

Review Article**Decline of Eschatological Consciousness in Contemporary Churches: Causes and Consequences****Okoi, Bassey John<sup>1</sup>, Onen, Ruth Moses<sup>2</sup>, Eni, William Ibiang<sup>3</sup>**<sup>1</sup> *Educational Management and Planning, University of Cross River State, Obot Idim Akwa Ibom State*<sup>2</sup> *Animal and Environmental Biology, University of Cross River State, Nigeria*<sup>3</sup> *Department of Education Biology, University of Calabar, Calabar and, Apostolic Church Bible College,***ABSTRACT:**

Eschatological consciousness over the years has functioned as an important framework shaping Christian hope, way of behaviour, worship, and mission. Based in biblical theology, eschatology guide believers toward God's ultimate purposes for history and the realization of His kingdom. However, in many contemporary churches, there is a noticeable decline in eschatological consciousness, reflected in diminished emphasis on themes such as Christ's return, divine judgment, resurrection, and eternal destiny. This study therefore examines the theological meaning of eschatological consciousness and traces its significance within Old and New Testament traditions, highlighting its role in sustaining faith amid suffering and oppression. Using a conceptual and theological analysis, the study considered key factors contributing to its decline, including secularization, prosperity-oriented and therapeutic theologies, pragmatic church growth models, and fears arising from apocalyptic abuses. The study further identifies the consequences of this decline, particularly the weakening of Christian hope, moral complacency, distortion of mission, and theological imbalance. Finally, the study argues for a recovery of eschatological consciousness through biblically grounded teaching, liturgical renewal, ethical engagement, and contextual theological formation. It concludes that reclaiming eschatological consciousness is important for restoring theological depth, moral accountability, and resilient hope within contemporary Christian communities.

**Keywords:** *Eschatological Consciousness, Christian Hope, Contemporary Churches, Biblical Eschatology, Theological Renewal*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The doctrine of eschatology is derived from the Greek word *eschatos* which connote "last" or "end", being a rooted doctrinal component of the Christian theology that deals with the study of last things, including death, judgment, the second coming of Christ, resurrection, heaven, and hell [1]. It focuses on the ultimate destiny of individual souls and of the entire created order, based primarily upon biblical passages within the Old and New Testaments. The teaching of eschatology reminds Christian faith of the last days, the consciousness of this teaching shapes Christian faith, behaviour, worship, and mission by guiding believers toward God's ultimate purposes for history and humanity. From the early apostolic church to the modern era, eschatological hope act as a powerful motivational factor that sustained perseverance, holiness, sacrificial living,

and missionary zeal among believers toward the kingdom of God. Eschatology in Old Testament context focuses on divine restoration, judgment and God's faithful people [2].

While in the New Testament, eschatological expectation goes beyond being mere speculative but more or less practical. The teachings of Jesus Christ, Paul, and John continuously present the anticipation of Christ's return as a motivating force for moral vigilance, spiritual discipline, and faithful stewardship (Matt. 24–25; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Pet. 3:11–13). These teachings were what has guided the early church to live with a strong sense of imminence, often expressed in the Aramaic prayer *Maranatha* ("Come, Lord"), which shaped both doctrine and daily Christian conduct [3]. Eschatology, in the Old Testament is traceable from Israel's life experience of displacement, oppression, and exile, particularly during the periods of foreign

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domination. During the period of conquest and captivity, the Israelites nurtured a profound hope for divine deliverance and national restoration [4]. Biblical text such as Deuteronomy 30:1–5 emphasis a promise of return from dispersion (hope of restoration), emphasizing God's covenantal faithfulness even amid judgment and suffering. This promise assured the exilic community that their suffering and affliction was not permanent and that repentance and renewed obedience would result in restoration and communal renewal. Eschatological expectations thus became deeply intertwined with Israel's understanding of history as guided by divine purpose [5] Bauckham, R. and Hart T. (1999).

Scholars like [6] observe that Old Testament eschatological images and symbols often reflect the concrete social and political conditions ancient Israel was experiencing then. As [7] notes, these visions arose from real historical struggles and shows the people's eagerness for God's intervention in human affairs. Consequently, eschatological narratives served a dual function: they offered spiritual consolation to a suffering community while also providing a subtle form of resistance against imperial powers that sought to suppress Israel's identity and faith. By affirming God's ultimate sovereignty, such texts challenged the legitimacy of oppressive regimes. Through prophetic promises of restoration, judgment, and renewal, eschatology provided a framework through which believers interpreted historical events as purposeful and redemptive. Deuteronomy affirmed that Israel's affliction would not last forever but would result in divine restoration based on repentance and renewed obedience. Such promises precipitate confidence in God's covenant loyalty and sustained communal faith during prolonged adversity [8].

In the same light, eschatology acts as a strong means of hope and moral, psychological and spiritual motivation for Old Testament believers living under foreign domination. Biblical prophetic texts reassured believers that oppressive powers were temporary and subject to divine judgment. [9] holds that Israel's eschatological vision affirmed that history was moving toward God's intervention, in which justice and righteousness would ultimately prevail. This conviction enabled believers to endure

suffering without surrendering their identity or commitments. Hence, eschatology thus encouraged perseverance, faithfulness to the law, and resistance to assimilation into pagan cultures, reinforcing the belief that obedience to God had future significance beyond present circumstances. The book of Daniel 7:13–14 further highlighted the importance of eschatological consciousness among believers by portraying the final triumph of God's kingdom over all earthly empires. Consequently, eschatology was foundational to Old Testament faith, providing hope, ethical direction, and theological meaning while anchoring believers in the expectation of God's ultimate redemptive intervention.

However, in many contemporary churches, especially within modern contexts there appears to be a noticeable decline in eschatological consciousness. Sermons, teachings, and church programs increasingly emphasize prosperity, personal fulfillment, psychological well-being, and social success, while themes such as judgment, eternal destiny, and the second coming of Christ receive minimal attention or in most cases neglected. This decline may have occur due to changes occurring in today's society. For instance, socioeconomic settings of believe may influence their religious ideology by extension reflect on eschatological belief [10]. This also extend to how most youths pay less interest on school these days as a result of this negligence to the teachings of the last days. They are mostly concerned of getting rich and having fame with the quickest means [11]. This shift reflects broader cultural changes in the Christian fold, theological reorientations, and pragmatic ecclesial priorities that have influenced the content and direction of Christian proclamation. The decline of eschatological consciousness raises important theological and pastoral concerns. When the church loses sight of its eschatological horizon, Christian faith risks becoming overly temporal, human-centered. This study therefore seeks to examine the causes and consequences of this decline in contemporary churches, with the aim of contributing to a renewed theological engagement with biblical eschatology.

## 1. Conceptual Clarification: Eschatological Consciousness

Eschatological consciousness has to do with an individual or particular concerned group of persons' sustained awareness, interpretation, and ethical orientation shaped by beliefs concerning the "last things" (*eschata*), including divine judgment, resurrection, consummation of God's kingdom, and the ultimate renewal of creation. Within Christian theology, it denotes not merely speculative reflection on future events but a formative worldview that integrates future hope into present faith, practice, and moral responsibility. Eschatology signifies theological reflection on the final purposes of God in history. Consciousness, in this context, transcends cognitive awareness to include existential orientation, communal identity, and lived expectation. Thus, eschatological consciousness can be defined as the dynamic posture of faith by which believers perceive present reality through the lens of God's promised future [12].

Theologically, eschatological consciousness functions as a comprehensive worldview that shapes how believers understand time, history, suffering, and hope. Rather than isolating eschatology as the concluding section of systematic theology, contemporary scholars argue that it should be regarded as the framework within which all Christian doctrines are interpreted. From this perspective, eschatological consciousness affirms that God's redemptive purposes are not exhausted in the present age but are oriented toward a divinely promised future that gives coherence and meaning to historical existence. This consciousness emphasizes the *already-not yet* tension of Christian hope. Believers live between the inauguration of God's kingdom through Christ's resurrection and its future consummation at the parousia [13]. Hence, eschatological consciousness prevents both despair and triumphalism: despair is countered by hope in God's ultimate victory, while triumphalism is tempered by the recognition that fullness remains future.

Eschatological consciousness also carries profound ethical implications. The anticipation of divine judgment and restoration functions as a moral compass that shapes Christian conduct, social responsibility, and perseverance. Authentic Christian hope is not escapist but transformative, calling believers to embody future realities justice,

peace, and reconciliation in the present world. Biblically, this ethical orientation is evident in New Testament exhortations that link eschatological expectation with vigilance, holiness, and faithful stewardship (e.g., Matthew 24–25; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11). Eschatological consciousness, therefore, fosters accountability before God and motivates ethical engagement rather than withdrawal from societal concerns.

Beyond individual belief, eschatological consciousness is deeply communal and liturgical. The church, as an eschatological community, lives in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises and expresses this hope through worship, proclamation, and sacramental life. Liturgical practices such as the Eucharist function as anticipatory signs of the messianic banquet, nurturing a shared consciousness of hope and expectation. In this sense, eschatological consciousness shapes ecclesial identity. The church understands itself as a pilgrim community journeying toward consummation, bearing witness to God's future in the midst of present brokenness [14]. In contemporary Christianity, scholars note a significant decline in eschatological consciousness, often replaced by pragmatic theology, material preoccupations, or overly realized eschatologies that collapse future hope into present success [15]. This erosion has contributed to weakened moral urgency, diminished perseverance in suffering, and reduced missional vitality. Recovering eschatological consciousness is therefore seen as essential for renewing theological depth and spiritual resilience within the church.

Despite extensive theological reflection on eschatology, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding the contextual decline of eschatological consciousness within contemporary churches. Most existing studies are doctrinal, exegetical, or historical in nature, focusing on what eschatological consciousness *ought to be* rather than examining how it is currently perceived, taught, or neglected in lived ecclesial contexts. Additionally, limited attention has been given to the causal factors contributing to this decline, such as secularization, consumerism, prosperity theology, and institutional pragmatism. Equally underexplored are the practical

consequences of diminished eschatological consciousness, including weakened moral accountability, reduced missionary urgency, and theological superficiality. This gap is especially pronounced in non-Western contexts, where rapid church growth often coexists with doctrinal imbalance.

## 2. CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- i. **The Influence of Secularization and Modern Worldviews:** One major factor contributing to the decline of eschatological consciousness is the pervasive influence of secularization. Modern societies increasingly prioritize empirical reasoning, technological progress, and immediate gratification, often dismissing transcendent realities as irrelevant or speculative [16]. Within this context, churches may consciously or unconsciously downplay eschatological themes to appear rational, relevant, or socially acceptable. Secularization has also encouraged an immanent understanding of human existence, where meaning is sought primarily within historical and material realities rather than in divine future fulfillment. As a result, eschatology is sometimes perceived as outdated or escapist, rather than as a core component of Christian hope.
- ii. **The Rise of Prosperity Theologies:** The growth of prosperity-oriented and therapeutic forms of Christianity has further weakened eschatological emphasis. These theological approaches often focus on material success, personal happiness, and immediate solutions to life's problems [17]. While such emphases resonate with contemporary aspirations, they tend to redirect attention away from future hope toward present rewards. In this framework, eschatology is either minimized or reinterpreted in purely symbolic terms, severing its connection to accountability,

judgment, and eternal destiny. Consequently, Christian faith risks becoming self-centered rather than God-centered and future-oriented.

- iii. **Fear of Extremism:** Another contributing factor is the historical misuse of eschatology through sensationalism, date-setting, and apocalyptic speculation. Such abuses have generated skepticism and caution among church leaders, leading many to avoid eschatological teaching altogether. While this caution is understandable, complete avoidance has resulted in theological imbalance. Rather than offering biblically grounded eschatology, some churches respond by silence, inadvertently depriving believers of a vital dimension of Christian doctrine and hope.
- iv. **Pragmatism and Church Growth Models:** Contemporary church growth strategies often prioritize practical concerns such as numerical expansion, leadership development, and social engagement. While these goals are not inherently problematic, they can marginalize doctrinal teaching that is perceived as abstract or controversial, including eschatology. This pragmatic orientation risks reducing Christianity to ethical activism or motivational spirituality, disconnected from its ultimate telos in God's redemptive plan.

## 3. CONSEQUENCES OF THE DECLINE OF ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- i. **Weakening of Christian Hope:** One significant consequence of diminished eschatological teaching is the erosion of Christian hope. Biblically, hope is rooted in God's promised future rather than in present circumstances (Rom. 8:18–25). When eschatology is neglected, believers may struggle to interpret suffering,



injustice, and death within a redemptive framework. [18] argues that without eschatological hope, Christianity loses its forward-looking dynamism and becomes captive to the status quo. This loss weakens resilience and perseverance in the face of trials.

ii. **Moral Complacency and Ethical**

**Relativism:** Eschatological consciousness historically reinforced moral accountability by affirming divine judgment and the ultimate significance of human actions. Its decline can contribute to ethical complacency, where moral choices are evaluated primarily by social norms rather than by eternal consequences [19]. The New Testament consistently links eschatological expectation with ethical vigilance, emphasizing holiness, justice, and faithfulness in light of Christ's return (2 Pet. 3:11–13). The absence of this perspective risks diluting Christian moral distinctiveness.

iii. **Distortion of Christian Mission:** The Christian mission is intrinsically eschatological, oriented toward the proclamation of God's coming kingdom. When eschatology is minimized, mission may be reduced to social improvement or personal empowerment, detached from the call to repentance and reconciliation with God. While social engagement remains essential, its theological grounding is weakened when divorced from the hope of ultimate renewal and restoration.

iv. **Theological Imbalance and Doctrinal Fragmentation:** The marginalization of eschatology creates an imbalance within Christian theology by overemphasizing certain doctrines while neglecting others. Since eschatology integrates Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, its decline leads to a fragmented understanding of the Christian faith. A holistic theology requires the integration of present faith with future expectation, ensuring coherence and depth in Christian teaching.

#### 4. TOWARD A RECOVERY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Recovering eschatological consciousness does not entail speculative obsession with end-time details but a biblically faithful and pastorally responsible engagement with Christian hope. Churches are called to teach eschatology as a source of ethical motivation, comfort, and mission, grounded in Scripture and centered on Christ. The following are ways of reawaking the consciousness of eschatology among Christians.

i. **Re-centering Eschatology within**

**Christian Theology:** The recovery of eschatological consciousness requires restoring eschatology to its proper place as a foundational framework of Christian theology rather than treating it as a peripheral or concluding doctrine. Eschatology provides the horizon within which doctrines such as salvation, ecclesiology, and ethics are coherently understood. As [12] asserts, Christian theology is inherently future-oriented, grounded in God's promises rather than present realities alone. Re-centering eschatology enables the church to interpret history, suffering, and hope within God's redemptive purposes.

ii. **Balanced and Biblically Faithful Teaching on Eschatology:**

A renewed emphasis on systematic and responsible biblical teaching is essential for recovering eschatological consciousness. Scripture presents eschatological hope not as speculative curiosity but as a catalyst for vigilance, perseverance, and moral responsibility (Matt. 24–25; 1 Thess. 5:1–11; 2 Pet. 3:11–13). Balanced teaching must avoid both sensationalism and neglect, affirming the certainty of Christ's return, judgment, and restoration while discouraging apocalyptic excesses.

iii. **Liturgical Reinforcement of Eschatological Hope:**

Worship plays a

formative role in sustaining eschatological consciousness within the believing community. Liturgical practices such as prayers for Christ's return, Eucharistic celebration, and eschatologically rich hymns serve as anticipatory signs of God's promised future. [10] notes that the church's worship reflects its identity as a pilgrim community awaiting consummation. Reintroducing eschatological language into worship counters overly therapeutic or anthropocentric expressions of faith.

- iv. **Ethical Renewal through Eschatological Expectation:** Recovering eschatological consciousness strengthens moral accountability and ethical seriousness. The anticipation of divine judgment and restoration affirms that present actions possess eternal significance. Rather than encouraging escapism, eschatological hope motivates believers to embody justice, holiness, and faithfulness in the present. This ethical orientation reinforces Christian distinctiveness and counters moral complacency.
- v. **Revitalization of Christian Mission:** Christian mission is intrinsically eschatological, oriented toward the proclamation of God's coming kingdom. Recovering eschatological consciousness restores urgency to evangelism and deepens the theological grounding of social engagement. The mission of the church is shaped by the tension between the already and the not yet, calling believers to witness to God's future reign while engaging present realities responsibly.
- vi. **Contextual and Pastoral Sensitivity in Eschatological Renewal:** The recovery of eschatological consciousness must be contextually grounded, particularly within contemporary and non-Western church settings where pragmatic concerns often overshadow doctrinal formation. Theological imbalance frequently arises when growth and relevance are prioritized

over depth. Intentional theological education, pastoral training, and contextual reflection are therefore necessary to cultivate a mature and lived eschatological hope within diverse ecclesial contexts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This conceptual study examined the notion of eschatological consciousness as a foundational theological construct within Christian thought and has explored its apparent decline in contemporary ecclesial contexts. Drawing on biblical theology and classical as well as contemporary theological scholarship, the study has clarified eschatological consciousness as an integrative worldview through which believers interpret present existence in light of God's promised future. Rather than functioning as a speculative doctrine concerned solely with end-time events, eschatological consciousness has been shown to shape Christian hope, ethical orientation, worship, and mission.

By synthesizing insights from Old and New Testament theology, the study has demonstrated that eschatological consciousness historically functioned as a sustaining force for faith communities, particularly in contexts of suffering, displacement, and moral challenge. Biblical eschatology provided meaning to historical experience and affirmed the conviction that human history is ultimately governed by divine purpose. The conceptual analysis further revealed that eschatology served not only a future-oriented role but also a present-formative function, grounding ethical responsibility and communal identity in anticipation of God's final redemptive act.

The study has also conceptually identified key theological and cultural factors that contribute to the contemporary decline of eschatological consciousness, including secularized worldviews, prosperity-oriented theological frameworks, pragmatic ecclesial priorities, and reactions against apocalyptic excesses. While these factors are not empirically tested in this study, they provide a coherent explanatory framework for understanding how eschatological themes have been marginalized within modern Christian discourse.

Furthermore, this study has conceptually articulated the theological implications of diminished eschatological consciousness, particularly its effects on Christian hope, moral accountability, missional orientation, and doctrinal coherence. The analysis suggests that when the future dimension of faith is neglected, Christian theology risks becoming overly immanent and anthropocentric, thereby losing its eschatological tension and redemptive depth.

Finally, the study has argued for a conceptual recovery of eschatological consciousness through

renewed theological engagement with Scripture, balanced doctrinal reflection, and ecclesial practices that affirm the “already–not yet” character of Christian hope. Such recovery is presented not as a prescriptive program but as a theological orientation that reaffirms the church’s identity as a pilgrim community awaiting the consummation of God’s kingdom. As a conceptual contribution, this study provides a coherent theological framework for further empirical, pastoral, and contextual research on eschatology and its relevance in contemporary Christianity.

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