

Screening the Scriptures: Biblical Imagery and Theological Imagination in African Film

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how African films engage with and reinterpret biblical narratives, symbols, and themes, offering a unique lens into contemporary African theological imagination. In an era where visual media significantly shapes religious understanding, African filmmakers increasingly draw on the Bible to frame moral conflicts, portray divine intervention, and explore existential questions within familiar cultural settings. Through a critical analysis of selected films from Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, this study investigates how biblical texts are localized, adapted, and sometimes contested in cinematic storytelling. Particular attention is given to how these portrayals reflect indigenous worldviews, Pentecostal-charismatic influences, and postcolonial identity formation. The paper argues that African cinema functions not merely as entertainment, but as a dynamic site of popular hermeneutics and public theology. It concludes that these visual interpretations both affirm and challenge traditional readings of scripture, revealing the Bible's evolving role in shaping African Christian thought and life.

Keywords: Scriptures, Biblical Imagery, Theological Imagination, African Film.

INTRODUCTION

In Africa today, the connection between religion and visual storytelling is more pronounced than ever, especially as Christianity continues to evolve and expand across the continent. Rooted in a rich tapestry of community life, oral tradition, and symbolic expression, African Christianity is finding new ways to engage with the world through digital tools and cinematic forms that are now woven into everyday experience. Among these, film has become far more than a source of entertainment—it's a powerful platform for spiritual expression, theological insight, and religious storytelling. Increasingly, African filmmakers are weaving biblical stories, symbols, and themes into their narratives, creating films that speak directly to local audiences while giving fresh life to scripture within culturally familiar settings.

This growing trend invites deeper reflection on key theological and interpretive issues: How are biblical texts being represented on screen? What kinds of theology are embedded in these portrayals? And how might these visual retellings influence the way Christians across Africa understand and live out their faith? In an age where images shape much of what people believe and value, these are questions that matter.

This study delves into how scripture appears and is reshaped in African film, looking closely at how stories from the Bible are referenced, reimagined, and brought to life in specific films. It aims to uncover the theological messages within these portrayals—especially how they shape ideas about God, Jesus, salvation, suffering, and moral dilemmas within African settings. The study also considers what this means for the wider Christian conversation on the continent, highlighting how such films play a role in shaping everyday theology and spiritual formation across diverse communities.

Ultimately, this research contributes to three major areas of scholarship: contextual theology, media studies, and African biblical hermeneutics. By treating film as a space where

theology is actively imagined and lived out, the paper highlights how scripture isn't just studied or preached—it's also dramatized and reinterpreted in ways that reflect the realities of African life. In doing so, it opens up new ways for scholars to think about the Bible—not just as a written text, but as a living story still unfolding on screen, in culture, and in faith.

Scholarly Views

The Bible in African Christianity

In African Christianity, the Bible holds a deeply rooted and commanding presence—not merely as a holy scripture but as a living, adaptable text that resonates through the rhythms of African cultural life, societal circumstances, and spiritual traditions. Increasingly, scholars have turned their attention to this intersection, offering a wide range of insights into how African Christians interpret, engage with, and integrate the Bible into both structured theological reflection and everyday religious expression. John S. Mbiti is recognized as a trailblazer in framing a theology that embraces the congruence between African traditional religion and Christian Scripture. His influential texts, *African Religions and Philosophy* and *Introduction to African Religion*, assert that Africa's religious worldview offers a fertile framework for receiving and interpreting biblical narratives. According to Mbiti, elements such as African cosmology, communal consciousness, and rich symbolic thought not only align with the biblical message but make it more comprehensible within African contexts.¹ He adopted an incarnational hermeneutic, arguing that the gospel finds authentic expression when interpreted through indigenous conceptual systems. Though critics have occasionally challenged him for an overly romantic portrayal of traditional beliefs, Mbiti's argument for a theological continuity between African culture and Scripture continues to exert significant influence in contemporary discourse.²

Kwame Bediako's contributions to African Christian theology are widely regarded as a significant advancement in the discourse surrounding scripture and identity in postcolonial contexts. His work presents a notable departure from earlier paradigms by foregrounding the theological agency of African Christians in interpreting the Bible. In *Theology and Identity* and *Christianity in Africa*, Bediako challenges the notion of the Bible as a Western imposition, arguing instead that African Christians perceive scripture as inherently liberative and culturally resonant.³ Through the integration of African languages, cultural frameworks, and communal memory, he posits that African theological reflection produces a biblically grounded yet distinctly African expression of faith.⁴

While Bediako shares common ground with scholars such as John Mbiti, particularly in affirming the importance of African traditional thought in theological development, he diverges in his stronger emphasis on the continuity between Christian revelation and African religiosity. Mbiti highlighted the philosophical underpinnings of African religion and its potential as a preparatory ground for Christianity, but at times maintained a more comparative framework between Christianity and traditional belief systems.⁵ Bediako, by contrast, sees African pre-Christian religious consciousness not merely as preparatory but as inherently continuous with Christian thought—a perspective that deepens the integration of scripture into African identity.

¹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969)

² John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

³ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 429.

⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 14–30.

⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1–10.

Lamin Sanneh's concept of "vernacularization," aligns with Bediako's emphasis on the theological significance of local languages. Both affirm that the translation of scripture into African vernaculars is not simply a linguistic task but a theological one, enabling indigenous communities to internalize and reinterpret Christian faith through their own cultural categories.⁶ However, Bediako places greater focus on the resultant theological identity formation, pushing beyond Sanneh's historical narrative to explore its implications for contemporary African theology.

In contrast to Western theological models that often universalize European interpretive frameworks, Bediako calls for a hermeneutic grounded in African experience, one that reclaims scripture as a source of spiritual autonomy and identity formation in postcolonial Africa. His work thus not only complements but also challenges and extends the insights of his contemporaries, offering a vision of African Christianity that is both self-authored and scripturally faithful. In the shifting contours of African theological thought, Jesse N. K. Mugambi represents a turning point in the movement from liberation theology toward what he terms "reconstruction theology." Mugambi argues that African theology must evolve from its earlier focus on resistance and critique to one that emphasizes nation-building, institutional renewal, and social transformation. Drawing from the biblical narrative of Nehemiah, he presents a model for theological engagement centered on moral reconstruction and societal development.⁷

This approach distinguishes Mugambi from earlier African theologians such as John Mbiti, whose influential work explored African traditional religions in dialogue with Christianity, often focusing on cosmology and religious identity rather than socio-political reconstruction.⁸ Similarly, Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, key proponents of liberation theology, framed theology as a tool of prophetic resistance during apartheid and colonial rule.⁹ While their contributions were pivotal during eras of oppression, Mugambi contends that post-independence Africa requires a theology oriented toward rebuilding and governance, rather than perpetual opposition.¹⁰

His work resonates, to a degree, with that of Kwame Bediako, who also called for a theology rooted in African cultural identity and historical consciousness.¹¹ However, Mugambi's insistence on using biblical paradigms as a blueprint for national reconstruction offers a more pragmatic, policy-facing theology. Emmanuel Katongole, too, has critiqued the limits of liberation theology, though his focus has largely been ecclesial and reconciliatory rather than developmental.¹² In this way, Mugambi's theology carves a unique niche by integrating scriptural interpretation with post-conflict nation-building, offering a framework that speaks not only to spiritual but also civic and institutional renewal in African contexts.

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke has played an important role in reshaping African biblical interpretation by using a postcolonial perspective. Unlike some scholars who celebrate African

⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 51–72.

⁷ Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 7–10.

⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1–5.

⁹ Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

¹⁰ Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 17.

¹¹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 12–20.

¹² Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 3–9.

Christianity as a unified tradition, Maluleke warns against this kind of generalization and encourages a more critical view of African culture. He argues that the Bible is read in Africa through many lenses, shaped by poverty, gender issues, and political struggles.¹³ Like Musa Dube, who highlights how the Bible can be used to resist oppression,¹⁴ Maluleke draws attention to how ordinary believers—not just scholars—help shape African interpretations of scripture. Gerald West also values the role of local communities, but Maluleke adds that scholars must listen more closely to the everyday experiences of readers.¹⁵ Some, like Justin Ukpong, have raised concerns that focusing too much on ordinary voices might create a narrow view of African experience.¹⁶ Still, Maluleke’s work is a key step toward more grounded and inclusive approaches to reading the Bible in Africa.

Gerald O. West has made important contributions to liberation hermeneutics, especially through his method of contextual Bible study (CBS). In books like *The Academy and the People* and *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, West promotes a way of reading the Bible that involves both scholars and everyday people. His approach is widely used in Southern Africa and helps poor and marginalized communities use the Bible to speak out against injustice.¹⁷

West’s work connects with Latin American theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, who also believed theology should start with the struggles of the poor.¹⁸ However, Gutiérrez focused more on church teaching, while West’s method is more interactive and happens in local settings. Scholar Itumeleng Mosala supports West’s focus on African voices but argues that CBS doesn’t fully challenge the Bible’s own social and political background.¹⁹

Other scholars, like Fernando Segovia, support West’s emphasis on context but warn that too many interpretations could make the message unclear.²⁰ Still, West’s work with churches and communities shows that the Bible can be a source of both resistance and hope for those who face oppression.

Elizabeth Amoah’s work brings a strong gender focus to African biblical interpretation. She challenges both Western feminist views and traditional African readings for overlooking the real-life struggles of African women. Instead, she calls for ways of reading the Bible that support women’s dignity and active role in church and society. In this, her approach echoes the ideas of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who argues that theology must deal with real-life oppression and promote

¹³ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “African Hermeneutics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144–160.

¹⁴ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 45–48.

¹⁵ Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 22–29.

¹⁶ Justin S. Ukpong, “Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*, eds. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 11–28.

¹⁷ Gerald O. West, *The Academy and the People: Theological Education in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2009), 22–26; Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 45–48.

¹⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 15–18.

¹⁹ Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 56–59.

²⁰ Fernando F. Segovia, *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 30–33.

justice and liberation for the poor.²¹ However, while Gutiérrez focuses mainly on class and social systems, Amoah adds another layer by emphasizing how gender and culture shape the way scripture is understood. Her work also connects with scholars like Musimbi Kanyoro and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who support culturally aware and justice-driven interpretations.²² Still, Amoah points out that even African theology often misses the mark when it comes to women's voices. She expands the field by insisting that any biblical interpretation in Africa must take gender seriously.

Among the key voices shaping contemporary hermeneutics, David T. Adamo, Hans W. Frei, and Musa W. Dube offer distinct yet intersecting contributions. Adamo's articulation of African cultural hermeneutics foregrounds indigenous traditions and ancestral symbols as vital lenses for reading biblical texts, challenging Western-centric exegesis by rooting interpretation in African religio-cultural contexts.²³ His approach contrasts with Hans W. Frei's post-liberal framework, which privileges the narrative coherence of biblical texts within the ecclesial community, often bracketed from historical or cultural critique.²⁴ While Frei does not directly engage African interpretive contexts, his emphasis on the integrity of biblical narrative finds indirect resonance in Adamo's appeal to communal meaning-making.

Musa W. Dube, meanwhile, critiques both missionary readings and dominant biblical scholarship through a postcolonial feminist lens, deconstructing interpretive paradigms that marginalize African worldviews and silence female agency.²⁵ Her call for a decolonized hermeneutic amplifies Adamo's emphasis on contextualization but presses further by demanding gender and power analysis. Dube's insistence on broadening the interpretive community aligns with Adamo's, though her approach is more confrontational in unmasking ideological complicity in biblical interpretation.

Collectively, these scholars reveal the multiplicity of interpretive strategies emerging from non-Western and marginalized perspectives, with Adamo and Dube offering contextual correctives to the universalizing tendencies found in traditions like Frei's.²⁶

African Popular Religion and Media

In contemporary years, the role of media in shaping religious life in Africa has received growing scholarly attention. Across the continent, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, electronic and digital media have become central to how people express, practice, and understand faith. From radio and television to mobile phones and social media, these tools have changed the way religion is experienced—making it more immediate, emotional, and visually engaging.

²¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 15–18.

²² Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002); Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001).

²³ David T. Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches* (Benin City: Justice Jeco, 2001).

²⁴ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974)

²⁵ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

²⁶ See also Gerald O. West, "African Biblical Hermeneutics," in *The Africana Bible*, ed. Hugh R. Page Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), pp. 35–44.

Birgit Meyer's influential concept of "sensational forms" explains how media—especially film and television—help make spiritual realities visible and felt.²⁷ In Ghana, for example, Pentecostal films and broadcasts often present spiritual warfare, miracles, and divine intervention in ways that feel real to audiences. Meyer argues that these forms connect African traditional cosmologies with Christian beliefs in powerful and culturally relevant ways.²⁸

Other scholars, such as Ruth Marshall and Afe Adogame, have explored how African Christianity adapts to changing media landscapes. They show that African churches are highly creative in using media to reach audiences, build community, and express faith.²⁹ These studies point to a flexible and hybrid form of spirituality that is emotionally intense, often theatrical, and deeply engaging.

However, while much research focuses on media's role in performance and outreach, fewer studies have examined the theological content of African religious media—especially films. Many of these films go beyond evangelism and act as tools for teaching, interpreting, and reimagining biblical stories and Christian doctrine. Scholars like Akintunde Akinade and Iheanyi Enwerem suggest that African Christian films offer unique local interpretations of major theological themes, such as sin, salvation, and divine judgment.³⁰

More recently, attention has turned to digital media. Scholars like Esther Mombo note that platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp are giving new voices—especially youth and women—a chance to participate in religious conversations.³¹ Yet, concerns remain that the digital shift may also simplify theology into easy messages, losing depth in the process.

In conclusion, African popular religion and media form a dynamic and evolving field. The media are not just tools for spreading religion—they shape how religion is felt, seen, and understood. While there is strong research on the emotional and performative aspects of this media, there is still more to explore regarding how these media forms construct theology in African contexts.

Film and Theology

The interdisciplinary dialogue between film and theology continues to gain scholarly traction, with increasing recognition of cinema as a vital medium for exploring sacred themes and spiritual inquiry. Robert K. Johnston notably characterizes film as a form of public theology, arguing that the cinematic experience creates a reflective space wherein audiences grapple with theological and existential questions through narrative immersion.³² In *Reel Spirituality*, Johnston asserts that even films lacking overt religious content can serve as conduits for divine encounter, making theology more accessible to secular and pluralistic audiences.

²⁷ Birgit Meyer, "Religious Revelation, Secrecy and the Limits of Visual Representation," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 4 (2006): 431–453.

²⁸ Birgit Meyer, *Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

²⁹ Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³⁰ Akintunde E. Akinade, ed., *Christianity and the African Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015); Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening* (Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 2020).

³¹ Esther Mombo and Caleb O. Oladipo, "African Theologies in the Digital Age," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 175 (2022): 42–61.

³² Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

Clive Marsh supports this interpretive openness, describing popular film as a contemporary *locus theologicus*—a site where deep religious impulses are both represented and interrogated.³³ He posits that mainstream cinema often gives voice to spiritual yearning and social critique, functioning less as doctrinal proclamation and more as theological provocation. Together, these perspectives have helped reposition film from mere entertainment to a legitimate object of theological analysis.

However, as critics such as Antonio Della Torre and Kutter Callaway observe, the bulk of this scholarship remains rooted in Euro-American contexts, frequently privileging Hollywood and European auteurs while overlooking the rich theological resonances present in global cinematic traditions.³⁴ For instance, Nollywood cinema has been increasingly recognized for its overt engagement with Christian eschatology, prosperity theology, and moral dualism—elements often delivered through melodramatic forms that resonate with local spiritual sensibilities.³⁵ Ghanaian films similarly incorporate indigenous cosmologies, Pentecostal imagery, and traditional morality tales, merging Christian themes with African oral narrative structures.

In Latin America, filmmakers like Alejandro González Iñárritu subtly weave Catholic symbolism and existential theology into narratives of suffering, grace, and redemption, offering a distinctively postcolonial theological vision. Meanwhile, Asian cinema—particularly from Japan and South Korea—often explores notions of the sacred through Zen aesthetics or Confucian ethical paradigms, challenging Western theological categories altogether.³⁶

This divergence in theological encoding calls for a more inclusive critical lens that accounts for how cultural contexts shape the theological textures of film. As scholars like Jolyon Mitchell have advocated, expanding the discourse to include non-Western cinemas not only diversifies theological reflection but also deepens our understanding of how spiritual meaning is constructed across cinematic landscapes.³⁷

Gaps in Literature

While a growing corpus of scholarship has explored intersections between African Christianity, media, and global theological discourse, a notable lacuna persists in how African cinema is treated within this landscape. Specifically, the theological and biblical potential embedded in African film remains largely unexamined. Though these films frequently weave in scriptural echoes—through direct citations or more implicit thematic allusions—systematic scholarly attention to the portrayal of biblical figures, narratives, and motifs is still scarce.

This oversight is especially evident when considering the vivid theological imagination that animates much of Africa's popular cinematic output. Themes such as divine judgment, miraculous intervention, salvation, and spiritual warfare are often central to these narratives, yet they remain largely outside the bounds of formal theological inquiry. Instead, academic treatments of African Christian media often prioritize sociological interpretations, focusing on Pentecostal spectacle, prosperity theology, or cultural expression. This approach, while valuable, leaves underdeveloped the potential of these films as hermeneutical tools—sites where theology is not

³³ Clive Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film's Challenge to Theology* (Paternoster Press, 2004).

³⁴ Antonio Della Torre, "Globalizing Theology and Film Studies: A Cross-Cultural Critique," *Journal of Religion and Film* 21, no. 2 (2017); Kutter Callaway, *Watching TV Religiously: Television and Theology in Dialogue* (Baker Academic, 2016).

³⁵ Nkiru Nzegwu, "Nollywood and the New Frontiers of African Theology," *Black Camera* 5, no. 1 (2013): 76–91.

³⁶ Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment* (IVP, 2009).

³⁷ Jolyon Mitchell, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Westview Press, 1999).

just represented but reimagined through popular media. In contexts where the Bible is not a static text but a dynamic, living presence, the absence of rigorous theological engagement with African cinema signals a pressing opportunity for deeper scholarly reflection.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theological Imagination

The concept of *theological imagination* provides a vital interpretive lens for understanding how faith communities construct meaning around divine realities. It encompasses the creative use of symbols, narratives, and metaphors that translate transcendence into lived human experience. Within the context of African cinema, this imagination becomes a dialogical arena where biblical imagery is not merely reproduced but dynamically re-inscribed within indigenous cosmologies and socio-political realities.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of symbol and narrative theology is particularly instructive in this regard, as it foregrounds the evolving and interpretive nature of sacred stories.³⁸ From this perspective, theology is not a fixed repository of truths but a continuing process of meaning-making shaped by context and culture. African film, therefore, operates as a site of theological discourse in which imagination functions both critically and constructively—challenging the hegemony of Western theological frameworks while re-articulating local understandings of the sacred.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye's reflections on African women's theology further extend this interpretive horizon. Her emphasis on storytelling as a means of reclaiming faith from patriarchal domination parallels the narrative strategies employed in many African cinematic texts. In these films, theology is performed through story—transforming imagination into a form of communal memory, cultural resistance, and spiritual reconstruction.³⁹ Theological imagination in African film thus emerges as a praxis of re-envisioning the divine within the textures of African experience.

Visual Hermeneutics

Visual hermeneutics refers to the interpretive process through which sacred texts are encountered and reimagined through images, symbols, and cinematic expression. It is grounded in the understanding that visual culture is not a mere extension of theology but a meaningful mode of theological communication in its own right. This perspective recognizes that seeing, perceiving, and visual representation are central to the ways faith and spirituality are experienced and conveyed.⁴⁰

Within this interpretive framework, African cinema becomes a vital medium for exploring theological meaning. By translating biblical narratives into local visual idioms, filmmakers create new spaces where Scripture engages the everyday realities, histories, and struggles of African communities. Films that retell the story of Christ through African settings illustrate how sacred texts can be woven into narratives of liberation, identity, and hope. Through such visual storytelling, the Bible is not simply portrayed but reinterpreted in light of contemporary social and spiritual contexts.⁴¹ In this sense, visual hermeneutics serves as a creative and transformative act—

³⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

³⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁴¹ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

one that reclaims biblical imagery as a living resource for reflection, resistance, and renewal within African experience.

Inculturation Theology

At its core, *inculturation theology* seeks to embed the gospel within the cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic frameworks of local communities. It involves a dialogical encounter between faith and culture, where Christian revelation takes root in the symbols, narratives, and values of a people. Within this context, African cinema provides a rich site for theological engagement, functioning as both a medium and a method through which the Christian message is reinterpreted through African worldviews and artistic forms.

Through storytelling, ritual, language, and music, African filmmakers reimagine gospel narratives in ways that reflect communal ethics, ancestral consciousness, and the dynamic interplay between the spiritual and material dimensions of life. These creative adaptations transform the gospel from an external import into a lived and participatory experience that resonates with local sensibilities. When biblical motifs are expressed through indigenous idioms, they acquire renewed theological significance—one that privileges community, harmony, and life-affirming values over abstract doctrinal formulations.⁴²

In this sense, inculturation in African film represents more than cultural adaptation; it is a theological rearticulation that allows the gospel to breathe within the hopes, struggles, and languages of the people. It marks a movement from imposed theological narratives toward locally grounded expressions of faith that affirm both the divine and the distinctly African.

Postcolonial and Popular Theology

African cinema participates in an ongoing discourse that bridges postcolonial and popular theologies—approaches that locate faith within the lived experiences of ordinary people and within histories marked by colonization, resistance, and cultural negotiation. Postcolonial theology challenges inherited, Eurocentric frameworks of interpretation, inviting fresh readings of Scripture from the perspective of those on the margins of power. Within this horizon, African film becomes a critical site for such re-readings, translating biblical ideals into narratives that confront the lingering effects of colonialism, expose systems of neocolonial control, and explore the complex intersections of tradition and modernity.⁴³

At the same time, popular theology affirms the everyday expressions of faith that emerge outside formal ecclesial institutions—through proverbs, songs, rituals, markets, and cinematic storytelling. In these vernacular spaces, theology is performed rather than prescribed; it is sung, spoken, and embodied within the rhythms of daily life. Through film, African theology thus finds a visual and narrative language that makes the sacred accessible and immediate, grounding belief in the realities of people's struggles and joys.⁴⁴

⁴² Bénédzet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁴³ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

⁴⁴ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "African 'Cultural Hermeneutics' and Contemporary Biblical Scholarship," *Religion & Theology* 12, no. 2 (2005): 122–135.

In this synthesis of postcolonial critique and popular expression, a distinctly African biblical theology emerges—creative, dynamic, and deeply human—where faith is not an abstract system but a lived testimony woven into the textures of culture and community.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary research design that integrates insights from theology, cultural studies, and film analysis. Such an approach allows for a nuanced exploration of African cinematic narratives through a theological lens, treating film not merely as an artistic medium but as a cultural text that reinterprets sacred stories within particular social and historical settings.⁴⁵

The study adopts an interpretive framework that emphasizes the dynamic relationship between understanding and explanation—an approach especially suitable for engaging film as a locus of theological reflection and imagination. This interpretive stance acknowledges that meaning emerges through dialogue between text, context, and viewer, allowing for a deeper appreciation of how cinematic forms embody and communicate theological ideas.⁴⁶

By approaching African film as a narrative arena where theology, culture, and experience converge, this research design enables a critical reading of visual storytelling as both a site of faith expression and a mode of contextual theological discourse.

Film Selection Criteria

The films selected for analysis originate from Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa—regions whose cinematic traditions are among the most dynamic and influential in Africa. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to identify films that either directly portray biblical narratives or engage symbolically with biblical imagery and theological themes. The study focuses on *The Figurine* (Nigeria), *Heritage Africa* (Ghana), and *Son of Man* (South Africa) as primary texts.

Selection was guided by three main criteria. First, each film demonstrates a clear engagement with biblical motifs, whether through explicit references or thematic parallels. Second, the films possess strong cultural resonance, reflected in their popular reception and their capacity to articulate the social and moral concerns of African communities. Third, they exhibit significant theological depth—either through overt religious content or through the exploration of questions that touch on the divine, morality, and human destiny.⁴⁷

These films collectively reveal the complex dialogue between African cultural traditions and biblical worldviews, illustrating how theology is continually reinterpreted within lived experience. Through them, cinema becomes a medium for theological reflection, one that both contextualizes and reimagines faith within the African narrative landscape.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 71–88.

⁴⁶ Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 25–49.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 105–123

⁴⁸ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke and Emmanuel Katongole, *African Theology Today* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2005), 15–32.

Biblical Themes in African Cinema: A Survey

African cinema, deeply embedded in communal and spiritual cosmologies, has consistently drawn upon Biblical imagery to express social, political, and existential concerns. The intersection of sacred narratives and indigenous worldviews has fostered a distinct theological imagination, whereby filmmakers transpose Biblical motifs into African realities. This survey examines how African auteurs engage the scriptures not merely for religious commentary but as a lens through which to interrogate power, justice, suffering, and hope.

Common Motifs and Narratives

Recurring Biblical themes such as miracles, divine judgment, deliverance, suffering, and salvation are prevalent in African film. These motifs serve as narrative anchors in works where traditional spirituality and Christianity coexist or clash. In Kunle Afolayan's *The Figurine*, the story revolves around a cursed figurine that brings fortune and misfortune, reflecting the dialectic of divine blessing and judgment. Miracles in such contexts are often ambiguous, raising questions about the source of power—God, tradition, or fate.

Similarly, *Yeelen* reinterprets the notion of divine deliverance through a story of spiritual initiation and struggle. Here, the protagonist's suffering mirrors the trials of Biblical figures like Joseph or Job, while salvation is portrayed as the acquisition of spiritual enlightenment rather than physical rescue. The use of Biblical paradigms to navigate trauma, colonial legacy, or socio-political disillusionment remains a dominant cinematic strategy.⁴⁹

Jesus Figures and Christ Typologies

African cinema frequently constructs figures who embody Christ-like attributes—characters who endure suffering, confront oppressive systems, and offer themselves for the restoration of communal harmony. Films such as *Hyenas* and *Tey* vividly portray this motif. In *Tey*, the protagonist's final journey through his village on the day of his death evokes the passion narrative, reflecting themes of sacrifice, mortality, and reconciliation. His serene acceptance of death and contemplation of life's transience invite a theological reading centered on redemptive suffering and love.⁵⁰

These representations, however, transcend the boundaries of traditional Christian interpretation. They are refracted through African spiritual worldviews, where the figure of the martyr converges with that of the griot, healer, or visionary—individuals who bear the moral and spiritual burdens of the community. In contrast, films such as *Of Good Report* destabilize this redemptive trope by transforming the would-be savior into a fractured antihero, exposing the perils of distorted messianic ambition within systems of corruption and decay.⁵¹

In these cinematic portrayals, the Christ figure functions as a symbolic prism through which African filmmakers explore suffering, resistance, and renewal. The result is a theology in motion—one that interrogates inherited symbols while reimagining redemption in the textures of African experience.

⁴⁹ Diawara, Manthia. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*. Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 67–71

⁵⁰ Gomis, Alain. *Tey*. Film. Granit Films, 2012.

⁵¹ Fromm, Charles E. "Christ Figures in Postcolonial African Film." *Journal of Theology and Film*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2005, pp. 45–58.

Old Testament References

Many African films draw from Old Testament narratives, particularly the themes of prophetic confrontation and divine retribution. The Exodus story is frequently mirrored in plots involving migration, liberation, or resistance. In Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*, the spiritual return to Africa by the protagonist is an exilic journey akin to Moses leading Israel out of bondage. The Red Sea crossing becomes symbolic of reclaiming identity through memory and struggle.⁵²

Prophetic figures also populate African films, channeling Biblical archetypes such as Elijah or Jeremiah. In *Karmen Gei*, loosely based on Bizet's opera, Karmen becomes a voice of rebellion whose fate underscores divine judgment. Such narratives reflect the theological tension between divine justice and human agency, especially in postcolonial contexts where institutions have failed to deliver moral governance.⁵³

Eschatology and Apocalyptic Elements

Eschatological themes—heaven, hell, judgment, and the end of time—occupy a prominent place in the African cinematic imagination. These motifs extend beyond religious symbolism to probe existential concerns about destiny, justice, and the moral order of the universe in societies scarred by suffering and inequality. In *Timbuktu*, for instance, the pervasive threat of religious extremism is rendered with apocalyptic intensity: barren desert landscapes convey spiritual desolation, while stark scenes of execution evoke a haunting vision of judgment stripped of compassion.⁵⁴

Across many African films, such imagery reflects a longing for transcendence amid turmoil. Visual metaphors of ascent, fire, and cosmic struggle articulate a persistent hope that ultimate justice lies beyond the reach of corrupt earthly systems. At the same time, these portrayals interrogate the ways eschatological belief can both inspire liberation and reinforce oppression. In *I Am Not a Witch*, the plight of the young protagonist becomes a moral indictment of societal hypocrisy and spiritual manipulation, suggesting that apocalyptic visions of judgment can reveal the very injustices they claim to condemn.

Through these layered representations, African cinema reimagines eschatology as both critique and consolation—an arena where faith confronts fear, and the promise of the world to come exposes the failures of the world that is.

Case Studies of Selected African Films

1. Nigerian Example: *The Ultimate Power*

Summary

The Ultimate Power, directed by Gabriel Moses and produced within the framework of Nigerian Pentecostal cinematic traditions, explores the tension between occult forces and Christian spiritual triumph. The protagonist, a devoted Christian, is entangled in a spiritual battle against a malevolent cult that symbolizes demonic influence. The narrative culminates in a climactic confrontation where divine intervention, through prayer and scriptural invocation, defeats evil.

Biblical References and Theological Implications

The film's spiritual narrative draws heavily on the biblical declaration that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers” (Ephesians 6:12), using this text as the

⁵² Gabriel, Teshome. *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Africa World Press, 1982, pp. 119–124.

⁵³ Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank. *Black African Cinema*. University of California Press, 1994, pp. 93–95

⁵⁴ Gifford, Paul. *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*. Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 101–104.

foundation for its portrayal of spiritual warfare. Within this framework, prayer, fasting, and the spoken Word function as instruments of deliverance, embodying the core theological motifs of divine power, confrontation with evil, and ultimate victory in Christ.⁵⁵

The narrative reflects a distinctly Pentecostal imagination in which the spiritual and physical realms are perceived as intimately connected, and human struggles are interpreted through a cosmic lens of conflict and redemption. The visual dramatization of divine authority overpowering occult forces mirrors the triumphalist theology that characterizes much of contemporary Nigerian Christianity. Here, cinematic storytelling becomes both a reflection of popular faith and a means of reinforcing it—portraying salvation as an active, victorious engagement with the unseen world.⁵⁶

2. Ghanaian Example: *Agya Koo and the Cross*

Summary

This comedic yet morally instructive film follows Agya Koo, a fictionalized version of the popular Ghanaian actor, as he is reluctantly drawn into a journey of faith. After acquiring a mysterious cross believed to possess supernatural qualities, Agya Koo experiences a series of misfortunes that eventually lead to his spiritual awakening and embrace of Christian values.

Biblical Symbolism and Contextual Relevance

The cross in the film operates as a profound theological symbol—initially perceived as a fetish object, it gradually transforms into an emblem of divine grace and redemption. This symbolic evolution mirrors the continuing dialogue within African Christianity between inherited traditional cosmologies and reinterpreted biblical meanings. Within this narrative framework, the cross embodies both suffering and vocation, functioning simultaneously as a sign of human frailty and divine empowerment.

The film's use of humor, proverbial wisdom, and vernacular expression situates its message within the contours of contextual theology. By presenting the gospel through familiar cultural idioms, it bridges the gap between doctrine and daily life, rendering complex theological ideas accessible to local audiences. Through this dynamic translation of faith into story, the film reimagines the Christian message as a lived encounter with grace—portraying the journey from folly to faith not as moral instruction alone, but as a transformative experience rooted in the rhythms of African life.⁵⁷

3. South African Example: *Son of Man*

Summary

Directed by Mark Dornford-May, *Son of Man* offers a contemporary reimagining of the life of Jesus, set in a fictional, conflict-ridden African nation. Jesus is portrayed as a young black activist who challenges systems of violence and oppression through a message of peace, community, and justice. His crucifixion is politically motivated, echoing the fates of many liberation leaders.

⁵⁵ Ukah, Asonzeh. *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*. Africa World Press, 2008, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Kalu, Ogbu. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 196.

⁵⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa*. Wipf & Stock, 2015, p. 112.

Portrayal of Jesus, Liberation Theology, and Socio-Political Undertones

Unlike many Western portrayals of Jesus, *Son of Man* situates Christ firmly within African socio-political realities. The film presents him not as a remote spiritual figure but as a revolutionary presence who identifies with the oppressed and confronts the structures of injustice. His mother, Mary, emerges as a pivotal character—an emblem of courage and compassion reminiscent of the central role women play in African grassroots movements for liberation and social change.

Drawing inspiration from biblical teachings such as “whatever you did for one of the least of these” (Matthew 25:40), the film reinterprets the gospel through a postcolonial African lens. This reimagining positions Christ’s mission as one of solidarity with the suffering and resistance against systemic evil. The crucifixion scene—set amid images of military occupation, grief, and communal lament—serves as a powerful visual metaphor for the enduring scars of apartheid, colonialism, and political violence.⁵⁸ Through this portrayal, *Son of Man* articulates a theology of incarnation grounded in struggle and hope, where redemption is envisioned not as escape from the world but as transformation within it.

Theological Reflection

The interplay between biblical narratives and African visual storytelling reveals profound theological dynamics. African films that utilize biblical imagery offer more than religious entertainment; they become conduits for theological imagination, reflecting a lived hermeneutic that resonates with communal spirituality and cultural memory. In *Screening the Scriptures: Biblical Imagery and Theological Imagination in African Film*, the biblical text is neither statically reproduced nor abstractly allegorized—it is reinhabited and re-signified within indigenous worldviews that privilege oral tradition, symbolism, and narrative as loci of theological meaning.

Popular Theology and Lived Religion

In this context, popular theology does not originate from formal ecclesiastical structures or systematic theological reflection, but rather from the lived faith of ordinary believers. It emerges through the everyday practices, interpretations, and cultural expressions of African audiences who engage biblical narratives within their own socio-religious worlds. African films, in this sense, function as dynamic spaces for vernacular theology—arenas where the gospel is not merely proclaimed but embodied, visualized, and reinterpreted in relation to local experience.

This form of theological expression often reveals a creative synthesis of Christian imagery and indigenous cosmologies. The use of parables, miracles, and moral allegories within African cinematic storytelling reflects the enduring influence of oral tradition, in which religious meaning is conveyed through narrative performance, song, and ritual.⁵⁹ Theology, therefore, becomes not an abstract discipline but a living discourse—woven into the rhythms of daily life, communal memory, and cultural imagination.

Cultural Re-Interpretation of Scripture

African filmmakers do more than merely transplant biblical narratives onto African settings; they reimagine them through the symbols, idioms, and epistemologies of their own cultures. This creative engagement functions as an act of contextualization that challenges inherited colonial readings of Scripture while affirming indigenous modes of knowing. Through this lens, cinematic

⁵⁸ West, Gerald. *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*. Brill, 2016, p. 87

⁵⁹ Robert Beckford, *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music and Social Change*, Routledge, 2006, p. 89.

storytelling becomes a decolonial practice—one that reframes the sacred text in ways that reflect African historical consciousness and spiritual sensibilities.⁶⁰

Films such as *The Figurine* (Kunle Afolayan) and *Sinking Sands* (Leila Djansi) may not explicitly reference Scripture, yet they invoke biblical archetypes of fall, redemption, and prophetic confrontation within distinctly African worldviews. In weaving together elements of Christian narrative and traditional cosmology, these films reveal how theological imagination flourishes at the intersection of faith and culture. Rather than diluting Christian belief, such synthesis revitalizes it—producing a re-enchanted vision of theology that speaks with both local authenticity and global resonance.

Opportunities for Contextual Theological Engagement

Film, as both a visual and narrative art form, offers profound possibilities for theological reflection, missional engagement, and interfaith dialogue within African contexts. By drawing upon the symbolic universe that shapes everyday belief, cinematic storytelling functions as a kind of visual liturgy—an embodied catechism that bridges indigenous spirituality and biblical faith. In this sense, the screen becomes a sacred space where theology is not only taught but performed, translated, and reimagined through culturally resonant images.⁶¹

African films can thus serve as pedagogical tools for exploring theological themes such as justice, suffering, and hope, rooting these discussions in the lived realities of local communities. Scenes of communal lament or depictions of spiritual conflict, for instance, invite engagement with biblical texts on lamentation and spiritual warfare, while simultaneously affirming African cosmological insights. Moreover, this mode of engagement challenges the dominance of Western theological paradigms, advancing a plurivocal and polycentric vision of Christianity that speaks powerfully from the margins of global faith.

Tensions and Ambiguities

Nevertheless, this convergence between theology and cinematic imagination is not without complexity. A persistent challenge lies in negotiating the balance between fidelity to the biblical text and the creative freedom inherent in visual storytelling. Artistic interpretation can enliven theological reflection, yet it also carries the risk of distorting core doctrinal meanings. The task, therefore, is to maintain narrative integrity without reducing sacred texts to mere moral allegories or symbolic abstractions.⁶²

Tensions also emerge when biblical themes are reframed through African cosmologies, where practices such as ancestral remembrance or spirit mediation may intersect with Christian motifs. While such integrations enrich the theological landscape, they can also blur doctrinal boundaries. A constructive response requires theological imagination that is hospitable to ambiguity—one that allows dialogue between Scripture and culture to unfold without forcing uniformity. The aim is not seamless synthesis but a dynamic conversation in which biblical narratives and African worldviews mutually illuminate one another in faithful and transformative ways.⁶³

⁶⁰ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Chalice Press, 2000, p. 45.

⁶¹ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, Liturgical Press, 1997, p. 131.

⁶² Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Yale University Press, 1974, p. 12.

⁶³ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, Eerdmans, 2011, p. 76.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that African cinema functions as a vital arena for theological reflection and biblical reimagination. Within these films, sacred narratives are not merely retold but transformed—interpreted through the textures of indigenous worldviews, political histories, and communal spirituality. The result is a mode of theological expression that speaks from within Africa’s lived realities, allowing Scripture to find new voice in familiar idioms and cultural symbols.⁶⁴

Rather than reproducing biblical motifs in static form, these cinematic retellings indigenize them, translating complex theological ideas into accessible visual and narrative forms. Through character arcs, storytelling techniques, and symbolic imagery, filmmakers construct theologies that resonate deeply with African social and moral concerns.⁶⁵ Their work exemplifies how faith, culture, and creativity intersect to produce theology that is both local in expression and universal in reach.⁶⁶

African films, therefore, emerge as dynamic sites of everyday theology—spaces where the sacred and the secular converge, and where meaning is generated beyond formal ecclesial boundaries.⁶⁷ In this way, cinema becomes not merely entertainment but a medium of spiritual inquiry, enabling theology to engage culture in transformative and life-affirming ways.⁶⁸

Contribution to Scholarship

This study makes a significant contribution to the growing dialogue between African biblical hermeneutics and media theology by addressing an often-overlooked dimension—the engagement of Scripture through African cinematic narratives. While previous scholarship in African theology has richly explored contextual, liberationist, and postcolonial readings of the Bible, such work has largely remained confined to textual and ecclesial frameworks, leaving the realm of visual and popular culture underexamined.⁶⁹

By foregrounding film as a legitimate medium of theological inquiry, this study highlights how African cinema reimagines sacred texts through indigenous aesthetics, oral traditions, and cultural symbolism.⁷⁰ In doing so, it brings to light new interpretive spaces where theology and culture converge, and where the biblical story is rendered in ways that speak to the lived realities of African communities.⁷¹

Furthermore, the study advances the project of a reconstructive African theology by suggesting that popular cinema can serve as a creative locus for renewal and theological reflection within postcolonial contexts.⁷² Through this interdisciplinary approach, film emerges not merely as a form of entertainment or cultural critique, but as a dynamic site of theological discourse—one

⁶⁴ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 42–45.

⁶⁵ Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1995), 7–11

⁶⁶ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of an Emerging Agenda,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 21–25

⁶⁷ Clive Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film’s Challenge to Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), 116.

⁶⁸ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 33–36.

⁶⁹ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2002), 17–21

⁷⁰ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 50–54; Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 123–128.

⁷¹ Clive Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film’s Challenge to Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), 113–117.

⁷² Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1995), 34–39.

shaped by Africa's social histories, spiritual sensibilities, and imaginative engagement with the divine.⁷³

Recommendations for Further Research

Building on the insights of this study, several directions emerge for further research to enhance understanding of how African films engage with Scripture and theological imagination. First, audience reception studies remain an essential but underexplored dimension. Examining how viewers across diverse socio-cultural and religious settings interpret and internalize the theological messages conveyed on screen would provide valuable insight into the lived reception of these narratives. Such inquiry would not only assess the pedagogical and spiritual impact of African films but also reveal their potential as instruments of formation, critique, and resistance within communities of faith.⁷⁴

Second, comparative regional analyses across the African continent could deepen this discourse by illuminating how local histories, languages, and belief systems shape cinematic encounters with the Bible. The theological imagination expressed in West African cinema, for instance, may diverge from that of East or Southern Africa due to differing colonial legacies, religious dynamics, and cultural worldviews.⁷⁵ Attending to these regional distinctions would underscore the plurality of African hermeneutical traditions while identifying shared theological motifs that traverse geographical boundaries.⁷⁶

Finally, advancing this field calls for sustained interdisciplinary collaboration among theology, media studies, anthropology, and cultural studies. Integrating these perspectives would enable a more comprehensive understanding of how African cinema functions not only as a reflection of theological ideas but also as a formative space where faith, ethics, and identity are negotiated.⁷⁷ By broadening methodological horizons, future research can more fully apprehend the intricate interplay between sacred text, visual media, and the lived spiritual realities of African societies.⁷⁸

Recommendations to Address Contemporary Challenges

In light of these findings, further research should engage with contemporary challenges that both influence and are influenced by the theological content of African films. A pressing concern is the widening generational and cultural gap between younger audiences and traditional forms of theological communication.⁷⁹ As African urban youth increasingly construct their identities within digital and globalized media spaces, it becomes crucial to explore how cinematic interpretations of biblical narratives can reawaken interest in contextual expressions of faith. Film, as a creative and accessible medium, offers promising avenues for reimagining spirituality in ways that resonate with youth navigating complex realities of postcolonial identity, consumerism, and moral

⁷³ Marc P. Bosman, "Doing Theology in Film: From Representation to Embodiment," *Religion & Theology* 22, no. 1–2 (2015): 150–155

⁷⁴ Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 242–245

⁷⁵ Birgit Meyer, "Religious Revelation, Secrecy and the Limits of Visual Representation," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 4 (2006): 431–433.

⁷⁶ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2002), 12–14.

⁷⁷ Robert Beckford, *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2006), 79–83

⁷⁸ Jolyon Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 167–170.

⁷⁸ Birgit Meyer, "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter

⁷⁹ Birgit Meyer, "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion," *Religion* 40, no. 3 (2010): 214–216.

uncertainty.⁸⁰ Investigating how such narratives can embody and communicate biblical ethics may provide valuable insight into addressing patterns of spiritual disengagement among emerging generations.

Beyond questions of faith formation, African societies continue to grapple with urgent moral and socio-political issues such as gender-based violence, corruption, and religious extremism. Films that draw upon biblical motifs to expose injustice or reframe notions of communal responsibility demonstrate how theology can assume a prophetic and transformative role within the public sphere. Further research could therefore examine how these cinematic texts operate as forms of public theology—mediating ethical reflection, inspiring collective conscience, and challenging systems of oppression.⁸¹

Finally, in contexts marked by interreligious diversity and tension, African films that reinterpret biblical themes within pluralistic frameworks can serve as catalysts for dialogue and mutual understanding.⁸² By analyzing how these films cultivate spaces of empathy and reconciliation, scholars can illuminate the potential of African cinema to contribute to intercultural theology and social harmony. In doing so, future research may reveal how visual storytelling functions not only as cultural expression but as a dynamic instrument of theological communication, social healing, and communal renewal.⁸³

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⁸⁰ Ezra Chitando, *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context* (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2012), 97–99.

⁸¹ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “African Theologies in the 21st Century: The Quest for Epistemic Justice,” *Exchange* 37, no. 3 (2008): 278–280; Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1995), 41–44.

⁸² Musa W. Dube, *The HIV and AIDS Bible: Selected Essays* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 29–32.

⁸³ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 121–123

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