research can bridge the yawning gap existing between the three as we can see below:



#### Suggested And Effective Methods For Biblical Researches

Archaeology opens up lots of hidden facts of history. A pastor who must indulge in biblical research must avail himself of the truths and findings of archaeology. This is because according to Brown (1983), a basic acquaintance with the civilizations that were the contexts of the biblical writers will lead to thoughtful reflection on how those civilizations conditioned the expression of the word of God. Bible renders service but may become very destructive if absolutized. For instance the problem that Jesus had with the Jews was not really their Judaism but their mindset in interpreting the tenets of Judaism. They held tenaciously to traditions that are purely human and not equitable with the word of God. Jesus opposition to and attempt to correct that fundamentalism caused him his life. This is always the danger when faith is separated from facts. A non-fundamentalist approach to the Bible, distinguishing between the intent of the revelation and the way in which it was phrased because of the circumstances of the biblical period, is possible only if one knows those circumstances. It was the archaeological discoveries that first alerted scholars that the Israelites lived, wrote and thought similarly to the people of the kingdoms that surrounded them. Thus, taking archaeology seriously arms the pastor with basic knowledge of the facts of history. Then using these facts as a spring board, he is able to interpret the word of God as it applies to the

circumstances of his day. He is able with archaeological tools, to bridge the historical gap caused by chronological separation from the time when the events took place.

Archaeological knowledge is not sufficient. The pastor must also arm himself with the languages of the Bible. A pastor who is deficient in the primary languages of the bible (Hebrew and Greek) can only engage in what Holladay (1999) calls “a second level interpretation”. He defines the first level interpretation as “the interpretation made of the original, whether by a native speaker or hearer or by one who has acquired knowledge of the original language”. A pastor who researches with a translation is only enslaving himself to possible mistakes and betrayals by the translator. Language is the vehicle of a culture. Since the Bible rose from a culture, the knowledge of the language of that culture is absolutely necessary if the culture is to be studied and if the Bible must be adequately understood, interpreted and communicated.

The pastor researcher must also be acquainted with the scientific methods of Biblical interpretation: the diachronic and synchronic methods. Gorman (2001) adds existential as the third method. The diachronic gets him at home with the historico-critical method including form criticisms, tradition criticisms, redaction, structural and historical criticisms. Synchronic method fortifies him with textual criticisms, grammatical and literary analysis. With these, the pastor is safely positioned to give a better and founded interpretation of the text result of his research.

#### APPRAISAL FOR FURTHER RESEARCHES

The words of J.A. Bengel (1742) remain perennially true that:

Scripture is the foundation of the Church: the Church is the guardian of Scripture. When the Church is in strong health, the light of Scripture shines bright; when the Church is sick, Scripture is corroded by neglect; and thus it happens, that the outward form of Scripture and that of the Church, usually seem to exhibit simultaneously either health or else sickness; and as a rule the way in which Scripture is being treated is in exact correspondence with the condition of the Church.

W.C. Kaiser jr. (2004) laments that the church is not in good health in many parts of the world because she has been fed with junk food; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes. Consequently, the very generation that has taken giant steps to diagnose and make sure that people are not killed by such carcinogenic substances in the name of teachings are afflicted by malnutrition. As a result there is a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God (Amos 8,11). The indubitable is that the church came before the bible and the bible is produced to help the believers follow ecclesiastical teachings. If this is so, then, we must note that there is no Old Testament without the people of Israel and there is no New Testament without the church. It therefore falls on the church as an onus to interpret the bible which is her work by definition (2Pet 1,19-20). In the context of the *sitz-*

*im-leben*, it is the responsibility of the Pastor. This is only possible through proper and adequate research.

In order to arm the Pastors to do proper researches, it is the belief of this paper that knowledge of the original languages of the bible is very pertinent. This knowledge cannot come on its own. The hierarchies of the churches must therefore motivate her candidates to pastoral ministry to enroll into scriptural studies by granting them scholarships and other necessary assistance. The few who are already involved in the field should also be provided with tools and motivations for researches.

#### Conclusion

Most fundamentalists believe that unconditioned revelation is found in the bible. Some Roman Catholics see it as enshrined in the decrees of the Church. The Jews believe that the truth is in the Torah, the Mishnah or Talmud. However, in *Mysterium Ecclesiae* of 1973, the Roman Catholic Church through her Doctrinal Commission stated explicitly that historical condition affects the expression of revelation and that truths are enunciated by the Magisterium in the changeable conceptions of a given epoch.

While not everyone who drives an automobile needs to understand the theory behind the internal combustion engine, *someone* does need to know this theory. I may be able to drive my Pontiac without any knowledge of internal combustion engines, until the Pontiac breaks down. Then, I must find someone (presumably a mechanic) who does in fact know enough theory to get the Pontiac running again.

The same is true of biblical research. It is not necessary for everyone to know biblical research theory, nor is it even necessary for pastors and teachers to know *everything* about biblical research. It is necessary for pastors and teachers in the church at the end of the twentieth century to know *something* about biblical research, for two reasons. First, it will affect the way we interpret the Bible for our people and it will curb incipient fundamentalism, fanaticism and superstition. A Pastor that does not do researches will likely end up a fundamentalist. According to Brown (1983): "A religious tragedy resulting from fundamentalism in the biblical sphere is that through it the Bible is brought into irreconcilable conflict with the majority scientific views of our time". Thorough research that is open to scientific discoveries leads one to a balanced, wholistic and essential perceptions of the Word of God.

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