



Research article

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ABSTRACT

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Christianity is the largest religious group in the world with about 2.6 billion adherents globally. Christianity is, therefore, expected to influence the character of most people in the world. But recent happenings prove otherwise. This research sought to examine how Christian eschatology might impact the public sphere from a Ghanaian socio-religious perspective. The researchers used qualitative research that employs the conceptual analysis approach. During the research, the researchers found out that scanty information exists in academia when it comes to eschatology in Africa. Another finding is a wake up calls on the church to review its eschatological position in the light of sound biblical interpretation. As eschatology influences the theological position of almost all doctrines and practices of the church, it is crucial for the church to revisit its eschatological doctrines and examine its biblical foundations. The research provided lessons and guiding principles for the Ghanaian Christian community.



1.0 Introduction

Eschatology remains a fascinating theological concept and theologians continue to devote a significant amount of time and labour to understand it because it is key in making reference to future occurrences. Elias Bongmba remarks that while many Christians might not bother about the theological subtleties of the debate, they remain interested because eschatological discourse concerns the destiny of the created order.¹ Christian eschatological study and discuss issues related to the second coming of Christ, resurrection of the dead, heaven, hell, rapture, tribulation, millennialism, end of this world, the new heaven and earth and the last judgment. The above-mentioned themes are dealt with in eschatology, a discipline of theology concerned with the individual and collective final destiny of human beings from a Judeo-Christian perspective.

For Moojan Momen, Christian eschatology is the study of the ultimate fate of each individual soul as well as the entire created order.² Bongmba explains that eschatology is about that which is last or ultimate, the doctrine of the end times which brings the Christian understanding of the world into the picture of God loving his creation and sending his son Jesus Christ to proclaim the Kingdom of God, present and future.³ Christian eschatology is the study of the reign of God preached by Jesus during his public ministry. In Christian eschatology, human beings are not destined to die but hope in the risen Christ for the new creation and the end of history. Christians expect the universal resurrection of the flesh and the general reconciliation of the creation with God.

Some scholars including Ernst K Kasemann are of the view that apocalyptic literature is “the mother of theology.”⁴ However, in his view, this literature has suffered over the years. He elaborates that theologians in times past viewed the writings “as an oddity, a perversion, and was not regarded to represent conventional Jewish or Christian philosophy.”⁵ Others neglected the topic because they assumed that apocalyptic philosophy had little impact on

¹ Elias Bongmba, *Eschatology in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 12.

² Moojan Momen, “Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure,” *Online Journal of Bahá’i Studies*. 1 no. 1 (2007): 71–88.

³ Bongmba, *Eschatology in Africa*, 26.

⁴ Ernst K. Kasemann, *The Beginning of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 1.

⁵ Kasemann, *The Beginning of Christian Theology*, 3.



Judaism and Christianity, while some gave little attention to the topic.⁶ In this context, Mitchell G. Reddish reiterates that the matter has recently received new attention, including academics warning about its impact on Judaism and Christianity.⁷ The survey of apocalyptic literature has increased more in the past 40 years than it has in the preceding 300 years.⁸ Modern civilization and current Christianity have been influenced by theology. The two primary books of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, Daniel and Revelation, are the most well-known examples of apocalyptic writing.⁹ That notwithstanding there are many passages in the Judeo-Christian scripture that are apocalyptic in nature.

Eschatology presents a message of hope to the hopeless believer and serves as a framework for life. Yet, not much scholarly attention has been paid to investigating the possible influences that eschatological teachings can have on the life of the Christian. The literature gap existing in this regard has prompted the present paper which examines the various ways in which Christian eschatology should inform the Ghanaian public space.

2.0 eschatology in Biblical Context

2.1 Eschatology in the Old Testament

Whereas some scholars see eschatology in Old Testament as incoherent with Christian eschatology, others such as Nahasheon Ndungu see eschatological ideas taking their roots in the Old Testament during the prophetic period or even earlier.¹⁰ R.E. Clements also advocates for a definition that includes the eschatological ideas found in the Old Testament period. It is only in the light of this Old Testament background that the New Testament ideas about the end of the world can be understood.¹¹ The ideas of eschatology in the Old Testament are connected in some way to the hope that people have placed in the comforting idea of a salvific eschaton throughout the years when they have been in distress and faced the devastation of creation. These ideas can be found in prophetic literature and have helped

⁶ Kasemann, *The Beginning of Christian Theology*, 3.

⁷ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 33.

⁸ Carter cited in Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 34.

⁹ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 34.

¹⁰ Nahasheon Wamathai Ndungu, *African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa and Eschatology* (Master's Thesis: University of Nairobi, 1979), 27.

¹¹ R.E. Clements, *Promise and Covenant* (London: SCM, 1965), 23.



scholars comprehend how the redemptive-historical process leads to the completion of the new creation.

After the death of Solomon, the golden age in the history of the Israelites began to decline. The kingdom was divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The political stability and economic prosperity enjoyed during the reign of David came to an end. The nation of Israel was now facing threats of invasion from the neighboring nations, especially the Assyrians. Worst of all, Israel had turned her back against her God, Yahweh, and was practicing idolatry (1 Kings 12: 26-33). Bright reiterates that during such a troubled period, the people inevitably wished that Yahweh would intervene and restore the lost glory of the Davidic period.¹² The people began to look forward to a day when their God, Yahweh, would remember them and come to deliver His people from their sufferings and oppression. This day became popularly known as the "Day of Yahweh".¹³

This was the situation in the two kingdoms by the time the writing prophets appeared. The pre-exilic prophets had a negative view of the day of the Lord due to the total misbehavior, social injustice and negligence of religious observances in Israel. They believed that the day of the Lord would bring punishment rather than victory (Amos 5:9, 18-20, Isa. 1: 4-6; Jer. 1:4-16). In spite of the utter hopelessness of the situation the prophets however still believed that Yahweh would at least save a remnant. (Hos.13:16-25; Isa. 7:14-17; Jer. 3:17). In the sense of eschatology as the end of a particular historical period to be followed by quite a different one, the pre-exilic prophets can be regarded as eschatological. Clements terms their eschatology: "an eschatology of doom in which the existing order between Yahweh and Israel was threatened with extinction."¹⁴ For the pre-exilic prophets, the end of the present world order would be marked by the invasion of the nation of Israel by a foreign nation after which God would restore a remnant of the faithful into a new world order under his divine guidance.¹⁵

During the period between the Exiles (587 BC) up to the time the book of Daniel was written (about 165 BC), remarkable developments of the ideas, about the end of the world

¹² John Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (London: SCM Press 1977), 19.

¹³ Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 19.

¹⁴ Clements, *Promise and Covenant*, 22.

¹⁵ Clements, *Promise and Covenant*, 23.



took place. The misfortune which had fallen upon the people of Israel of being taken captives to Babylon may have influenced their religious outlook. Without a king, the hope of a coming messiah must have been a great consolation to them. According to the post-Exilic prophets, the exile into Babylon was a kind of Yahweh's judgment (Isa. 40:1-2; 51:17-20). After the punishment, God would come back to his people and save them from their oppressors (Isa. 51:21-23). On top of the national salvation of Israel, the writer of the book of Isaiah entertained some hope that the whole world would have a share in God's salvation through the commission of the servant of Yahweh (Isa. 42:1-4). The passages about the servant of Yahweh laid a basis on which later messianic interpretations were made, especially in the early Christian Church in relation to the person of Christ (Acts 8:32-33).

Another idea which emerges in Deutero-Isaiah is the idea of "the world to come" being not in this world but other-worldly. This other-worldly view was due to Persian influence. In the book of Daniel, a new idea emerges about the symbolic figure of one like the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13). Also, the writer talked of the resurrection of the dead (Dan. 12:1-4). The writer was answering the question raised by the problem of the martyrdom of the faithful Jews during the Maccabean revolution. In connection with this problem, the writer brought forward the idea of rewards after death for the faithful and punishment for the wicked people. Thirdly, the writer of Daniel was thinking of a world beyond this world. Through Persian influence of Dualism (a belief in this world and a world beyond) meant a considerable strengthening of the other-worldly element in the beliefs about the end of the world, during this post-exilic period.

During the inter-testamental period, eschatological thoughts and beliefs developed further and centered around the Messiah. The coming Messiah was the one who would conduct the final Judgment. The theme of death and resurrection was greatly colored with many speculations. T. F. Glasson observes that the inter-testamental literature abounds in ideas of the geography of the next world, and the locations of paradise amid hell as the destinations of the good and the bad people respectively, are elaborated at a great length.¹⁶ Ndungu notes that the beliefs that the Jews had developed about a coming Messiah or ideal King, the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment were not realized by the time the Old

¹⁶ T.F. Glasson, *The Second Advent* (London: Epworth Press, 1963), 16.



Testament. was written. It was in this situation of expecting the promised Messiah that Jesus emerged whose person and work form the core of the New Testament.¹⁷ The birth, life and ministry of Jesus also threw more light on eschatological beliefs and practices. The next section takes care of eschatological views in the New Testament.

2.2 Eschatology in the New Testament

The central message of Jesus' preaching is the imminence of the Kingdom of God. On more than one occasion, he claimed that the dawning of the Kingdom of God in his mission was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. To his disciples he once said: then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it" (Luke 10:23-24 NKJV).

What the prophets and Kings had desired so much to see was nothing less than the Kingdom of God, which Jesus now claimed not only to have dawned upon his hearers but actually to be present among them. According to Ndungu, besides Jesus' emphasis on the presence of the Kingdom, he seems at the same time, to have reserved a phase of the Kingdom, its final consummation, to be seen in the future (Mark 9: 1). The sayings about the Son of Man coming on the clouds (Mark13:26; 14:62) point to a future direction of the Kingdom.¹⁸

The so-called parables of the *parousia*, which include the parable of the thief in the night (Matt. 24:43), the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) the doorkeeper (Mark 13:33-35) the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) can also be included in this category of Jesus' teaching about the consummation of the Kingdom at the *parousia*.¹⁹ The tension between the sayings about the presence of the Kingdom on the one hand and the Kingdom as a future phenomenon on the other runs through the New Testament. As is evident from the fact that future and present declarations are related in the most intimate way in Jesus' discourse, Bornkamm notes that they must not be divided.²⁰ While Jesus endorsed Old Testament ideas such as the resurrection of the dead (Mark 13:26), a coming judgment (Matt.19:28) and a consummation

¹⁷ Ndungu, *African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa and Eschatology*, 67.

¹⁸ Ndungu, *African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa and Eschatology*, 68.

¹⁹ Ndungu, *African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa and Eschatology*, 68.

²⁰ O. G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Rodder and Stoughton, 1960), 92.



of the Kingdom by the Son of Man (Mark 8:38), he declined, however from giving a date when the end of the world would take place. Ladd notes that the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13 is no criterion for timing the end.²¹ He observes that the Olivet discourse describes no signs v14 by which the end can be calculated. According to Jesus, the arising of false messiahs and wars will not be a sign of the end because after these things “the end is still to come” (Mark 13:8 NKJV).²² According to O'Callaghan, the foundation of the Christian faith is based on four significant eschatological facts: the *parousia*, which is the appearance of Jesus Christ in glory at the end of time; the resurrection of the dead; the rebirth of the universe; and the judgment of humanity, which is accompanied by either eternal life or eternal punishment for those who have not been loyal to God.²³ This supports the claim that Christian eschatology is founded mainly on Christ. Mbiti confirms the Christological orientation of New Testament eschatology and claims that this is the best way to understand the phenomenon because it is founded on the fulfillment of Christ.²⁴ He points out that the incarnation partially reveals fulfillment. And being an eschatological body, the church shares this hope to some extent.²⁵ This suggests that the church (*ecclesia*), in some way, finds fulfillment in their relationship with God made possible by Christ's incarnation. Ndungu after a survey of eschatology in the New Testament concludes that the central theme of the New Testament is the *Parousia*. The end of this world order will be associated with the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the transformation of the living and the last judgment. Thus, the three themes of *parousia*, resurrection and last judgment form the core of the Christian belief of the coming end of the world.²⁶

3.0 Selected Eschatological Themes

3.1 Death

Death, in phenomenological terms, is the loss of the function of the conscious spirit as a result of separation.²⁷ As a natural occurrence and the finality of the human system, death is

²¹ G.E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1969), 322.

²² Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 322.

²³ O'Callaghan, *Christ our Hope*, 11-12.

²⁴ Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 57.

²⁵ Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 57.

²⁶ Ndungu, *African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa and Eschatology*, 68.

²⁷ Bradley J. Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 7.



an inescapable fact. The evidence from scripture attests to this fact. With the exception of the physical translation of Enoch and Elijah, all persons captured in the biblical story died (Heb. 11:5; Gen. 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11). The Christian scriptures illustrate the mortal destiny of man through physical death, spiritual death and second death. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, spiritual death is the result of human disobedience to God's word, the source of life. Christians hold that death came as a result of the sin of one man and death through sin (Rom. 5:12).²⁸ Physical death can generally be defined as the permanent termination of the life of an organism.²⁹ It may result from aging, poor health, war, accidents, and malnutrition among others. Scholars have observed that people from different cultures recognize death as a universal biological event. Quenum notes that human beings cease to function in times and space at their physical death followed by the release of their spirit from their bodies and by it they are separated from the living through death.³⁰ The second death occurs to people who lack eternal life in Christ after their physical death. Thus, after judgment, some souls will be condemned as a result of failure to identify with Christ.

Quenum observes among evangelicals that there is disagreement on the intermediate state.³¹ Several theories have emerged over the years including immediate ascension to heaven and descending to hell, soul sleep, instantaneous resurrection and purgatory. Places like Sheol comprising of the lower regions for with and Abraham's bosom for the righteous and as paradise feature prominently in these theoretical arguments. The Methodist Church, the Anglican Church and the Presbyterian Church hold that an intermediate state exists between death and resurrection.³² They hold that in this intermediate state, the soul does not sleep in unconsciousness rather it exists in happiness or misery. They explain that the term hades or Sheol is divided into paradise or Abraham's bosom and Gehenna with an impassable gulf separating the two.³³ Thus what happens to the conscious self after physical death before the final judgment and the renewal of this world or the resurrection has been debated by

²⁸ Sam Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide: The Conservative Protestant Subculture in Canada and the United States* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), 29.

²⁹ Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide*, 30.

³⁰ David E. Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism? Discerning a New Faithfulness for Mission* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 55.

³¹ Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism*, 56.

³² Martha McGill, "A Protestant Purgatory? Visions of an Intermediate State in Eighteenth-century Scotland," *Scottish Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (2018): 153-186.

³³ McGill, "A Protestant Purgatory? Visions of an Intermediate State in Eighteenth-century Scotland", 153-186.



evangelical scholars to date. Whereas each of the theories is inconsistent with one scripture or the other, a general agreement that runs through all these views is the fact that life continues in one way or the other after physical death.³⁴ It is clear from scripture that human beings do not completely die (Rev. 14:13, 20:12). Immortality is engraved in the hearts and minds of humanity. Death is definitely not the extinction of life (Job 19:25-27).³⁵

3.2 Second Coming of Christ (*Parousia*)

The New Testament places a lot of emphasis on Christ's second coming. Hanegraaff contends that if one indication of a biblical teaching's importance is the quantity of space allotted to it in the text, then it is obvious that one of the most crucial lessons to be learned from the New Testament is that Jesus will return to earth.³⁶ In the NT, it is mentioned 300 times, or once in every five verses. Paul mentioned the Second Coming 50 times. According to statistics, there will be 8 times more allusions to the Second Coming than the First Coming. Second Coming revelations are the focus of the Thessalonian epistles (1 & 2 Thess. and Rev.19:11-20), with entire biblical chapters devoted to this topic (Mat. 24-25; Mk 13; Lk 21). It was obviously intended to have a significant role in the Christian's motivation. From the teaching of Jesus himself through to the final writing of the NT era, it is widely discussed, plainly explained, and consistently applied. Throughout the New Testament, the idea that the timing of the *parousia* is unknown is prevalent (Mat. 24:36). Majority of New Testament scholars subscribe to the notion that the *parousia* will be personal, bodily and universally visible (Acts 1:11, Rev. 1:7, 1 Thess. 4:16, Mat. 24: 30). It is also generally held that it is going to be audible and glorious (Mat 24:23 &31).

The seven-year tribulation is closely associated with the subject of the *parousia*. Persecution of believers is referred to as "tribulation." Dispensationalists and some others believe that a seven-year tribulation, particularly intended against the nation of Israel, will occur right before the *parousia* based on their interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27.³⁷ It is believed that in the second half of the tribulation, there would be a period of even worse

³⁴ Douglas Banister, *The Word and Power Church: What Happens When a Church Seeks All God Has to Offer?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 45.

³⁵ Banister, *The Word and Power Church*, 46.

³⁶ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says about the End Times and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 272.

³⁷ Jonathan Menn, *Eschatology*, (Eugene Oregon; Resource Publications, 2013), 22.



suffering known as the "great tribulation." Dispensationalist theories on the specifics of any future tribulation are rejected by the majority of historical premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists. Although the severity of persecution may intensify just before Christ's second coming, they consider tribulation as something that defines the entire time between Christ's first and second comings.³⁸

Another related eschatological event closely associated with the *parousia* in the New Testament is the Millennium. In Revelation 20, Christ's 1000 years of rule on the earth is simply referred to as the millennium. There are several schools of thought regarding the relationship between the millennium and the *parousia*. Any belief that Christ will return before the "thousand years" is known as premillennialism. Premillennialists hold that when Christ returns, he will establish a millennial rule (or "golden period") on earth, following which he will establish the afterlife.³⁹

Postmillennialism is the official term for any belief that Christ will return after the "thousand years." However, postmillennialism, as it is commonly understood, is the view that, based on the work of the church and the Holy Spirit in the world, the "millennium" is a future, discrete period of unprecedented Christian influence in the world (a "golden age") that gradually manifests before Christ's return. The kingdom will then be given to Christ when he returns, and the eternal state will begin.⁴⁰

According to amillennialists, the "thousand years" refers to the entire interval between Christ's resurrections and just before his return. There won't be a golden age before Christ returns; instead, that time will be marked by the expansion of the gospel and the spread of sin. The general resurrection, judgment, and the establishment of the eternal state will occur as a result of Christ's second coming.⁴¹

3.3 Resurrection of the Dead

The theme related to the second coming of Christ is the resurrection of the dead. The New Testament talks of two kinds of resurrections: resurrection unto life and resurrection unto death (John 4:39). The bible talks of a future event in which the righteous who are dead and

³⁸ Menn, *Eschatology*, 22.

³⁹ G. E. Ladd, *Historic Premillennialism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 17.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 23.

⁴¹ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1983), 1225.



those who are alive would be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. The righteous dead shall be raised from the dead with a new body whereas the righteous living would be translated (1 Thess. 4:16-17 and 1 Cor. 15:50-55). While there is a general agreement among Evangelical scholars on the air-borne meeting between Jesus and the redeemed, the event that immediately follows this meeting is debated. Some scholars and denominations hold that Christ and the raptured souls would return immediately to the earth. Others argue that Jesus will take the redeemed to heaven immediately after the air-borne meeting. Scripture also makes it clear that the resurrected body is different from the current corruptible bodies. Romans 6:4 -6 says that the righteous would be raised in like manner as Christ was raised. This suggests the resurrected body is going to be a physical body, endowed with supernatural abilities and perfect in every sense.⁴²

3.4 Final Judgment

The final judgment is clearly spelt out in scripture (Matt. 25:32-33, 2Pet. 2:4, Rom. 2:5 and Heb. 9:27). This popular scriptural event has been variously been referred to as the last judgment, day of the Lord, judgment day, doomsday, day of reckoning among others. This event refers to the time or period where people from all nations will be held accountable for their lives resulting in the approval of some and the penalizing of others.⁴³ Several academics and religious institutions hold that the judgment will occur following Christ's second coming and the resurrection of the dead. There is a faction among evangelicals who questions the eternal punishment laid out for unrepentant souls.⁴⁴ They hold that God's nature of love, mercy and grace are incompatible with the causation of suffering. Since punishment involves some degree of suffering or pain, it is inconceivable how God will cause pain to beneficiaries of His Omni benevolence. Traditional evangelicals however hold firmly that the unrepentant souls will face destruction and suffering in hell fire. There are enough biblical passages in support of this position (Pro. 16:4; Psa1:5; 9:5; 37:28; 92:7; 145:2; Isa. 34:10; Eze. 3:18; Nah. 1:15; Mal. 4:3; Job 36:6; Mat. 10:28; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7; Rev. 11:18; 21:8).

4.0 Impact of Eschatology on the Ghanaian Christian Community

4.1 Eschatology and the Ghanaian Traditional World View

⁴² Menn, *Eschatology*, 22.

⁴³ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 23.

⁴⁴ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 24.



Before the arrival of Christianity, Ghanaians had their worldview concerning eschatological events. Ghanaians believe in what passage of rites. The passage of rites refers to the cycle of life right from birth to death. When a child is born, he or she is welcome to the society with a ceremony (naming ceremony/ outdoor). He/she is then ushered into another ceremony called adolescent rite or puberty rite when the child is of age. After he/she has been ushered to the stage of adolescence, the adult is expected to marry in order to give birth to continue his or her generation. The marriage ceremony is performed to join the couples together. The last rite is the funeral rite where the person is buried and is welcomed by his/her ancestors. From there he becomes an ancestor if and only when he/she led a good moral life whilst alive. This life is believed to be an endless one. It is a belief in Ghana that sometimes some of the dead are reborn if they couldn't accomplish their mission whilst living on earth. As Mbiti observed, there was nothing like an expectation that this world will end in some days to come. Moreover, indigenous Africans had no thoughts of judgment but a mere continuity of life in the spirit world after one dies.⁴⁵ As a result, the motivation to be responsible persons in society was grounded solely in the consequential blessing or curses which came from ancestors and forces of nature. The foremost and most significant impact of eschatology in the Ghanaian context is a paradigm shift in the worldview.

The world view and cosmology of a particular people affect the way in which they behave in all endeavors of their lives. Africans and for that matter Ghanaians in the past had a different concept of times and future expectations. However, these thought patterns as far as Christian eschatology is concerned have shifted significantly. The Christian view of eschatology, especially the Hebrews 9:27 "and as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this, the judgment" (KJV) statement has caused most Ghanaians to realize that people don't return from the dead and after death, there is only judgment left for man to face. It would not be farfetched to elude that, almost all Ghanaians have considered the notion that the world is approaching an end. With the advent of Islam and Christianity, the notion that all humans will be held accountable for their lives by God is prevalent among Ghanaians in general. A chief cause of this paradigm shift is how the gospel with its eschatological component provides answers to the existential needs of Ghanaians. Naturally, people are curious about

⁴⁵ Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology*, 57.



what the future holds.⁴⁶ However, the certainty, urgency and frequency with which the second coming of Christ, the fulfillment of the signs of the end times ushering in the end of the world and the doctrine of heaven and hell is preached seem to draw the attention of many. No other religion in Ghana talks about eschatology with much enthusiasm as Christians do. It is therefore not a surprise to witness the proliferation and prevalence of Christian eschatological ideas in this country. Thus, the gospel seems to offer a new meaning to life and hope for the future. The proliferation of churches, especially neo-Pentecostal churches in contemporary times alone justifies this notion. Certain Christian beliefs offer a specific drive to keep encouraging people.

4.2 Eschatology and Missions

The expectation of a unique intervention of God in time and history, particularly the second coming, has had a tremendous impact on believers' worldviews, ways of life, and methods of ministry throughout history. Giles Dimock affirms that eschatological beliefs will shape and direct choices, as well as the drive for service, self-sacrifice, and lifestyle.⁴⁷ He elaborates on the eschatological idea to underscore the passion of the apostles in spreading the gospel to the point of martyrdom. He is pretty convinced that the main factor that accounted for persisted faith and zeal of the early church fathers, protestant reformers including Martin Luther, and the missionaries that spread the gospels to Africa is eschatology.⁴⁸

The notion of the imminent coming of Christ, coupled with the sign of the end times that are being fulfilled in this generation has motivated many churches, para-church movements and individuals to engage in vigorous mission. The number of street preachers that flood markets, public transport and other public centers alone justify this notion. Especially in urban centers, it is an everyday phenomenon to see a cluster of preachers with public address systems preaching about the second coming of Christ, judgment and the need for salvation. In rural places, crusades organized to preach about Christ and the fate of this world and its inhabitants are very common in Ghana. Aside these, aggressive evangelism is school campuses from primary to tertiary levels also attest to the extent to which eschatology

⁴⁶ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 24.

⁴⁷ Giles Dimock, *101 Questions and Answers on the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 135.

⁴⁸ Don Walton, *Piecing Together Bible Prophecy: The Rubik's Cube of Bible Prophecy* (Bloomington: West Bow Press, 2012), 33.



motivates mission. The church in Ghana has also taken advantage of the technology platforms available to propagate the gospel. Countless ministries now own television and radio stations. The use of media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Zoom, and others for evangelism also proves that attempts are being made to use every medium possible to reach out to the lost souls. Because the Bible uses symbolic phrases to convey eschatological concepts like mortality, judgment, heaven and hell, reward and punishment, there are numerous competing views on what those hopes should be.

The Pentecostals have their views on eschatology when it comes to missions. Pentecostal missionary endeavors are informed by Pentecostal eschatology. Marius Nel asserts that for more than a century, Pentecostals sing “He’s coming back again. He went away but not to stay. He’s coming back again!” and also pray “O Lord Jesus, how long, how long before we call out with thankfulness, Christ is returning again!” Hallelujah! Amen.”⁴⁹ According to Nel, early Pentecostals’ premillennial outlook had a significant effect on their beliefs, spirituality, and intense missionary zeal. Eschatology as seen from a Pentecostal viewpoint should also be discussed in light of the premillennial belief in the impending return of Christ together with the experience of Spirit baptism for the empowering of Christians to go into the entire world and proclaim the gospel to all people.⁵⁰ The eschatological consciousness of Pentecostals is the reason behind their intense missionary efforts.

4.3 Eschatological and Public Morality

Christians in this nation’s lifestyles are influenced by the expectation of and preparation for Christ's Second Coming and the judgment that will follow. Empirical research reveals that eschatological discourse puts its subjects on their toes.⁵¹ Since heaven and other rewards are the targets of every Christians, holding on to the faith till the end is a must. This is an important motivating factor for holy living among Christians in Ghana. For instance, Apostle Eric Nyamekye, the current head of the Church of Pentecost, frequently exhorts Christians to

⁴⁹ Marius Nel, *African Pentecostalism and Eschatological Expectations; He is coming Back Again* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), xv.

⁵⁰ Nel, *African Pentecostalism and Eschatological Expectations*, xv.

⁵¹ Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13.



avoid engaging in unethical behavior at work and elsewhere since they are not of this world.⁵² He believes that because Christianity is an exclusive religion, its followers cannot lead worldly lives. These and other factors act as catalysts for Christian moral uprightness because they are assured of enjoying a better home in the afterlife where evil will be eradicated.

According to Antwi, eschatological discourses inspire Christians to take extreme measures to protest dictatorial world leaders, unfair systems, and the persecution of faith in God, even using their lives as martyrs.⁵³ Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President of the Republic of Ghana, commented on same-sex marriage which he was not clear as to whether he was in support of gay and lesbian act or not. Because of this, the people of Ghana felt threatened by their theology since majority of the population are Christians and they believe if they allow this act to be accepted by the government, God will punish them during the end time or the nation will even face tragedy before the end time. As an example, the majority of Ghanaians demonstrated in the streets and flocked to media outlets to express their outrage and protest.⁵⁴ Even though he later answered that the “Government would not modify laws on same-sex marriage, Ghanaians passionately opposed so that the practice will not be legalized even when same-sex activists push the bounds,” his initial comment did not support their actions. Ghanaians consider such actions to be bad and see them as a sign of the end times that are foretold in the Bible.⁵⁵

4.4 Eschatology and the Doubtful

Eschatology influences Christianity both positively and negatively, with numerous good effects on it. It is interesting to notice that many people have eschatological doubts about some aspects of the gospel, leading them to question the Christian faith. The gospel is preached with urgency on the basis of the scriptures that Christ’s second coming is imminent

⁵² My Joyonline, Speech by Apostle Eric Nyamekye, accessed on 20 June, 2022, url <https://www.google.com/search?q=Eric+Nyamekye%2C+the+Chairman+of+the+Church+of+Pentecost%2C&rlz=1>

⁵³ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, Joseph Williams Acheampong and Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi, "Message of Biblical Apocalyptic Literature and its Relevance for Contemporary Christianity in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* Vol. 6 Issue 8 (2020): 386 – 393.

⁵⁴ Africa News, “Homosexuality not on Ghana’s agenda-President Akufo-Addo,” (2017) Accessed on June 25, 2020, from <https://www.africanews.com/2017/11/26/homosexuality-not-on-ghana-s-agenda-president-akufoaddo/>

⁵⁵ Jubilee House Communications Directorate, 9/08/2018 I have no plan to bring same sex-marriage in Ghana, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do4boquC7H0>



and very near. Such messages are preached with such fervency that one is left with only one choice but to repent and be saved. These messages in particular draw on the signs enumerated in Matthew 24 and their fulfillment in current times. However, critics and wavering believers as well have developed the notion that there is no truth in the claims that Christ coming is coming soon. This is due to the fact that despite waiting for years, no *parousia* has appeared. There is a popular assertion of critics that “even if Christ was coming on a trolley he might have arrived by now.” Some of the doubters take the pain of tracing how the apostles themselves expected Christ's return, throughout history to the present, all in an attempt to prove that there is no truth in the eschatological doctrines of Christians. Such people see messages about the second advent of Christ and judgment as mere scary messages designed to manipulate people. Therefore, the concept of the delayed *parousia* has cost Christianity a considerable number of souls.

5.0 Conclusion

It can be concluded that eschatology tremendously affects the lives of people in Ghana. The certainty, urgency and frequency with which the second coming of Christ, the fulfillment of the signs of the end times ushering in the end of the world, and the doctrine of heaven and hell are preached seem to draw the attention of many. It is indeed true that people are curious about the future. The churches in Ghana have capitalized on this opportunity to propagate Christian eschatological ideas in the minds of Ghanaians. This has drastically changed the cosmology and worldview of Ghanaians eschatological component of the gospel provides answers to the existential needs of Ghanaians. It has encouraged holy living and increased mission activities among Christians.

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