



A Critique of Irenaeuan Theodicy in the light of proper Biblical Hermeneutics for 21st Century Interpreters

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Abstract

Interpretation of the Christian Bible does not go in line with the ethical saying that “The end justifies the means” but rather, the means is as important also, as the end. The 21st century Christian society was filled with a wide range of heretical preachers who came up with interpretive errors concerning understanding and dealing with the scriptures. This had in a big way affected the rate at which there had been deterioration in the positive influence of sermons in the lives and hearts of avid adherents and listeners. This practice is not a totally new ideology at all, as it could be traceable even to the early church fathers. One such great church father, and a man of prominence amongst them, was Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, who made some severe hermeneutical mistakes. Meanings are often lost in interpretation and in translation. This means that aspects of a text’s subject matter is not transmitted accurately. This then suggests that no one is above making a mistake or an error and this is what this paper sets out to address. Nowadays, the milieu or location of the reader has become more important for biblical interpretation. There are many interpretative traditions but the word of God must be the ultimate guide. Irenaeus even say’s “proofs in the Scriptures cannot be proven except from the Scriptures themselves”. The article asserts that proper hermeneutics in the church would likely lead to a return of greater influence for the church, and ultimately benefit its members and the society in general. Thus, this study made use of hermeneutical procedures to examine Irenaeus premise, and where, the twenty first century interpreters follow proper hermeneutical principles instead of committing the same errors made by Irenaeus and others. To diminish the truth of Scripture to a set of propositions is certainly reductionist and of no value.

Keywords: Theodicy, hermeneutics, interpreters/preachers, eisegesis, exegesis.

Introduction

The Nigerian and the global society at large, are filled with a variety of errors concerning coming up with the proper interpretations for scriptural passages. This could be due to a lack of having a proper approach and understanding of interpreting the scriptures through exposition of the passage and proper exegesis of the passage, which could be caused by lack of proper theological training or indeed a failure of proper application of theological training to the exercise.

It is of no gainsaying that this ‘un-hermeneutical’ preaching has spread in a rampant way in this 21st century Christianity. This could possibly be seen as one of the reasons for having doctrinal errors which may ultimately affect the growth and spread of the Word of God as it ought to be. This is a heavy burden, affecting the positive impact of biblical teachings in



society, since the scriptures which are supposed to be the inspired word of God are erroneously interpreted. A very important individual, who happened to be a church father was Irenaeus who in his attempt to solve the problem of evil, came up with a theodicy that breached the real meaning of the passages he used as a basis for his theodicy. Thus, in his attempt to solve a problem, he committed a serious hermeneutical blunder, which could affect and raise a number of questions concerning other works he had come up with. In the interpretation of a text, hermeneutics must consider the original medium and its language and what this implies. The process invariably consists of numerous steps for best reaching the scriptural author's intended meaning(s) for any text.

In view of this, this paper sets out to address the misinterpretation of the scriptures by Irenaeus, in creating his 'Theodetical' discourse, cum solution, and to sound a warning cum clarity, to the contemporary preachers to have Biblically and theologically rooted preaching as they interpret the Bible in order not to have a wrong ideology projected. This could linger long after they are even gone. Because, the theodicy propounded by Irenaeus might have been very great and superb if his interpretation was a theologically rooted one, this is an important area to consider. However, his theodicy is being turned down, due to the belief that the eisegesis in his work was incorrect.

Biblical hermeneutics refers to the theological principles of exegesis which are often practically identical to the 'principles of biblical interpretation' or methodology of biblical exegesis. Secondly, the more current advances drive us to understand the term 'biblical hermeneutics' as a wide-ranging philosophy and linguistic supporting structure of interpretation. Scripture is merely "text" which human beings try to comprehend. It is with this sagacity, that the principles of understanding any text apply equally to Holy Scripture as well. Equally important to note is that all characteristics of philosophical and/or linguistic hermeneutics are reflected upon as being germane to biblical texts.

Conceptual Clarification

Hermeneutics: Is defined as the science of interpreting written documents and languages in the general sense, but when streamlined to the scriptures, it is the science and art of interpreting the Bible. As presented by Resane in her understanding of hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics is the art or technique of interpreting the biblical text in order to understand its original context and then find its contemporary meaning.¹ In corroborating the point by Resane, Thiselton posits that hermeneutics explores "how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in another context of life from our own."² The focus of hermeneutics is therefore to peek into the setting of the original text, and to discover the real intent of the original author of the text taking into consideration the addressee and what actually occasioned the writing of a particular text.

Theodicy: Theodicy is known widely to be the study of evil. It is the justification of God in a world that also harbours evil, since God is known to be omnipotent, omniscient, omni-present and omnibenevolent. Theodicy is therefore aimed at justifying the act of God in permitting or letting evil to exist in the world He created by his own 'Hands'. The term *theodicy* was coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz in his 1710 work, written in French,³ and from that time on, the term had been used to refer to the study of evil. The word *theodicy* derives

¹ Kelebogile Thomas Resane "Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of Biblical Texts African Approaches" in Pharos Journal of Theology online Volume 99 [http://: www.pharosjot.com](http://www.pharosjot.com), 2018. (Accessed on 12th April, 2019).

² A.C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), n.p.

³<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodicy> (Accessed on March 15, 2018).



from the Greek words Θεός (Theos) and δίκη (dike). *Theos* is translated "God" and *dikē* can be translated as either "trial" or "judgement".⁴ Thus, theodicy literally means "justifying God".

Eisegesis: This is a term used theologically to refer to importing meaning into a passage or text, instead of reading from the text. It is a state whereby an interpreter manipulates a passage to present what he wants the passage to say. In other words, the attempt is focused on reading into a scriptural passage, instead of reading out of the passage, thereby, betraying the motive of interpretation of the scriptures. As used in this paper, eisegesis represent the importation of meanings by the author into a particular biblical text being considered which totally betrays the thought of the original intent.

A Survey on the Person of Irenaeus

Irenaeus, who lived ca. 130–202 CE, was known to have risen to become the bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul (modern Lyons, France). As a great figure in the history of the church, he was a very rigid and determined opponent of any heretical approach. He was also an influential witness when it comes to the development of the biblical canon. Unfortunately, little is known about the life of Irenaeus.⁵ We do know that he was from Smyrna in Asia Minor, and a student of Polycarp (who was a disciple of the apostle John), making him a third generation student to one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. After sometime, Irenaeus moved to Rome and his purpose of their was to study under Justin Martyr. Sometime prior to 177 CE Irenaeus moved to Lyons. In 177 CE, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius ordered a violent persecution of Christians in France, but Irenaeus was able to escape this because at the time of persecution he was on a journey to Rome, apparently carrying a letter to the church at Rome. Irenaeus returned to France after the persecution had subsided, and was installed as the bishop of Lyons in 178 CE, replacing the previous bishop, who had died or was probably a victim of the persecution.⁶

Irenaeus' ideology is often used to support the Roman Catholic idea of apostolic succession because he was of the opinion that all the bishops can trace their succession back to the apostles. However, this statement needs to be understood in its correct context (Pagels, 2002). The Gnostics held that they were privy to secret information that had been passed down from Jesus. Irenaeus makes the case that all the orthodox bishops can trace their teaching back to the apostles, who obtained their teaching from Jesus. The bishops of the churches are considered to be the safeguards of the truth, which can be traced in an unbroken line back to the apostles. The line of teachers was not difficult to trace, since it had been little over 100 years since the death of the apostles. Irenaeus himself, could easily trace his message to the apostle John, whose student, Polycarp was Irenaeus' teacher. The link between the contemporaries of Irenaeus and the apostles is a far-cry from the more modern idea of apostolic succession.

Irenaeus may be best known for his theory of recapitulation. Recapitulation emphasizes the true humanity of Christ, who undoes the work of Adam and fulfils all that God intended for mankind. Gnostics however, denied the true humanity of Christ and taught that the human body was evil. Unfortunately, Irenaeus' emphasis on Jesus' human nature inherited from Mary may be seen as the basis for the later elevation of Mary as co-redemptrix, yet it appears that was not at all that Irenaeus had in mind.

⁴J. Van Der Minde, "δίκη" in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 1*(Grand Rapids: Eerdsman Publishing Company, 1978), 334.

⁵Shams C. Inati, *The Problem of Evil: Ibn Sîna's Theodicy* (Binghamton, New York: Global Academic Publishing, 2000), 95.

⁶"Irenaeus" www.wikipedia.com (Accessed on, March 20, 2018).



Irenaeus was an influential thinker, and there is evidence that his writings were widespread in the churches around the Roman Empire during his lifetime or shortly after his death.⁷ Irenaeus died around 202 CE. Some sources indicate that he was martyred, but there is not enough concrete evidence to determine the actual events surrounding his death. Irenaeus was canonized by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. In unpacking his ideology and making it go viral, Irenaeus was primarily noted for his refutation of early Gnosticism. The key area of Irenaeus' theology was the unity of God, in opposition to the Gnostics' who divided of God into a number of divine "Aeons". They also drew differences between the "High God" and the wicked "Demiurge" who created the world. Irenaeus used the notions of the Logos theology he inherited from St. Justin Martyr. He spoke of the Son and the Spirit as the "hands of God," and Christ, for him, was the invisible Father who was made discernible.

Irenaeus wrote numerous books, and his most important work is the five-volumes *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis*, normally referred to as *Adversus Haereses*^{9a}. His emphasis on the unity of God is reflected in his corresponding emphasis on the unity of salvation history. Irenaeus repeatedly insists that God created the world and has been overseeing it ever since.

Concept of Irenaeuan Theodicy

Irenaeuan theodicy is seen as 'soul making', a term coined out by John Hick, and this is as a result of the fact that his theodicy is more concerned with the development of humanity. He dwells on the fact about man "metamorphosising" from an ordinary image of God into the likeness of God. The inspiration for his theodicy is derived from the book of Genesis and the creation of man. Irenaeus draws different conclusions from Augustine.⁸ Irenaeus distinguished between the 'image' and the 'likenesses of God. Adam had the form of God but not the content of God. He held firmly that the moral nature of God had been deposited in man and thus, the moral nature which he took as the 'image' of God, has to be developed into the 'likenesses of God.⁹ This can only be done with the existence of evil and suffering in the world created by God. He therefore, sees evil and suffering as catalysts to help in the development of Man in his soul's ascent. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they were immature and needed to develop, i.e. they were to grow into the likeness (content) of God. They were the raw material for a further stage of God's creative work. The fall of humanity is seen as a failure within this second phase of becoming more like God in content. Suffering is a necessary part of God's created universe – it is through suffering that human souls are made noble. The world is a 'vale of soul making'.

Attackers have asked why God did not create man to be perfect to start with. Irenaeus' response was that, although God could have done this it is better to have a morality that is developed through hard work than one which is pre-programmed. Importantly Irenaeus recognises that a pre-programmed morality would effectively make human beings robots without free will (Pagels, 2002). Unlike Augustine, Irenaeus does not believe that humans were made perfect, nor does he believe that the earth was made perfect. His argument is that human beings need to live in a world where pain and suffering are real experiences in order to develop morality. Irenaeus believed that in a world without pain our actions could have no moral consequences.

A vivid supporter and expander of this view has earlier noted was, John Hick has coined the term "soul making" to describe this idea of moral growth. He identifies that if God intervened

⁷Ibid

⁸www.thoughtcontrol.com *The Evil God: God or Evil Part 4* (Accessed March 2, 2018)

⁹A Movie Clip by Mr McMillan, *The Problem of Evil: Irenaeuan Theodicy Part 3* (Mr McmillanRevis: Making Revision Easier).

^{9a}https://orthodoxwiki.org/Irenaeus_of_Lyons



in this process it would undermine human free will. There is also a concept of *epistemic distance* inherent in this argument: God deliberately makes his existence uncertain because if we knew he existed we would act out of fear of his punishment rather than our own virtue. Detractors of this view recognise a big problem: suffering does not necessarily lead to moral development. In fact, in many instances suffering leads to moral degeneration. Much of the crime and atrocity observed in third world countries is attributed to poverty and a lack of access to survival requirements such as clean water and medication. Irenaeus responded to this problem by saying that for the suffering to be morally justified everyone must ultimately attain perfection. This led to the argument that this process of “soul making” must continue in the afterlife. As a result of this idea, Irenaeus was forced into the position of endorsing universal salvation.

Summary of Irenaeus’ Theodicy

To summarise Irenaeus’ Theodicy, it could be placed in the following statements:¹⁰

- Humans were created in the image and likeness of God.
- We are in an immature moral state, though we have the potential for moral perfection.
- Throughout our lives we change from being human animals to ‘children of God’.
- This is a choice made after struggle and experience, as we choose God rather than our baser instinct.
- There are no angels or external forces at work here.
- God brings in suffering for the benefit of humanity.
- From it we learn positive values, and about the world around us.

Suffering and evil are:

- Useful as a means of knowledge. Hunger leads to pain, and causes a desire to feed. Knowledge of pain prompts humans to seek to help others in pain.
- Character building. Evil offers the opportunity to grow morally. If we were programmed to ‘do the right thing there would be no moral value to our actions. ‘We would never learn the art of goodness in a world designed as a complete paradise.
- A predictable environment. The world runs series of natural laws. These laws are independent of our needs, and operate regardless of anything. Natural evil is when these laws come into conflict with our own perceived needs.

As good as this theodicy could have been, there is error with its foundational basis of the theodicy and that will lead to the flaws discovered in the work.

Hermeneutical Flaws with Irenaeus’ Theodicy

After considering the concept and ideology of the Irenaeus’ theodicy, it is essential to check some weaknesses and mistakes as it regards the interpretation of the Bible passage he made use of as the basis for his studies and proposition. It is thus important to ensure that interpreters of the scriptures are very vast in their knowledge base on the scriptures, and that they take the time to use a careful approach when interpreting each text they study based on the context of the work (De La Torre, 2002).

An examination of Irenaeus’ reading of Genesis 1:26 is found to be questionable. He certainly appears to be proof texting (Proof texting is the method by which a person appeals to a biblical text to prove or justify a theological position without regard for the context of the passage they

¹⁰David Cheetham, *John Hick: a Critical Introduction and Reflection*. (Norway: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 1995.



are citing)¹¹ here in order to prove his point. Additionally, Irenaeus' belief that the world and humanity were not created good flies directly in the face of Holy Scripture. On numerous occasions in Genesis during the creation myth, God describes His creation as good. It appears that Irenaeus was prepared to take a metaphorical view of the Scriptures and in many ways this tends to reflect the poor hermeneutical practices of the time. With a refined biblical interpretation from the knowledge of Biblical Hermeneutics, it is impossible to both believe the scriptures, and also then believe Irenaeus' theodicy.

Irenaeus failed to go by the hermeneutical principle of the "*usus loquendi*" in having a proper interpretation for the passage he used as the basis for his theodicy. This ideology is basically meant to mean that, a writer might make use of a common word in his own definition or interpretation and this could be discovered from the context in which that word is found from the passage itself in some cases.¹² It is therefore important to note that the approach given by Irenaeus to this passage is not actually what the writer intends as the writer intended defining that both the 'likeness' and the 'image' of God was made already by him without man having to just start working towards the likeness. He only affirmed one side and then left the other one unattended to.

Another core flaw discovered in the approach given by Irenaeus in his theodicy, was the fact that the teaching of Irenaeus could also be seen as to have held that the earth was not created perfectly¹³ which is categorically against what the expression of God states in the Book of Genesis after he created everything, and he remarked that "All was very good" (Genesis 1:31). It thus means that, Irenaeus failed to go by the Hermeneutical rule and principle of Scripture interpreting scripture, as the interpretation given to the passage he chose as a basis is contradictory to another passage, which is only four verses from it. It is expedient for the theodicy of Irenaeus to understand that the likeness of God in man is quite different from what man could just start building upon. Considering the fact that the likeness of God in man was a mental likeness, spiritual likeness, moral likeness, social likeness.¹⁴ If Irenaeus had understood the concept of what the 'likeness' was, then probably, he would have had another kind of theodicy to develop.

Some very important points to note in the wrong interpretation of Irenaeus are stated below;

- The view of creation presented by Irenaeus is radically at odds with the Biblical account in which man is created as being perfect. It is not considered orthodox.
- The significance of Christ's sacrifice is devalued as humanity's moral perfection is guaranteed as an end result.
- God creates the world out of pre-existent matter, which challenges the idea that He is omnipotent as He is no longer the source of everything (contrary to Augustine's view).
- The concept of heaven is believed to for all is unjust and it does not correspond with biblical view of eternal punishment

The proper hermeneutics of the Bible should have been followed by Irenaeus, and this is what this work promotes, encourages and advises upon, as being useful for contemporary

¹¹<http://www.theopedia.com/proof-texting> (Accessed March 3, 2018).

¹² Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 181.

¹³A Movie Clip by Mr McMillan, *The Problem of Evil: Irenaeus Theodicy Part 3* (Mr McmillanRevis: Making Revision Easier).

¹⁴Tunde Aremu and E.O Malomo, *Christian Theology in African Context* (Ilorin: Amazing Grace, 2016), 130-131.



interpreters of the scripture as they go on a quest to offer a correctly grounded translation and interpretation of the Bible. This notion is discussed below.

Proper Hermeneutical Principles

There are many principles to consider in running a very vivid and rightful interpretation of the scriptures and this is understood in the context of the principles for interpreting the scriptures.

Below are the biblical interpretive methods as given by McDill¹⁵;

Firstly, an interpreter has to identify what kind of literature a text is. Bible scholars call this the *genre* of the text. That means the general form the text takes, which could be either narrative, prophecy, poetry, history, gospel, or epistle. The various kinds of literature present their message in differing styles and with different structures. Narrative texts do not operate the same way the epistles do in getting their message across to the reader.

Secondly, the interpreter is to consider the context of the passage to derive the meaning. This is often considered to be the first and most important principle for accurate interpretation. Bible scholars use the term *context* to discuss various aspects of the original writing of the text—historical, social, political, religious, and literary. It is this literary concern that is considered as the *context* of the passage.

Furthermore, an interpreter is to read the text for its plain and obvious meaning. A common and persistent myth about the Bible is that its real meaning is hidden behind the surface message. Even though the Bible uses symbolic or figurative language, most of it is clear to the reader. Even when the individuals do not know about the people, places, and events in question, the point of the text can be grasped by the occupant of the distant context.

In addition, an interpreter is to discern the writer's intention when the text was written. (Ricoeur, 1981). This principle of intentionality is critical for the expository preacher. You study the text not to find a sermon in it, but rather to discover the writer's intended message. Unless you can learn the intended meaning of the text writer, you will not be able to preach the message of the text in your sermon accurately. The interpreter has to remember that "The text cannot mean what it never meant" (even when it is wrongly interpreted, it does not change the original meaning of the passage). Discovering the writer's original meaning is the first task as one prepares to preach to one's own generation. (see Ramm, 1970).

The interpreter of the scripture must be able to look carefully at the language of the text. Words are understood to carry human thoughts. The words of the text are all we have of the writer's thoughts. If one hadn't written it down, we wouldn't know what one was thinking. So we can look closely at one's words, examining each one carefully for the part it plays in an intended message. One should also look at how the words and phrases connect with one another and how the sentences are constructed. Language is very important in conveying a particular thought and in the understanding of the scripture this is also important, because the usage of words is peculiar to traditional and cultural approaches. An understanding of either the synchronic or the diachronic approach to reading the Bible is necessary in uncovering the proper language interpretation used in any text.

The interpreter of a scripture also needs to take into consideration the various theological themes. Though a text has one intended meaning, it can have a number of significant theological themes. It can also have a number of different applications. When one does a structural diagram and puts their observations down, one needs to list the emergent themes

¹⁵Wayne McDill, 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006)



and what the text says about them. Identifying these themes and understanding how they relate to one another in a text is a most helpful key to grasping the intended meaning.

It is *prima facie* plausible to postulate that there is nothing beyond understanding a text, than understanding the sentences which compose it; and that there is nothing beyond understanding a sentence than understanding the words which compose it. This widespread view is based on the belief in the validity of the principle of compositionality (Szabo 2013): the meaning of a complex expression is supposed to be fully determined by its structure and the meanings of its constituents. Gottlob Frege has famously declared in section 60 of his *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884) that only within complete sentences do words have meaning. This different, but related principle to the principle of compositionality is usually referred to as the context principle. He writes:

Es genügt, wenn der Satz als Ganzes einen Sinn hat; dadurch erhalten auch seine Theile ihren Inhalt. (It is enough if the sentence as whole has meaning; thereby also its parts obtain their meanings.) (Szabó, 2013).

Finally and ultimately, an interpreter is to always take a God-Centred perspective for interpreting a text. This means looking at the text in terms of what it reveals about God and His dealings with His creation, particularly humankind. This is theological interpretation. It arises from the assumption that the Bible is really God's means of making Himself known to us. What it says about Him will always be central to every text. Any sermon that would not focus on God is not a sermon at all because, the Bible being the word of God is to teach and revolve around God.

Normalising Eisegetical Preaching

Eisegesis is seen as the opposite of exegesis, and this could be seen in light of the fact that it was as a result of eisegesis in Irenaean Theodicy that, the theodicy attempt resulted in what one could call a futile mission, as it had breached the proper translation of the scriptures thereby creating another meaning about the creation. In order to create a kind of positive approach to hermeneutics of the scriptures, and for modern preachers to be able to avoid the mistake committed by Irenaeus, below are what are considered to be the proper ingredients that scriptural interpreters must take cognisance of.

An interpreter must be an exegete. Unlike Irenaeus, who read into the scripture, the 21st century preachers should always be ready to dig deep into the scripture and to exegete properly instead of eisegesis as done by Irenaeus, and by this to come up with what the passage they are dealing with is actually attempting to portray and depict. Stuhlmacher (1977), stated that "exposition must be an exegesis applied to the scriptural text which traces out the gospel and serves its preaching".¹⁶ He further said "Exegesis must now discover the gospel on its own".¹⁷ Thus, the exegesis of the scripture should be handled with care and great concentration.

An interpreter must be an expositor but an expositor not in the limited sense of the kind of sermon known as an expository sermon, but rather, covering all types of theologically based sermons inter-alia, topical and textual. In exposing the scripture, one would be able to understand the context of the passage, and the immediate and extended recipients of the text. By inculcating this into the act of sermonising, the expositor would thus approach each text as

¹⁶Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1977), 33.

¹⁷ Ibid



they are supposed to and do it correctly. In discussing the features of theologically rooted preaching, Adebayo (2017), noted the following;¹⁸

1. Exposition sets limits: It restricts to the scriptural text, since expository preaching is Biblical preaching. This presents that there is no room for unnecessary gallivanting and eclectic movement round the Scripture. There is a definition of scope and a boundary to cover.
2. Exposition demands integrity: Stott is quoted saying that, exegesis is sometimes graced with rather long-winded adjectives 'Gramatico-historical', because it signifies the interpretation of a text in accordance with both its historical origin and its grammatical construction"¹⁹. This saying by Stott shows that there is no room for manipulation of what the content is actually presenting.

A hypothetico-deductive method can assist one to create hermeneutic objectivity. This is at the end of the day based on a critical conversation among the participants to the discourse on the appositeness of diverse interpretations concerning the arrival at the correct aims of interpretation. One can use

Intersubjective intelligibility, testability with the use of evidence, rational argumentation and objectivity are, thus, feasible also in the case of text interpretation. (Detel, 2016; Mantzavinos, 2005, cited in Mantzavinos, 2016).

Conclusion

The teachings of Irenaeus' theodicy is really a force to reason with from a rational perspective, but it has a capital flaw from its root and this is a major problem to every branches that evolves from this theodicy as it is not following the right channel of interpreting the scriptures. His theodicy held that, suffering and the presence of evil is a major reason to understand the good side of life, as evil helps one to appreciate good would have been a very interesting force to reckon with as far as evangelicals are concerned, but the problem can still be traceable to its background where the interpretation of the passage is considered to be wrong. This is of course a highly contentious inter- Christian denominational issue.

Contemporary preachers need to recognise that the interpretation of the scriptures is a sacred and spiritual exercise where the Bible is already the word of God and reading into the Biblical passages is more like "Killing" the text in from which a sermon emanates. If preachers could examine the havoc caused by Irenaeus due to his theodicy which the researcher believes had a faulty background, they would be able to recognize that the offshoot of any wrong interpretation is always 'hazardous' to the spiritual health of the listener and it would reveal that the act of interpreting the scripture goes beyond a mere surface work but rather requires an in-depth lens to be applied to it. When the difference between the ontological and epistemological level is acknowledged, it is always a matter of argument whether it is definitely productive to completely abandon the composition and structure of a text that one is studying especially when one is involved in its interpretation.

It would have been much more better (considering the contribution of Irenaeus) if his Theodicy had been criticised properly for him to better understand the hermeneutical flaw he committed at the basis of trying to come up with a kind of response to the problem of evil. This could possibly be as a result of his position as a senior minister where people would not want a more direct confrontation. The same flaw may well be applicable to contemporary preachers where people who listen to them might not be able to correct their errors in their presence probably

¹⁸P.O Adebayo, "Theologically Rooted Preaching and Nigeria's National Transformation" in S.O.Y Baba *et al* (eds.) *ETSI Journal Vol. 9* (April 2017), 104.

¹⁹John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: W.B Eerdsman Publishing Company, 1998), 127.



because of the respect they have for their high status. Nonetheless, preachers should remember that their speech could be used against them at the point where they cannot be there to defend or to make any amends. Thus, in order to avoid this, a thorough expository cum exegetical work should be carried out on any text before being presented to the audience as a fact.

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