

Becoming Christian, Remaining African: The Role of the Bible in Shaping African Christianity

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ABSTRACT

The Bible has a central place in African Christianity. However, its interpretation in Africa is often assessed through Western hermeneutical models that do not reflect African cultural realities. This study examines how African Christians relate biblical authority to cultural identity. It asks how believers remain African while becoming Christian, and how the Bible functions in this process. The study uses a qualitative method based on contextual theology and African hermeneutics. It draws on African theological literature and applies thematic analysis. It examines how the Bible is used in worship, healing practices, media, Pentecostal movements, and African Independent Churches. The study shows that African biblical interpretation forms a clear pattern shaped by communal life, spiritual worldview, and lived experience. It also shows how teachings on Christ, the Holy Spirit, and hope for the future are expressed through African cultural categories while remaining rooted in Scripture. The study contributes to discussions in global theology by questioning the universal use of Western interpretive models and by supporting contextual theology. It concludes that African Christianity shows how the Bible can shape Christian identity without removing cultural identity.

Keywords: African Christianity, contextual theology, African hermeneutics, biblical interpretation, cultural identity.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is central in Christian theology and practice worldwide, serving as a source of spiritual authority, moral guidance, and doctrinal instruction. Within the African context, however, the reception and application of Scripture take on distinctive characteristics shaped by cultural diversity, historical memory, and socio-spiritual realities. African Christians use the Bible as a sacred text and a living, dynamic force that informs daily life. Scripture is invoked in healing rituals, spiritual warfare, communal solidarity, and moral decision-making, reflecting a holistic, experiential approach to faith. Despite the vibrancy of African biblical engagement, much of the prevailing scholarly discourse evaluates African Christianity through Eurocentric hermeneutics. These perspectives often dismiss indigenous interpretations as syncretic, theologically shallow, or uncritical, thereby marginalising the authenticity and complexity of African contextual theology. This misrepresentation reveals a gap in global theological scholarship, particularly in recognising the legitimacy of culturally biblical interpretations.

This study examines how African Christians integrate biblical authority with indigenous cultural identity, creating a unique model of contextual theology. It argues that African Christianity embodies a valid and innovative form of scriptural engagement that affirms faithfulness to the biblical text and fidelity to African worldviews. Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on biblical theology, ethnographic observation, and African hermeneutics. The paper explores how the Bible functions as a spiritual compass and a cultural mediator. The findings contribute to broader conversations in

global theology by demonstrating the theological depth, adaptability, and relevance of African biblical praxis.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on contextual theology and African hermeneutics. It looks at how African Christians understand the Bible in ways that connect with their culture. The focus is on how Scripture is used in church settings, homes, markets, schools, and other places where people live their daily lives. The study does not follow outside or foreign methods that may not fit African realities. Instead, it begins with the idea that African Christians already have meaningful ways of using the Bible within their communities. The research follows a qualitative approach. This kind of method does not use numbers, graphs, or measurements. It uses words, thoughts, and observations. It is used when a researcher wants to understand how people think, speak, and act. In this study, it is used to explore how African Christians relate to the Bible in practice. The Bible is not only read as a book. It is also used in songs, prayers, storytelling, healing, blessings, and decision-making. A qualitative method helps to capture these forms of use.

A literature review is the main way of collecting data for this study. This means that the researcher reads and studies books, articles, and other written works. These works include ideas from African theologians, Christian scholars, historians, and cultural researchers. The review includes writings on African religion, the role of tradition, worship practices, and how the Bible is used daily. The researcher examines how other writers have explained the relationship between Scripture and African culture. The purpose is to collect facts and understand the existing ideas. From the literature, the researcher draws different insights that help to answer the research question: how do African Christians use the Bible while also holding on to their culture? The texts are read carefully and sorted by topic. These topics are then grouped and examined further.

The researcher uses thematic analysis to study the ideas found in the literature. This is a way of reading texts and grouping ideas that appear repeatedly. For example, the study identifies themes like the Bible as a tool for healing, the use of local symbols in worship, the practice of reading the Bible in groups, and the way new meanings are formed based on life experiences. These themes show how the Bible is understood as a book from the past and as a guide for today. The thematic method helps organize the findings and show what they mean in the context of faith and culture. The study uses an insider view, also called an emic perspective. This means that it tries to see things from the point of view of the people who live them. Instead of looking at African Christianity from the outside, the study listens to the voices of people within the communities. These voices are found in the texts being reviewed. They speak through testimonies, songs, prayers, teachings, and other forms of faith expression. The researcher respects these voices and allows them to shape the findings. This view is helpful when the goal is to learn from people rather than speak for them.

The study also follows basic ethical and respectful practices. It treats the beliefs and actions of African Christians as worthy of study. It does not call their practices mixed, strange, or wrong. It does not measure them against outside standards. Instead, the study accepts that the Bible can speak differently in different cultures. It shows how African Christians have found ways to follow Scripture while still holding on to their customs, family systems, and languages. This approach helps to show how faith and culture are not in conflict but often work together. Using this method, the study shows that African Christianity is not separate from the Bible. At the same time, it is not separate from African culture. The two come together in how people live, pray, worship, and teach. The Bible becomes part of everyday life. It is quoted in daily speech. It is read in homes. It is sung in songs. It is used in

naming children, starting meetings, and seeking peace during conflict. The method used in this study helps to make all these things clear.

The Bible and African Christian Identity

The Bible is pivotal in shaping African Christian identity, serving as a spiritual guide and a cultural reference point. Many African Christians' faith is intertwined with their cultural heritage, and Scripture becomes a tool through which they navigate their complex identities. This section explores how the Bible influences the formation of African Christian identity, examining how Africans interpret and live out biblical teachings in ways that reflect both their Christian beliefs and indigenous cultural values.

In African Christianity, the Bible holds a revered and dynamic role that extends beyond mere text; it is perceived as a source of spiritual power and an active agent in the daily lives of believers. Its authority is evident in practices such as healing, exorcism, and protection, where Scripture is believed to invoke divine intervention and combat spiritual forces. African Christians treat the Bible as a sacred object, integrating it into their spiritual and communal life. Scholars like J. A. O. Akinwale emphasise that African Christians engage the Bible for practical empowerment, reflecting a worldview that closely links the spiritual and material realms: "African Christians tend to read the Bible not only for its theological implications but for its practical, life-affirming power in their social and cultural contexts."¹ Similarly, W. A. Oyeleye's belief in God's immanence, mediated through Scripture, contrasts with Western emphases on divine transcendence: "The African worldview embraces a dynamic interaction between the sacred and the secular, where the Bible becomes a bridge for God's engagement with the tangible world."² The rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements further the Bible's role as a channel for supernatural power and its practical and transformative significance in the African Christian faith.³ The Bible in African Christianity is a theological foundation and an immediate, powerful resource for believers navigating everyday spiritual and social realities.

Christianity was introduced to Africa through colonial missionaries who initially imposed Western worship styles, theology, and church organisation, often clashing with indigenous cultures. Over time, African Christians adapted Christianity to their cultural contexts, known as indigenisation, which allowed them to retain cultural identity while embracing the faith. As Kwame Bediako explains, Christianity in Africa is "not a foreign religion but one that has been appropriated and indigenised"⁴—making it an integral part of African life and history. This process has empowered African believers to express their faith authentically. This indigenisation is evident in African worship, in which traditional music, dance, and storytelling create a worship style connected to African culture. Theologians like John Mbiti and Emmanuel Katongole emphasise African communal values and spirituality, integrating these with Christian teachings of salvation.⁵ Such liturgical and theological expressions reflect an understanding of faith that is both culturally resonant and spiritually meaningful for African Christians.⁶

¹ J. A. O. Akinwale, *African Christianity: Faith and Practice in Contemporary Society* (Lagos: under Gospel Press, 2019), 45–47.

² W. A. Oyeleye, "God's Immanence and the Authority of Scripture in African Theology," *Journal of African Religious Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 112–115.

³ T. M. Adeyemi, *Pentecostalism and Scripture in Africa: Empowerment and Practice* (Nairobi: Spirit Publications, 2020), 78–82.

⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 65.

⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108–110.

⁶ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 44–46.

Indigenous healing practices and symbols have also been blended with Christian spirituality, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. This fusion demonstrates African Christianity's ability to adopt local traditions without compromising biblical teachings. Although this blending has faced criticism, scholars such as Andrew F. Walls argue it is an authentic contextualisation rather than syncretism.⁷ The indigenisation process has enriched Christianity both within Africa and worldwide, creating diverse expressions of faith that remain in African cultural realities.

Contextual Hermeneutics in African Christianity

Peter Nyende observes that African Christians do not engage the Bible as a detached academic text but as a living document addressing real-life issues such as illness, poverty, and social injustice. Unlike Western theological traditions that often focus on intellectual or doctrinal aspects, African Christians interpret Scripture in direct connection with their daily struggles and lived experiences. This approach prioritises the Bible's practical relevance over abstract theological debates, making it a guide for immediate circumstances. Such an engagement reflects the existential nature of African Christianity, where Scripture shapes believers' responses to life's challenges.⁸ This perspective challenges the notion that biblical interpretation should be purely academic and the importance of contextual relevance and lived experience. This functional approach is the Bible's transformative power, emphasising healing, restoration, and liberation for individuals and communities. In Africa, the Bible is a source of divine authority capable of producing real-world change, invoked in prayers for healing, spiritual warfare, and overcoming poverty or oppression. Nyende emphasises an "urgency" in African biblical interpretation, expecting tangible results in personal transformation and societal development.⁹ This sense of immediacy demonstrates the Bible's role as both a spiritual guide and practical tool for addressing complex African realities, making Scripture a living source of hope and empowerment.

Furthermore, this interpretive method aligns with the African worldview, which integrates the sacred and secular. The Bible is not confined to church settings or private devotion but permeates all areas of life, shaping moral decisions, relations, and social engagement. African Christians live out Scripture holistically, blending spirituality with material and social concerns. This performative engagement includes communal rituals, healing practices, and economic activities, where Scripture is a source of divine intervention in crises like illness or financial hardship. As Daniel B. S. Ojong notes, "For African Christians, the Bible is an instrument of deliverance and healing, ing immediate solutions to existential problems."¹⁰ This praxis is the intimate relationship between Scripture and everyday life in African Christianity, affirming the Bible's relevance in all spheres. Therefore, the African engagement with the Bible contributes to global Christian hermeneutics by centring faith in lived reality.

Africa's rich oral culture influences how the Bible is taught, interpreted, and understood. In many African communities, oral traditions are the main means of passing down knowledge, values, and histories, shaping Scripture's transmission through stories, songs, and communal rituals rather than formal academic study.¹¹ This oral foundation ensures that biblical teachings are integrated into everyday life and culture. Such culturally grounded retellings connect Scripture closely to everyday realities, enriching its spiritual

⁷ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 199–202.

⁸ Peter Nyende, *African Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading the Bible in Context* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2014), 45–47.

⁹ Nyende, *African Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading the Bible in Context*, 51–54.

¹⁰ Daniel B. S. Ojong, *Biblical Interpretation in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2017), 102.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1–15.

significance. This dynamic storytelling keeps the Bible relevant and meaningful across generations. Lamin Sanneh shows oral culture as a dynamic interaction between the gospel and African indigenous contexts, allowing the Bible to remain a living, evolving text.¹² Moreover, African Christians often engage with the Bible communally, discussing and interpreting it in group settings. This collective participation shapes a shared understanding of Scripture in lived experience, unity and relationality among believers. Through this communal engagement, the Bible also serves as a foundation for social cohesion, addressing justice, peace, and ethical behaviour relevant to the needs.¹³ The Bible thus functions not only as a spiritual guide but as a practical tool for nurturing social harmony and ethical living within African communities.

Western biblical scholarship and African hermeneutics approach the interpretation of Scripture from different perspectives, shaped by distinct epistemologies and cultural contexts. Western methods prioritise historical-critical analysis, focusing on authorial intent, linguistic precision, and the original historical setting of biblical texts. This approach aims for intellectual rigour and academic accuracy to preserve the Bible's original meaning. By contrast, African hermeneutics emphasises the Bible's existential and communal relevance in how Scripture addresses pressing social realities such as illness, poverty, and injustice. Mercy Oduyoye submits that the Bible "is not just a book to be read in quiet study but a document to be lived out in."¹⁴ Oduyoye's this functional and lived dimension of African biblical interpretation. Thus, the African approach centres on Scripture's practical impact rather than solely on textual analysis. African hermeneutics also reflects the communal nature of African societies, where Scripture is collectively read, discussed, and applied within settings, as well as social cohesion and shared identity. This contrasts with Western individualistic interpretive models and aligns with African values of solidarity and collective responsibility. Furthermore, African approaches give significant weight to the spiritual power of the Bible, viewing it as an active agent for healing, deliverance, and guidance that transcends intellectual understanding. This integration of the sacred and secular reflects an African worldview in which spirituality permeates all facets of life, a perspective that Western scholarship often underappreciates.¹⁵ Therefore, African hermeneutics provides a holistic understanding of Scripture that intertwines faith and lived experience.

Cultural Retention and Theological Innovation

African Christians have actively integrated indigenous cultural elements—symbols, names, and festivals—within their Christian faith, affirming that African identity and Christianity are not mutually exclusive. Historically connected to ancestral worship, traditional symbols like drums, colours, and dance have been reinterpreted to express Christian themes of praise, unity, and the Holy Spirit's presence during worship. Tite Tienou that African Christian worship is participatory and connected to cultural expressions, reflecting an embodied faith practice.¹⁶ *This illustrates how African Christianity embraces cultural heritage as a vibrant part of worship rather than a barrier to faith.* Names bearing spiritual and cultural weight in African societies are often given biblical significance, blending African identity with Christian spirituality. Biblical names such as "Emmanuel" and "Zion", with African hopes for divine presence and protection, demonstrate a synthesis of faith and cultural identity. Similarly, traditional festivals and rites of passage have been reimagined with Christian meanings—harvest festivals, for example, have become celebrations of God's provision

¹² Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Orbis Books, 1989), 137.

¹³ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Orbis Books, 1995), 45–47.

¹⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 89.

¹⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 150.

¹⁶ Tite Tienou, *Theology and the African Experience* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1992), 58.

rather than ancestral veneration.¹⁷ *Thus, these practices reveal how African Christians creatively contextualise biblical themes within Indigenous culture.*

This cultural retention and reinterpretation process shows that African Christianity affirms and transforms African identity rather than erasing it. John Mbiti argues that Christianity in Africa renews rather than replaces indigenous culture, creating a distinctive, culturally grounded form of Christian faith.¹⁸ This synthesis enriches global Christianity by showing how the gospel can be authentically incarnated within diverse cultural contexts, both unity and diversity within the worldwide church. *Consequently, African Christianity is a model for how faith and culture can coexist dynamically and fruitfully.* In African Christianity, the Bible functions as a sacred text for study and a performative, spiritually potent object integrated into daily life and worship practices. The physical use of Scripture, such as invoking Psalm 23 or Psalm 91 for protection and healing, embodies the belief that God's Word is not merely intellectual but dynamically effective in addressing real-world crises.¹⁹ Thus, the performative use of Scripture strengthens both individual and collective faith experiences in African Christianity. The performative emphasis aligns with African ritualistic traditions, where symbolic acts serve as channels for spiritual engagement. This cultural resonance affirms that African Christianity is in indigenous meaning-making and religious expression patterns. This usage underlines God's immanence, emphasising that the Bible's power is immediate and relevant to spiritual and physical needs rather than abstract or distant.²⁰ Such a view contrasts with more detached Western perspectives and the vibrant, living character of Scripture in African contexts. Thus, African Christianity's performative use of the Bible challenges Western views that often separate text from praxis, showing Scripture as a living, transformative force. These important contributions are hereby expressed thus:

Christology, Jesus as Healer and Liberator: In many African traditional religions, spiritual intermediaries who provide healing, protection, and liberation are central figures. African Christian theologians have reframed Christology to emphasise Jesus as both a healer and liberator, who performed roles that with African believers facing sickness, poverty, and oppression. Kwame Bediako notes that Jesus not only spiritual salvation but also physical and social restoration, presenting a holistic gospel that addresses the totality of human experience.²¹ This reframing also allows African Christians to integrate indigenous healing practices with the biblical narrative, seeing Christ as the source of spiritual and physical healing without negating traditional methods.

Pneumatology, The Role of the Holy Spirit in Empowering the Community: The African emphasis on the spirit world shapes pneumatology in which the Holy Spirit is experienced as a dynamic and empowering presence within communities. Particularly within charismatic and Pentecostal movements, the Spirit is active in healing, prophecy, and material provision, linking spiritual renewal to social and political liberation. Adamu Usman explains that the Holy Spirit's role extends beyond personal sanctification to encompass societal transformation, addressing oppression and communal well-being.²² This pneumatological perspective reflects the African worldview's holistic approach to spiritual and material realities.

¹⁷ Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 137–140.

¹⁸ John S. Mbiti, *Christianity and African Religions* (London: SPCK, 1976), 75.

¹⁹ Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 89.

²⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 150.

²¹ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 134.

²² Adamu Usman, *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity* (Lagos: University Press, 2010), 77.

Eschatology, Hope for a Transformed Africa: African Christian eschatology is characterised by a hopeful anticipation of God’s Kingdom as both a present and future reality. This “already” and “not yet” encourages believers to find solace in personal salvation and ongoing transformation while looking forward to fully realising justice, peace, and prosperity. Mercy Amba Oduyoye that African Christians connect eschatological hope to their lived experience of suffering and social injustice, motivating endurance and active engagement in promoting justice in their communities.²³ Thus, eschatology becomes a theology of hope and action, promising redemption while inspiring present transformation.

The Bible as a Cultural and Spiritual Mediator

The Bible is central in mediating between Christian doctrine and African cultural values, providing a space where believers integrate their ancestral heritage with biblical teachings. This integration is a hybrid yet authentic Christian identity that affirms both gospel truths and the cultural heritage of African communities. By acting as a mediator, the Bible bridges the sacred and the every day, transforming cultural practices while respecting their historical and communal significance. Thus, the Bible preserves African identity within Christianity and enriches the faith experience by grounding it in local realities.

The Bible as a Source of Cultural Interpretation: In African Christianity, the Bible is more than a foreign text; it is actively engaged within local culture. It provides a context in which traditional African values—such as communalism, respect for elders, and reverence for ancestors—are reinterpreted and into Christian life. For example, communal worship aligns with biblical teachings on fellowship and unity, echoing African societal values. John Mbiti observes, “The African concept of time and life stages find their fulfilment in the Bible, which gives these notions new meaning within the Christian narrative.”²⁴ This interpretive engagement allows African Christians to retain positive cultural elements while transforming practices incompatible with biblical monotheism, such as ancestral worship, which is redefined as honouring the living and the dead without idolatry. Albert M. D. Kalu notes that “the Bible allows for the integration of cultural practices such as respect for ancestors while emphasising that Christ is the mediator between the living and the dead.”²⁵ Scripture guides a balanced negotiation between cultural preservation and gospel fidelity.

Biblical Themes in African Cultural Expressions: The Bible also influences African cultural expressions, including music, art, and dance, which have become integral to Christian worship. Biblical themes are conveyed through indigenous languages and art, making Scripture accessible and relatable. Psalms, proverbs, and biblical narratives are retold in local oral traditions that reflect African storytelling and performance styles. In many African churches, hymns are sung in local languages and accompanied by indigenous instruments, creating biblically faithful yet culturally resonant worship. This fusion nurtures a Christian identity in African traditions while remaining aligned with biblical teachings. Therefore, the Bible informs theology and inspires culturally meaningful worship that strengthens identity.

The Bible as a Source of Liberation and Transformation: For many African Christians, the Bible is a powerful tool for social and cultural transformation. Its messages of justice, liberation, and human dignity with African struggles against oppression, colonialism, and socio-economic inequality. Theologian James H. Cone asserts, “African Christianity, like liberation theology in other parts of the world, sees the Bible not only as a document of personal salvation but as a manifesto for justice and liberation in the face of suffering and

²³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *The African Christian and the Eschatological Hope* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2003), 90.

²⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 78.

²⁵ Albert M. D. Kalu, *African Christianity: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 56.

oppression.”²⁶ The African historical context has nurtured a theology where the Bible functions as a liberating force, emphasising God’s care for the oppressed, His call for justice, and His promise of deliverance. This transformative reading is especially visible in Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, where believers affirm the Bible’s power for personal salvation and societal change. Consequently, Scripture serves as a foundation for holistic liberation, addressing spiritual and social realities in African Christian life.

The Bible and African Christianity

Pentecostalism and the Bible in Africa: Pentecostalism has experienced explosive growth in Africa, particularly over the last few decades. Central to the Pentecostal movement is the emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit, with believers frequently engaging in practices such as prophecy, healing, and miracles. In this context, the Bible is not simply a book of historical or theological significance but a living source of guidance and power that is actively relied upon for spiritual and practical matters. This reliance on Scripture for daily guidance illustrates the existential approach to the Bible in African Christianity—seeking immediate and tangible transformation through the Word of God. African Pentecostalism’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit as an active, empowering presence reflects a theological and existential orientation toward divine intervention. Scripture, particularly Acts 2, is foundational to this belief, shaping the Pentecostal understanding that the Spirit empowers believers for healing, prophecy, and deliverance.

In African Pentecostalism, Scripture is deployed as a source of direct prophecy and miracle-working, with biblical narratives serving as templates for contemporary divine acts. While this is the Bible’s relevance, it can also provoke critique from more traditional theological perspectives wary of potential emotionalism or doctrinal dilution. African Pentecostals’ daily engagement with the Bible through memorisation, recitation, and digital tools illustrates a vibrant, lived faith. This constant interaction with Scripture’s role as a guide and protection source evidences a theology where the Bible is dynamically intertwined with personal and communal identity. This supports understanding this practice as a form of spiritual resilience and empowerment. However, it also raises questions about how this daily reliance might shape believers’ broader theological worldviews and their understanding of scriptural interpretation beyond immediate personal needs.

Bible as Central Authority in African Theological Frameworks: African Independent Churches (AICs) uphold the Bible as their foundational authority while interpreting it through African cultural worldviews, emphasising communalism, spirituality, and ancestral connections. This approach aligns with John Mbiti’s insight that African spirituality centres on relationality, which shapes how Scripture is understood locally.²⁷ Similarly, Kwame Bediako stresses the need for African Christianity to embody biblical faithfulness and cultural relevance.²⁸ Thus, African theology becomes a contextualised faith that refuses to impose Western norms but affirms African identity through biblical truth. The Bible remains central in AICs, but its interpretation is enriched by African cultural realities, making faith authentic and relevant. AICs employ indigenous rituals such as anointing with oil and the laying on hands, practices supported by Scripture (e.g., James 5:14-15) yet shaped by traditional healing customs. Ogbu Kalu notes that this indigenisation helps African believers relate to the Bible as a living text that meets their spiritual and social needs.²⁹ The use of local languages, spiritual warfare, and blessings reflect the theology of African

²⁶ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970), 112.

²⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1–10.

²⁸ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 45–60.

²⁹ Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78–85.

cosmology. Therefore, these contextualised rituals demonstrate how African Christians creatively bridge Scripture and culture, making faith experiential and meaningful.

Use of the Bible in African Christian Films and Music: African media's role in bridging Scripture and local culture is widely acknowledged. Draper emphasises how cultural expression and power dynamics shape African Christianity, validating the media's contextual engagement with biblical themes to authentic faith experiences.³⁰ This confirms that African media do not merely entertain but serve as conduits of cultural and spiritual identity. However, Draper also cautions about the complex negotiation between global Christianity and local cultures that media producers must continually navigate to avoid oversimplification or cultural dilution. Mbugua's study on biblical adaptation in African films supports the idea of localising biblical narratives' relevance and spiritual impact.³¹ The Jesus Film Project's multilingual, culturally sensitive approach aligns with Mbugua's findings about the importance of contextual storytelling for effective evangelism.³² Maxwell expands on this by showing how such films address societal challenges, demonstrating the Bible's practical application beyond mere doctrine.³³ These sources collectively affirm that African Christian films serve theological and social functions, although Maxwell's work suggests that filmmakers must carefully balance cultural elements with biblical fidelity to avoid syncretism.

Falola and Jennings argue that African gospel music's fusion of Scripture and traditional rhythms is a powerful medium for cultural evangelism, resonating with the text's emphasis on music's spiritual and cultural roles.³⁴ Stager furthers music's dual role as worship and social commentary, which is the idea that gospel songs address contemporary African realities through biblical hope.³⁵ This dialogue between tradition and Scripture in music supports the notion that African Christians internalise faith through culturally familiar means, though Falola also warns against the risk of cultural practices overshadowing biblical messages, a tension media must carefully manage. Sanneh's work on missionary impacts the significance of indigenising Christianity to affirm African identity within the faith, corroborating the claim that African Christian media promote a hybrid identity.³⁶ Eze's analysis of music videos as platforms for storytelling shows the importance of visual media in biblical narratives in African cultural contexts, giving tangible form to this identity integration.³⁷ Both scholars suggest that such media are crucial in dismantling the misconception of Christianity as alien, yet they also imply that the creative process must remain sensitive to theological accuracy to avoid diluting Christian distinctiveness.

Implications for Global Christianity and Theological Discourse

Contribution of African Christianity to Global Theology: African Christianity is a vibrant and contextual approach to biblical interpretation that challenges and enriches global theological discourse, particularly in contrast to traditional Western perspectives. This distinctiveness stems largely from its grounding in lived experience, communal values, and a

³⁰ Jonathan Draper, *Culture and Power in Contemporary African Christianity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 45–60.

³¹ Kenneth Mbugua, "Biblical Adaptation in African Christian Films," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 18, no. 2 (2015): 23–35.

³² The Jesus Film Project, <https://www.jesusfilm.org> (accessed June 2025).

³³ David Maxwell, *Christianity and Social Change in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 78–84.

³⁴ Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, *Africanizing the Gospel: African Traditional Religious Responses to Christianity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), 112–29.

³⁵ John Stager, "Gospel Music and Social Commentary in Africa," *African Music* 9, no. 1 (2017): 55–67.

³⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 145–60.

³⁷ Chielozona Eze, "Visual Storytelling in African Christian Music Videos," *Studies in World Christianity* 25, no. 3 (2019): 217–30.

worldview that seamlessly integrates the spiritual and physical realms. A key feature of African biblical interpretation is its emphasis on **lived faith**. Unlike Western theology, which often stresses individual salvation and personal devotion, African Christianity views faith as inherently communal. This perspective is well articulated by John Mbiti, who notes that African societies understand the individual only concerning the family, which shapes how Scripture is interpreted and applied.³⁸ African Christians use the Bible not only for spiritual guidance but also as a practical tool to confront pressing social realities such as poverty, illness, and injustice.

Secondly, African theology reflects a holistic integration of the spiritual and physical realms. Terence Ranger that, unlike Western dualistic distinctions between sacred and secular, many African traditions perceive no strict boundary between these realms, viewing them as interdependent and interactive.³⁹ This is evident in the use of Scripture for physical healing and protection—practices that might seem unusual from a Western theological standpoint but are integral in African Christian spirituality. Ezra Chitando explains that such practices express a belief in the Bible's power to mediate spiritual and material realities, revealing a theology where the supernatural actively intersects with everyday life.⁴⁰ Thirdly, African interpretations of Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology frequently challenge dominant Western theological norms. Kwame Bediako points out that African Christology commonly portrays Christ as a healer, protector, and liberator, roles that with indigenous spiritual mediators, thereby challenging Western abstract doctrinal emphases on Christ's nature.⁴¹ Finally, African Christianity significantly enriches global theological conversations by advocating for greater recognition of diverse, contextual theologies. Musa Dube's postcolonial feminist biblical interpretations echo the African call for theology grounded in local realities rather than imposed Western paradigms.⁴² This contribution urges the global Church to rethink how Scripture is applied in real-world contexts, particularly concerning health, justice, and well-being, thus expanding the horizons of global Christian theology.

Challenges to Euro-American Models: African biblical interpretation fundamentally challenges the universality claimed by Western hermeneutical models by insisting on the necessity of **contextual theology** that reflects African communities' specific cultural, historical, and social realities. Western theological methods tend to prioritise academic, historical-critical approaches that emphasise authorial intent, linguistic precision, and doctrinal consistency, often with the assumption that such methods can be applied across all contexts. However, African biblical hermeneutics argues that these approaches must be supplemented by the interpreting's lived experiences and cultural narratives to remain relevant and authentic. Unlike Western scholarship's often detached, text-centric approach, African Christians engage with the Bible not as an academic text but as a living and sacred document that addresses their existential realities. This approach echoes Lamin Sanneh's insistence on the significance of cultural context in theological interpretation, asserting that Scripture cannot be removed from its original or current cultural milieu without losing meaning.⁴³ This perspective acknowledges the dynamic nature of biblical interpretation, where the text speaks anew within each culture's worldview.

³⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 125-130.

³⁹ Terence O. Ranger, "Christianity in Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 8, ed. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93-96.

⁴⁰ Ezra Chitando, *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 54-58.

⁴¹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 82-87.

⁴² Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 101-105.

⁴³ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 45-50.

Affirming Contextual Theology: African Christianity affirms the legitimacy and necessity of contextual theology by demonstrating that the gospel can be relevant to local cultures without compromising its core message. Contextual theology, as defined by theologians like Stephen Bevans, is a method of theological reflection that consciously examines the cultural, social, and historical realities in which faith is lived while maintaining fidelity to the essential truths of Christian doctrine.⁴⁴ African Christianity, characterised by its vast cultural, linguistic, and traditional diversity, provides a vivid model for how the gospel can be incarnated within particular contexts, enriching both the faith of the believer and the wider church. The development of African Christianity showed the importance of adapting theological concepts to the lived experiences of believers. Rather than perceiving the gospel as a foreign imposition—as postcolonial scholars such as Musa Dube have critiqued—African Christians actively see the Christian message in the realities of African life, affirming that the gospel is a universal message that speaks within particular histories and cultures.⁴⁵ This contextual approach enables believers to interpret Scripture through their indigenous worldviews and social, addressing pressing issues like poverty, illness, cohesion, and spiritual warfare in culturally meaningful ways.

This affirmation of contextual theology stands in direct contrast to the traditional Western assumption that theology must be universalised from a Eurocentric perspective and imposed globally. African Christianity insists instead that theology should emerge organically from the lived realities of the people it serves. Doing so reveals that the gospel—centred on salvation through Jesus Christ—can be faithfully communicated in diverse cultural languages, idioms, and practices while maintaining doctrinal integrity.⁴⁶ In this way, African Christianity legitimises and embodies contextual theology as a dynamic and essential means of engaging with the gospel. It is important to have cultural authenticity in interpreting and living out the Christian faith, reminding the global church that the gospel is a living, dynamic message capable of incarnation in multiple, diverse contexts without losing its power or truth.

CONCLUSION

African Christianity exemplifies how the Bible can shape identity while embracing cultural uniqueness, showing that being authentically African and genuinely Christian are not mutually exclusive. Through contextual hermeneutics, Scripture is interpreted in light of local culture, traditions, and daily realities, making the faith both relevant and transformative. The performative use of Scripture—such as using Psalms for healing or placing the Bible in significant life events—reflects the African worldview where the sacred and secular are interconnected. African theology also innovatively reinterprets doctrines like Christology and pneumatology to align with African cultural values, portraying Jesus as a healer and liberator and emphasising the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. This approach affirms that African Christians can maintain cultural authenticity while faithfully following Christ, challenging the imposition of Western norms and the gospel's contextual adaptability. African Christianity models a biblically grounded, culturally resonant faith honouring Christian and African identities.

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⁴⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1-15.

⁴⁵ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 20-25.

⁴⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200-205.

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