

**Families of Texts: Its Importance and a Need for the Introduction of Textual Studies in Theological Institutions and Universities in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

Every field of study has material in form of a text (such as textbooks, manuals, workbooks, etc) which consists of vital information that relates to the course. The contents of the text could vary from one material to another. A material could contain observations, experiments, theories, instructions or notes, etc. that will foster knowledge in that field. A problem, therefore, arises when there are no adequate texts or materials available for study. This will lead to stagnancy and inefficiency in that field of study. Institutions in Nigeria such as theological institutions and religious studies in the universities have been indirectly involved in textual studies only from a theoretical perspective. The impact of textual studies on our institutions cannot be underestimated. Although, just a little fragment of textual studies, mostly in a summarized form as a topic, is treated in few of the institutions stated above, which give a limited idea and limited scope of the subject matter, the contents and practical aspect of the study are wider and more interesting (although tasking) than the way it has been presented in the few institutions. The researcher proposes the introduction of textual studies as a course in theological institutions and universities in Nigeria. The objective of this study is to give the relevance of the families of text to contemporary textual studies and to suggest the introduction of textual studies to the curriculum of all theological and religious institutions in Nigeria. The study adopts an analytical and textual approach to achieve this goal. The study affirms that the relevance of the families of text is awesome in the sense that it has helped students and scholars in identifying manuscripts and classifications of manuscripts and it has also improved their use of biblical language. Through the help and assistance of distinguished global scholars, the practical aspect of textual studies which involves the studies of both ancient and recent biblical manuscripts has been made available in the last decade in Nigeria. This connotes that both the theoretical and practical aspect of textual studies is a reality in Nigeria just as it is experienced in advanced and western religious institutions. The introduction of textual studies in all our institutions in Nigeria will lead to the development of African scholars who can study ancient biblical manuscripts which will help them to interpret accurately and understand the scriptures better. This work will be of great benefit to believers and biblical scholars at all levels within and across Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Manuscripts, Families of Text, Textual studies, Institutions, Biblical scholars

## Introduction

Most studies in the scientific field are usually more sensitive and peculiar than other fields in the sense that theories are not just propounded from imaginations but in most cases, a lot of experiments would have been carried out which will lead to the hypothesis, observations, conclusions, etc. then theories are established. There is no scientific law or theory that has received wide recognition and universal acceptance without undergoing various tests or practical aspects with proven results. In the same vein, there are other non-scientific fields which also have various practical aspects with findings that are authentic and excellent. When experiments or the practical aspect is ignored in a field that requires these, it is certain that studies in that field will be limited and skills underutilized. The Bible which is available today was originally written in the biblical languages. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Koine or Pigin Greek. It is generally believed that the Old Testament manuscripts were carefully written and preserved. In the early century, Christians desired to have the scripture, and the available manuscripts were recopied by various scribes. This led to the multiplicity of manuscripts. Over the years, several manuscripts have been recovered including our present days and when these manuscripts are studied to unveil their contents, it is amazing that in most instances, such manuscripts consist of portions of the Old or New Testament and in other cases, the manuscripts consist of literature that are related or connected to the Bible.

Textual studies are not limited only to the theoretical aspect but have a lot to do with the deciphering of manuscripts which has become a norm in western nations. Although history has it that the studies of manuscripts began in places like Africa such as Egypt, North Africa, etc. such experience has never happened in Nigeria. However, in recent times, the door of the studying of manuscripts has been opened to biblical scholars in Nigeria which gives room and privilege for biblical scholars in this part of Africa to develop their skills through involvement in the study of ancient and recent biblical manuscripts which is the practical aspect of textual studies. For this reason, I find it interesting to introduce the scholars whom God has used to make the studies of ancient and recent biblical manuscripts a reality in Nigeria. The Centre for Ancient Religious Scroll and Manuscripts which is a collaboration of the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos, the Global Scholars, University of Jos and Manuscript Research Group, Grand Haven, USA began the training of professors, doctors, and students who are also ministers of the Gospels (from several theological seminaries and religious departments of universities) in the training of religious scrolls and manuscripts since October 2013. The focus of this workshop is to ensure that African scholars have a good knowledge of the scriptures. It is also the aim of this centre to seek the truth in the Word of God through the studies of biblical ancient scrolls and manuscripts. More than 20 workshops and seminars have been conducted in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos with impressive results. Participants have been able on several occasions to study ancient manuscripts written in Greek, Hebrew and Coptic. Participants are also trained in other biblical languages, for example, Coptic with the aim of gaining the skills of studying, interpreting and applying information and truth derived from biblical manuscripts.

The last workshop which took place at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary between May 31<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 was awesome with scholars from several theological seminaries and departments of religious studies from reputable institutions in attendance. A minimum of 35 participants met to study recent and relevant biblical manuscripts. I, therefore, submit that part of the contents of this work is not only from the book of textual studies but also from the wealth of knowledge of textual

studies and skills derived from the seminar/workshop over the years through the expertise of these great, biblical and global scholars: Rev. Prof. Danny McCain and Prof. Scott Carroll. Adejare introduced these great scholars in his article, *“The Impact of New Testament Passages with Textual Issues to Contemporary Biblical Scholarship”*. Rev. Prof. Danny McCain is the Director-at-large of the Global Scholars who is also currently the Director of the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies at the University of Jos and also a distinguished Professor of New Testament Theology at the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos. He is a great missionary of over three decades in Nigeria who I refer to as an African- American biblical scholar. Prof. Scott Carroll is also an initiator of the workshop/seminar at the University of Jos. He is a distinguished and highly respected man globally. He is the Director and Senior Research Scholar of Manuscripts Research Group, USA.

On many occasions, as an international archaeologist, he has travelled round the continents of the world for many decades, discovering and examining a lot of manuscripts and biblical literature. He is very current in many biblical and modern languages. He is one of the backbones and pillars of textual discipline and research in Nigeria, Africa and the world in these modern times (Tambiyi 107-8).

This paper, therefore, shows how key the families of text are to students and scholars who are involved in textual studies. This work reveals that the study of ancient and biblical manuscripts at the University of Jos is open to all biblical scholars in Nigeria and Africa. This paper also suggests the full involvement of biblical students and scholars in Nigeria not only in the theoretical aspect of textual studies but also in the studies of manuscripts which could lead to peculiar discoveries that will project and uphold scholarship in Nigeria, within and outside Africa.

### **Documentation, Tools and Methods of Textual Studies.**

Many activities have happened in ancient times and most of these events are still very much implanted in the minds of the people. These occurrences or events have been transferred from one period of time to another. One of the methods through which these events have been well-kept is documentation. Nggada and Adejare note that through the careful documentation and preservation of the manuscripts, the legacies of the early fathers have been observed and put into practice from the primitive periods to this dispensation (51). Biblical scholars in textual studies have unveiled to us how the documentation of the Gospel developed over time from the early centuries to this present dispensation.

In Jalingo Journal of Christian Religious Studies and Societal Research, in an article titled, *The Significance of New Testament Manuscripts Textual Variants and Its Impact on Religious Experience*, Adejare reveals that the first material used for writing was papyrus which was derived from a plant. This papyrus was not durable and it was prone to wear out easily. Parchment or vellum was the second material which was gotten from the skin of animals. Another material which was commonly used by the Jews was a scroll. The scroll is usually rolled either from one end to another end or rolled from both ends simultaneously to meet in the middle. The Pentateuch which is also known as Torah or by a layman, the five books which Moses wrote, were commonly found in the scroll form read by the Jews in the synagogue.

Preus adds that the use of codex was invented and commonly used by the followers of Christ. The believers preferred the scriptures to be in portable book form. During the time of persecution, the scripture in a codex form was with them when they ran from one place to another. This also contributed to the spread of the Gospel of Christ. Around the fifteenth century, the printing of paper began. This form of material for documentation seems to be the most durable, flexible and accessible material compared to the previous ones. With the aid of ink, writing becomes smooth and easy on paper. The words written on paper with good ink do not easily fade away except the paper itself is destroyed. If the paper or book is not well kept, it can be destroyed easily either by fire, water, rodent or insects. From the time of the production of paper till this century, the use of paper has been prevalent across the globe and its quality has improved. The manuscripts of the New Testament are very enormous. To preserve the text, the New Testament scribes recopied the manuscripts with their bare hands (Preus 63-4).

The contents of the manuscripts vary from one to another, some manuscripts contain portions of the Old Testament or the Synoptic Gospels. Some manuscripts contain portions of Pauline Epistles. Other manuscripts contain portions of the General Epistles and the book of Revelation. A particular manuscript can contain a whole Gospel or a combination of Gospels. Manuscripts are designated with papyrus, families and manuscripts. These three forms all have a number attached to them for recognition and differentiation, i.e. P<sup>45</sup>, (contains 220 leaves, 10 by 8 inches, four Gospels and Acts, which is a third-century manuscript, P<sup>74</sup>, (3 by 8 inches, 264 pages, it contains part of Acts, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 3 John and Jude which is of 7<sup>th</sup> century, Family 1- 1, 118, 131, and 209 between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries., Manuscript 28 (11<sup>th</sup> century, contains Four Gospels), Manuscript 2344 (11<sup>th</sup> century, Acts, Catholic and Pauline Epistles and Revelation.), etc. All manuscripts are not produced in the same period. While some manuscripts exist in the early centuries, others exist in later centuries up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. manuscript 33 is from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of the manuscripts which existed before the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century were documented in capital letters commonly known as Uncials. At the end of the eighth century, the form of documentation changed from the capital to small letters which are also known as minuscules (Metzger 38ff).

In textual studies, some tools are available that will help to give the desired results. All tools used in biblical studies for Bible study (such as Bible dictionary, Bible commentary Bible concordance, Word Study materials, Study Bibles, etc.) are all relevant and play one role or the other in the understanding of the scriptures. Some tools will be very helpful in the studies and deciphering of manuscripts, some of them are a *complete Hebrew and Greek Bible*, *Bible software* (like Bible works, logos, etc), *Greek/Hebrew Lexicons* (such as UBS), *Hebrew/ Greek paper/book template* (which contains the alphabet –handwriting or different writing styles from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century), *special sites in the Internet* (to search for specific Hebrew, Greek or Coptic words), etc. On a sincere note, the study of manuscripts is a very interesting task and also a herculean task.

There are several approaches to the study of manuscripts. The approaches include Byzantine priority, Thorough-going eclecticism, Reasoned eclecticism, Genealogical or Stemmatic, Conjectural Emendation, etc. Igbari comments that when several existing manuscripts are brought together, a serious examination and comparison are made between them, and the manuscript which has the highest common features is chosen as the best manuscript or closest to the original reading. This is known as the Majority text (Chap 7). Elliot defines thoroughgoing eclecticism as a method that examines the differences in textual manuscripts by persistent and continuous use of

transcriptional and intrinsic evidence (103). Reasoned eclecticism is a method in textual studies that take into consideration all evidence which includes other manuscripts that trace or support the manuscripts under study and the addition of the literal characteristics such as the idea, changes or forms of documentation of the writer. The former is known as external evidence and the latter is internal evidence (Holmes 79). P. Maas and M.L. West are fans of this Genealogical or Stemmatic approach. This classical approach is focused on repositioning the existing grouped manuscripts by re-examining the various manuscripts to discover a similar document and the most authentic one. This method entails the different manuscripts in the stemma which is also known as a closed Recension (Evans and Porter 1211).

Textual scholars are involved in guessing or presupposing what the real intent of the author might be when the reading of a particular text is unrealistic or unattainable. The purpose of making guesses or speculations is to correct the errors present in the text. Some errors in a text could either be intentional or non-intentional in the sense that the scribe might have deliberately supplied it in the text with the motive of making the reading to be smoother and more acceptable. This is known to be a Conjectural emendation (Metzger 186). These different approaches are used by textual scholars to decipher a manuscript. At times, one or more methods can be used at the same time to get the certainty of discoveries made, for instance, conjectural emendation could be used simultaneously with any method. Although some approaches are seriously upheld by some scholars and other approaches could be seen to be stale or irrelevant, all approaches have their strengths and weaknesses.

### **Families of Text**

It is important to note that different scholars have designated different names for the various divisions of texts in textual studies. The various names given which are the same are New Testament groups, text-types, textual clusters, families of manuscripts or families of text and witnesses. Colwell remarked that it was intentional for textual professional writers to classify manuscripts into Text, Families and Text-types for the main purpose of achieving their objectives (1). The classification of the families of text began before the fifth century (Hawthorne, Martin and Reid 928). Griesbach was the first scholar to classify the manuscripts into three (3) which are Alexandrian, Western and Byzantine forms at the beginning of the enlightenment period while Westcott and Hort classified the manuscripts into four (4) groups which are Neutral, Alexandrian, Western and Syrian (Evans and Porter 673). Fee also in his work, *Textual Criticism of the New Testament* thinks that although two manuscripts can't be the same, manuscripts can be similar and the process of identification of the manuscripts includes, "first, the percentage of agreement certain manuscripts have with one another over a total area of variation and secondly, the amount of agreement these manuscripts have in variant readings peculiar to them" (7). Metzger specifies that family relationships among manuscripts can be decided by examining two similar manuscripts with the ones that are antecedent and recently discovered (179). Ladd affirms that among variant readings, the manuscript can be categorized based on the congeniality of the manuscripts. He explains that two reputable scholars, Westcott and Hort of the early centuries, have made a good attempt to categorize the various manuscripts into families (75). Evans and Porter note that to classify the manuscript, scholars have to locate the source of the manuscript. The progressive nature of the line of the manuscript was also put into consideration. The source of manuscripts at times has to do with some specific places and people (673). Metzger also suggests that the best

reading can be discovered by determining the age of the manuscript and the extent of the spread of the manuscripts, then the transcriptional and intrinsic approach can follow (217).

### **Type of Families of Text**

**The Syrian Text:** This text is from the Byzantine Empire, which has undergone numerous reproductions and alterations. It is the most inferior textual text in history (Ladd 76). This text is referred to by scholars as the Syrian text or *Koine* with the combination of rounded capital letters (majuscules) and small letters developed from uncials (minuscule). Some manuscripts derived from this text are regarded as stale and not original compared to other texts (Evans and Porter 674). In order to ascertain the best reading, the Byzantine text has been given different names by scholars:

- i. Syrian text by Westcott and Hort.
- ii. Koine text by Von Soden.
- iii. The Ecclesiastical text by Lake.
- iv. The Antiochian text by Ropes.

This text has the features of joining separate parallel and the fusion of words. Between the sixth and fifteenth centuries, the Byzantine text was universally referred to and received as the authentic text. Other materials connected to this text are Codex Alexandrinus in the Gospels, uncial manuscripts, and numerous minuscule manuscripts (Metzger xx).

**The Western Text:** The Western text which is from the fifth century can be found in the manuscripts of the Old Latin translation and fathers like Marcion, Irenaeus and Tertullian. It is also found in the Old Syriac translation of the Gospel and Cyprian class of popular readings in history (Ladd 76). This text that emerged in the second century is from the Mediterranean and the East to some extent has preserved some readings that are real (Evans and Porter 674). The Western text is the accumulation of massive manuscripts which have existed during the time of the church fathers such as Marcion, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian. Its source is derived from the ancient Latin manuscripts and the Codex Bezae. It consists of the Gospel, Acts and Paul's letters which have spread across places in Egypt and North Africa, Italy and Gaul (Metzger 213). The three important manuscripts connected to the Western Text are:

- i) 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>-century Codex Bezae (D) comprising the Gospels and Acts.
- ii) 6<sup>th</sup>-century Codex Claromontaneous (D) comprising the Epistle of Paul.
- iii) 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-century Codex Washingtonianus (W) comprising Mark 1:1 to 5:30.

The Old Latin translation, which is divided into three forms; African, Italian, and Hispanic, are a good example of Western text. Other attributes are:

- a. It has the attributes of words or phrases, which were replaced, introduced or missed.
- b. Deliberate and significant cancellations without purpose were also made.
- c. The text excludes some important part of the NT, which appears in other text.
- d. The style of writing, i.e. Luke and Acts are elongated rather than in other texts.

One of the major features of this text is the reframing of words. Changes occur in the text as a result of either the joining of words together or the addition of words. The forms of text are not concise. Some words and content in selected passages of the New Testament such as the closing of the Gospel of Acts cannot be located in this text but can be found in other texts. Western-non - interpolations as given by Westcott and Hort or aberrant readings are the names given to the concise text. In this text, the book of Acts is known to be lengthier when compared to the text that is regarded to be authentic (Metzger xviii).

**The Alexandrian Text:** This text consists of manuscripts which are sustained by the Egyptian (Coptic) version. The qualities of this text are traced to the Alexandrian centre of learning and culture. This text was also used by some Alexandrian fathers like Clement, Origen, Dionysius, and Cyril in history (Ladd 76). Many textual critics agree that the Alexandrian text is the best among other texts (Evans and Porter 673). It is generally believed that the Alexandrian text was written by experienced and pious scribes which resulted in the discovery of the two most widely accepted and cherished manuscripts: Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. The proto-Alexandrian text (which is always in a concise form) is connected to the Neutral text of Hort and is dated to the early second century. Its style of writing has gone through a well-refined process (Metzger 216). According to Metzger, the Alexandrian text has the attributes of simplicity and terseness. Alexandrian style is the main component of the Sahidic and Bohairic readings (Metzger xvii).

**The Caesarean Text:** This text is a combination of the Alexandrian and Western contents. This text has been classified by some scholars into two, the pre-Caesarean text, which refers to Origen's ancient Egyptian text that he took to Caesarea. The main Caesarean text in Caesarea contains quotations of the primordial church fathers with other important textual features. This text is concluded to be the less similar and most combined text compared to others (Metzger 214). This text which is also known as a unique text has the features of both the Alexandrian and Western text (Evans and Porter 674). The Caesarean text which has its source in Egypt was taken to three different places in history. It was first taken to Caesarea by Origen, then to Jerusalem (utilized by some scholars, i.e. Eusebius) and the Armenians took the text to Georgian (where it was utilized by the Armenians and Cyril) (Metzger xix).

**The Neutral Text:** The Neutral Text is known to be the most reliable, excellent and authentic text. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, which are the most ancient fourth-century manuscripts, constitute the neutral text. These texts are said to be void of irrelevant alterations and mostly accurate. This makes the neutral text preferable to the Alexandrian text, although they can be traced to the same source in history (Ladd 77). The Neutral text as invented by Westcott and Hort is a brand of Alexandria text which is much better accepted among

the other texts because it is a text that maintains the main idea of the writer. The text is unique on its own for being concise and straight forward in its form of writing. The Alexandrian text can be traced to a prototype in the primitive period after the first century (Metzger xvii).

Tambiwi in his article, "*Exiling Ancient Biblical Versions: Argument for the African Roots of Biblical Versions*" confirms that the various divisions of the text types were introduced by Westcott and Hort, and various names were given by different skilled and experienced textual personnel. This is a result of the different sources and environment the manuscripts are traced to as well as the form or pattern the manuscripts presents as documented by the scribes. It is believed that the text of Alexandria can be traced in one way or the other to the other text types. It is also the text that is usually the first to be consulted before other text types because of its high level of accuracy. Through this text, the Egypt scriptures were converted into several languages of the people during the time of Hellenization. Also, the Coptic translation of the New Testament scriptures which has creditable features can be traced to the Alexandrian text. During the reign of

Constantine, the Byzantine texts (which contributed to the Vulgate) were created by Origen in Egypt, meaning its source is from Africa (187-8). In Textual studies, both the manuscripts and their content are very important. However, Eldon asserts that “It is not the age of the manuscript that counts but the age of the text it contains” (36).

### **Six ways the Families of Text has helped Textual Studies**

The families of texts have helped both the Old and New Testament Textual studies in the following ways:

**Families of text have helped in discovering the sources and origins of manuscripts:** McCain and Keener assert that the place the families of texts or manuscripts come from is familiar and related (56). All manuscripts come from a particular source. From the discourse above, it can be deduced that the Syrian text is gotten from the Byzantine Empire. The Western text has its source from the primitive Latin and writings of the early church patrons. The Alexandrian text has its roots in the Coptic version in Egypt. The Caesarean text which has its origin in Egypt is a combination of Alexandrian and Western contents. Every manuscript has a root or origin and once that root is identified, its classification will not be a problem.

**Families of text have helped in revealing the various qualities of manuscripts:** The Byzantine text is the less important textual text in history and it existed at the beginning of the fourth century. The Byzantine or Syrian texts were initially seen as the best text until the discovery of other authentic texts. The Western text has the features of alterations and reframing of words. The qualities of Alexandrian text are traced to the Alexandrian centre of learning and culture. The Alexandrian text is also mostly seen as a well-recognized and preferable text. There is a high value the Alexandrian manuscripts because the professional writers were very careful in copying the manuscripts

(Martins and Davids 1172). Green. McKnight and Marshall are of the view that although no manuscripts are completely free from alterations, the Alexandrian text type is better than the other ones (829). Tambiyi posits in his article: *Metzger on Trial: Re-defining the History of Text-Critical Studies in Africa* that “the Alexandrian scholars expanded the scope of textual studies to a more complicated, unconventional and advanced form of studies” (56). In terms of the quality of manuscripts, the Caesarean manuscript is next to the Syrian one. The neutral text is unique on its own for being concise and straight forward in its form of writing. All manuscripts have their peculiar qualities which go a long way in helping one to identify manuscripts.

**The strength and weaknesses of manuscripts are also discovered:** There is no manuscript without strength or weakness in the sense that there is no manuscript that is 100 per cent void of any error or alterations. The degree of acceptance varies from one manuscript to another. The two most valuable codices have areas of dissimilarities in the Gospel (Wallace 14). Tenny proclaims that the Byzantine text was prevalent at the ending of the seventh century (844). The Textus Receptus which has its origin in the Koine or Byzantine text was once universally accepted but after some period, it was rejected from being the best. Other better translations of the Bible made were regarded to be preferable to the former because of the originality of the manuscripts used to translate them. The mss used for the Textus Receptus were later considered to be awkward and outdated. Notwithstanding, the Received Text also known as the King James Version is still preferably used by some people who see it as an earlier sacred translation.



**It has helped textual scholars in the identification and classification of manuscripts:** Fee in the *Textual Criticism of the New Testament* insinuates that the classification of manuscripts into the various divisions they belong to has been made possible by professional scribes (146). Identification of a manuscript is very key in textual studies. Before a manuscript can be effectively studied to know the information, contents or details it carries, the manuscript must first be identified and then classified. This is made possible by observing the style of writing and transcribing the manuscript, etc. once this is achieved, it will be easy to move to the next step before getting other information embedded in the manuscript. Other texts are connected to a particular text, and once they are identified, they are easily classified just as we have Codex Alexandrinus in the Gospels, uncial and minuscule manuscripts which are connected to the Syrian text. The Codex Bezae, Codex Claromontaneous and Codex Washingtonianus are strongly linked to the Western text.

**It has imbibed in the hearts of students and scholars the need for developing writing skills:** Writing can never be a tactic. Writing is a skill which will always appreciate and it can be improved upon. Better manuscripts were discovered because the form of writing was clear with less alteration. Initially, words were written on manuscripts without space in between the letters but before the eleventh century, space in between words was introduced which made it easier to read and understand. Documentation in the early centuries was only written by hand, in the middle of the eleventh and twentieth centuries, the printing press was established. In this current dispensation, writing and printing is well advanced. This unveils to us that writing in all aspects (including the style of writing) can be developed and improved upon.

**The process of identification and classification of manuscripts which could be easy and sometimes very difficult has imbibed good qualities in the students and scholars:** Scholars and students involved in textual studies of manuscripts have learnt good qualities of discipline, persistence, patience and an optimistic attitude. Without these attributes, success cannot be achieved.

Many biblical professionals in advanced countries have invested much in the actualization of ancient materials and the establishment of their students in textual studies and another similar biblical disciplines. This has gone a long way in establishing and strengthening the religious and theological sectors of education. Most relevant, impactful and inspiring biblical tools such as commentaries, handbooks, dictionaries and concordances, etc. to a large extent which students and African scholars use come from these advanced countries. Their findings, emendations, presuppositions, research and conclusions which led to the production of these materials are excellent, and almost accurate but not completely applicable in the African setting. God in his infinite mercy has raised great leaders of honour, virtue and excellence who have sacrificed their time, money, resources and experience in training African students and scholars to meet up to the national and international standards of studying, interpreting and understanding the scriptures. They have accomplished these through the establishment of the institution, learning centres, books and materials, classroom and on-line lectures and the provision of scholarships and grants to relevant students and scholars for further studies and research. There are so many of them. Some of them are missionaries whose great impact in the religious and theological setting is evidenced in this dispensation and if the Lord tarries them, their great and good work will continue to speak for them in the future. Apart from the great and highly distinguished scholars mentioned at the beginning of this work, Rev. Prof. Danny McCain and Prof. Scott Carroll, others are Rev. Prof.

Gary Maxey (the founder of West Africa Theological Seminary, Ipaja, Lagos), Rev. Dr Robert Lillo, Dr Mary C. Preus, Rev. Dr Rudolph H. Wiebe, Dr Lois K. Fuller, Late Prof. Timothy Palmer, etc.

To take good and positive advantage of the sacrifice and investment made in our religious and theological institutions in Nigeria by the biblical scholars named above and other reputable ones not mentioned in this work, our religious and theological institutions must revisit and upgrade their curriculum by adding courses that will improve the academic scholarship of their students and staff. One of the ways this can be done is the introduction of Textual studies as a major course for all biblical students at all levels. This will instil in them amazing skills that will make them meet up to the standard of their counterparts. It is important to note that the current Africa Study Bible was made possible by the unrelenting

efforts of some of the scholars named above. African scholars and institutions most especially Nigeria which is the Centre of Christianity in Africa and across the world should rise and take the lead in biblical scholarship globally.

Kilpatrick states that the detection of manuscripts and their production of them paved way for the study of the New Testament Text shortly before the twentieth century (1). Tambiyi notes in his dissertation, *“Recovering Matthean Text of the Holy Family in Africa: A Coptic and Greek Textual Analysis”* that McCain in his article, *“Theological Education for a Mature African Church”* has revealed the great impart African biblical scholars have contributed to scholarship in the past and the present (82-5) and Tambiyi in his article, *“The Original Text of the New Testament: Why the Long Silence?”* laments that great discoveries have occurred in the past in Africa. Although most of the manuscripts were discovered in Africa, the western and developed nations have claimed ownership leaving little or no recognition for Africa as one of the main sources of manuscripts discovery (Tambiyi 224). This shows that great discoveries have been made by African scholars in the past and great discoveries can continually be made by Nigerian and African scholars in this present and future dispensation.

### **The relevance of the introduction of textual studies in theological and religious institutions in Nigeria.**

Textual studies are very important in our contemporary scholarship and should be introduced in the academic curriculum of theological institutions and religious departments of universities in Nigeria for the following reasons. Firstly, *textual studies increase the quest of biblical students and scholars to know the original intent of the authors of the Bible*. The real aim of textual scholars is to find out what the authors had in mind when they documented the scriptures. This cannot be achieved unless there is a deliberate effort to find it out by using the various textual tools available. Consistent practice and effort to achieve this aim develop the skills of the individuals involved in it. The process might at first be uninteresting and it might look so difficult but a patient and focused scholar will end up making great discoveries that will help a lot of people in the understanding of the scriptures. Secondly, *the knowledge of the real motive of the authors of the scriptures helps students, scholars and believers to reject prevailing heresies*. Many false teachings are going on today in some religious gatherings and through other mediums by some individuals or clergy who are not grounded and rooted in the truth of the Word of God. Most of these false teachings have brought so many gains to the perpetrators but it has also led many genuine believers astray from the truth embedded in the Gospel. Unless there are sound individuals who are ready to go through

the pain and process of extracting the truth from the scriptures through effective studying and the help of the Holy Spirit, the battle against false teachings will continue to increase.

Furthermore, *textual studies strengthen the biblical language of the students and scholars*. Through the constant study of the scriptures in their original language, the biblical students or scholars become more familiar with the original language of the Bible in Greek and Hebrew. The study of biblical manuscripts will make it difficult for students and scholars who constantly practice forgetting the grammar and it encourages them to increase their knowledge of vocabulary. The more vocabulary a student knows, the easier it will become to be able to translate the biblical language into English and vice versa. Textual studies most especially, the study of manuscripts deal a lot with the original language of the scriptures. Interestingly, *it gives biblical students and scholars, the privilege to study another biblical language*. Because the studies of manuscripts involve one's knowledge of the original biblical language such as Greek and Hebrew, there are other biblical languages directly or indirectly that can be learnt which will increase the skills and ability of the students or scholars. Other languages which can be useful for the study of manuscripts are Aramaic, Coptic, Syriac, Latin, etc. Ayugha affirms that "one primary objective of every Bible translation project is to give to the target community a product-either part of the scriptures or a whole in a language that the target community bests understand, the mother tongue" (134). One of the importance of studying biblical language is to be able to translate the Bible into the language of the native people (Fuller 1).

*Textual studies provide the platform where global textual scholars meet and study manuscripts thereby yielding great discoveries which build up the Christian faith*. Ihejirika and Obeneche in their article, "Rethinking Theological Education: A Tool for Socio-Ecclesiastical Reformation" posits that "Theological education by this token includes all educational activity which draws out the potentials as well as creates awareness ...in the student" (190). If our religious and tertiary institutions in Nigeria intentionally engage in textual studies, most especially in the studies of manuscripts, in the next decade or more, many skills of biblical students and scholars would have been greatly developed not only towards textual studies but also holistically. Textual studies have a way of building the skills and intellect of students and scholars, it helps to develop the reading, studying and reasoning of those involved in it with the consciousness of handling a fragment of the scriptures, the reverence for God and His words increases.

## **Conclusion**

This paper significantly revealed the importance of families of text to contemporary textual studies. The identification and classification of manuscripts by students and scholars have been made possible. Biblical students and scholars have also been able to learn more biblical languages and develop their skills such as writing and reasoning through the studies of manuscripts. Just as McCain indicated, there is no doubt that those whom God used to document the scriptures were led by the Holy Spirit (92), and 2 Timothy 2: 15 instructs, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (NIV); however, it is our responsibility to make the efforts to know what has been originally documented. This study strongly suggests the inclusion of textual and manuscript studies in the curriculum of the theological and religious departments of universities in Nigeria. The researcher maintains that our theological and religious studies institutions have a lot to gain both

academically and also in Christendom when textual and manuscripts studies are introduced to the tertiary education system in Nigeria.

The practical aspect of textual studies which is the studies of manuscripts has been made available to all students and scholars in Nigeria with the assistance of these outstanding and awesome global scholars: Rev. Prof. Danny McCain and Prof. Scott Carroll through the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Ancient Religious Scrolls and Manuscripts at the University of Jos. It is a place where students and scholars study biblical manuscripts for personal and general understanding of God's words and edification of the body of Christ. This paper concludes by inviting all biblical students and scholars who are God-centred in Nigeria to be part of the rare opportunity which is capable of transforming our lives, ministries and institution positively through the power of the Holy Spirit because "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (1 Cor. 3: 6b NKJV).

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