

The Bible and Africa: Some Trends Towards Advancing African Biblical Scholarship

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Abstract

Viewing the dominance of the Western Scholarship that produce the Western Knowledge on the System and Philosophies in academic space of Africa, shows that African culture has been derogatorily undermine. It is in this regard that even the Bible was read and interpreted in the tradition of Western Scholarship. This has made Africa to be misrepresented in Biblical Scholarship. Significantly, this has made even the white missionaries from the west who introduced Christianity in Africa unable to meet up with the African expectations. It is in an attempt to account for the holistic worldview of African culture and the Bible that the rapid exploration of African Scholarship of Biblical subjects is being encouraged. African Scholarship stands a better chance to defend the continent as far as theological and biblical discussion is concerned. However, despite the significant influence and development of African Biblical Scholarship, there is still high expectation compared to what is obtainable in the western world. It is to this effect that this work attempts to highlight some factors that resulted to poor Biblical Scholarship in Africa. It also seeks to highlight some trends towards advancing African Biblical Scholarship.

Keywords: Biblical, Scholarship, Africa, Trend

Introduction

African biblical scholarship has been the reflection of the biblical interpretation with its implication to African Experience, Values and cultures. The articulation of African Biblical scholarship is not a new discourse. It has been a topic of conversation for decades now. Many African biblical scholars had contributed to the peculiarity and development of African biblical scholarship compared with what is obtainable within western biblical scholarship. It was Adamo who reiterated that the bible is read and interpreted in the universities and seminaries in Africa in the tradition of Western scholarship.¹ Therefore, the fundamental of African Biblical scholarship is the dismantling of Western tradition in Biblical interpretation that is forfeiting its implications to Africans. African Biblical scholarship is not without challenges. Some of the challenges are factors that are leading to poor global visibility and expectations. Significantly to the articles, African biblical scholars are tasked to provide intellectual excellence by improving and actualizing some trends towards advancing African Biblical Scholarship.

Literature Review

There are many studies that dealt with issues of African biblical scholarship; however, a few related studies are worth mentioning. Unwaegbute examined the African biblical studies and the question of methodology.² His work calls attention to the need for African biblical scholars in

¹ David T. Adamo. "Decolonizing the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa." *Bulleting for Old Testament Studies in Africa* (2005). <http://www.mhs.no/article-204.shtm/> Retrieved, October 26, 2024

² Kingsley I. Uwaegbute, "African Biblical Studies and the Question of Methodology: A Focus on New Testament Scholarship in Nigeria" *HTS Theological Studies*. Vol. 79;No.4(2023)1-7

Nigeria to emphasizes methodological rigor in their research which will leads toward global visibility.³ Although a reasonable knowledge could be derived from Uwaegbute work, but his work on African Biblical Scholarship is limited to methodological rigor in New Testament. Little is said on the factors that resulted to poor biblical scholarship in Africa.

Another conservative scholar who contributed for the understanding of African biblical Scholarship is Mbuvi.⁴ Mbuvi work evaluated the conversation and makes the core for broadening the discipline of Biblical studies as a whole.⁵ His work recognized that all interpretation is premised on the located-ness of the interpreter. Thus, African biblical scholarship should be without forfeiting its implications beyond the African continents.⁶ Mbuvi work reflect that biblical interpretation should have its implication within Africa. He did not extent to other trends that could advance African biblical scholarship which is the trust of this work.

Another work which is worthy of given attention is that of Ugwueye and Umeanolue.⁷ Their work focuses on serious academic research in the area of Old Testament.⁸ Their paper examined the necessity and challenges of Old Testaments scholarship in Africa and also seek the cooperation among African universities and Old Testament Scholars evolvement of methodology, planning of curriculum that reflects African perspectives as solutions.⁹ Ugwueye and Umeanolue work revealed how biblical scholarship faced challenges in the development of Africa. Although their work is closely related to this article, but their work is limited to Old Testament scholarship. New Testament and other related biblical scholarship were not addressed in their work.

Another crucial work to be considered in this paper is the argument of West. His work basically analyses the trajectory, reflecting on how three South African biblical scholars (Funther Wihenbery, Makhosazana Nzimande and Hulisani Ramantswana) have discerned the need for the African decolonial project to recognize and recover the class divisions within a culture.¹⁰ West work contribution to African Biblical scholarship is how to discern class distinctions within a culture in South Africa. His work fails to address the challenges that African biblical scholarship faced and the need to improve towards its advancement.

Kahl redirects the understanding of scholars on Africa biblical scholarships.¹¹ His work traces the development of post-colonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis and he reflects on its significance as well as on problematic aspects. Kahl work revealed clearly that post-colonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis do not represent a unified approach to the Bible.¹² Kahl argument not withstanding is limited to traditional western exegesis. Most of the issues raised by scholars in this work on African Biblical scholarship are in contrast with what this article attempts to address. It became essential to highlight some factors that resulted to poor biblical

³ Uwaegbute "African Biblical Studies and the Question of Methodology: A focus on New Testament Scholarship in Nigeria," 1.

⁴ Andrew M. Mbuvi, "An African Biblical Explores the Broadening of the Biblical Studies Landscape," *Journal of Theology for South African* 168. (2020), 41-63

⁵ Mbuvi, "An African Biblical Scholars explores the Broadening of the Biblical studies landscape," 41

⁶ Mbuvi, "An African Biblical Scholars explores the Broadening of the Biblical studies landscape," 41

⁷ L.E. Ugwueye and L.L. Umeanolue, "Old Testament Scholarship in Africa," *Unizik Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol.1 No. 3 (2010), 190-207

⁸ Ugwueye and Ymeanolue, "Old Testament Scholarship in Africa, 190"

⁹Ugwueye and Umeanolue, 191

¹⁰ Gerald O. West, "A Decolonial (Re)turn to class in South, African Biblical Scholarship" *Old Testament Essays*. Vol. 34, No.2 (2021)

¹¹ Werner Kahl, "Post-colonial Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis" *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology*. Vol.14, No.1 (2024), 31-52

¹² Kahl, "Post-Colonial Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis, 31."

scholarship in Africa and the need to explain some trends towards advancing African Biblical scholarship.

Methodology

The Instrument

Apart from the Literature review, the questionnaire is the main instrument for the study. The questions are in simple sentence structure that the respondents do not require the presence of the researcher for explanation and clarification. The questionnaire was an inline Google form. Thus, a link was used in order to access the questionnaire.

Population, Sampling and Administration of the Instrument

The study was carried out among lecturers and post-graduate students within some selected seminaries and universities within Nigeria. The researcher used the set link and distributed sixty (60) online questionnaire through individual emails and what sap numbers. With these effort only forty seven (47) individuals were able to respond. Therefore, 47 questionnaire were used in this research. The selected institutions are, ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro, Theological College of Northern Nigeria, University of Jos, ECWA Theological Seminary Jos, Kaduna State University and Nasarawa state University.

Data Analysis

The mean or average was used in calculating the data. How the average mean was computed: Average = $\frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5} + \frac{15}{5} = 5 = 3.00$. Hence the means criterion is 3.00 it scores as the base for rejecting or accepting with the mean or average of respondents on each item.

Example of finding an average:

X	F	FX
5	16	80
4	25	100
3	3	9
2	3	6
1	0	0
TOTAL	47	195

$$\text{Average or mean} = \frac{195}{47} = 4.1$$

Presentation of Findings

Section A. Question: Despite the rapid exploration of African Biblical scholarship, do your admit that it is still weak compared to what is obtainable in Western biblical scholarship?

NO	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Undecided	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Average Mean
1	16	25	3	3	0	4.1

From the above response and average mean, it is very clear that the majority of the respondents admit that African biblical scholarship is weak compared to what is obtainable within western biblical scholarship.

Section B

Question: Do you consider the following factors as leading to poor biblical scholarship in African?

NO	ITMES	Strongly Agreed 5	Agreed 4	Undecided 3	Disagreed 2	Strongly Disagreed 1	Average Mean
1	Poor governmental policies that does not encourage research	19	18	8	0	2	4.1
2	Lack of African Literatures	13	19	6	8	1	3.7
3	Lack of social amenities that encourages scholarship	17	21	6	1	2	4.0
4	Inadequate findings for research	28	15	1	3	0	4.4
5	Laxity in researching for something new in academics	23	16	7	1	0	4.2

According to the data and Average mean displayed above, the factors leading to poor biblical scholarship in Africa are poor governmental policies that does not encourage research, lack of adequate African literatures, lack of adequate social amenities that encourages scholarship, lack of funding for research and laxity in researching for something new in academics.

Section C

Question: In your Opinion, do you consider the following trends necessary for advancing African Biblical scholarship?

NO	ITMES	Strongly Agreed 5	Agreed 4	Undecided 3	Disagreed 2	Strongly Disagreed 1	Average Mean
1	Encouraging individuals to study within seminaries and	30	11	2	4	0	4.4

	universities in Africa						
2	Biblical students should submit to African scholars for mentorship than foreign scholars	26	15	0	5	1	4.2
3	Facilitating more development on African Academic method logical tools	27	16	3	0	1	4.4
4	Engaging in Academic Politics towards providing new development in Biblical research in Africa.	22	20	0	5	0	4.2
5	Guarding against individualism and completion in scholarship	24	16	4	1	2	4.2

From the responses above, it is clear that the current trends necessary for advancing African biblical scholarship are first, individuals should be encouraging to study within seminaries and universities in Africa. Secondly, biblical students should submit to African scholars for mentorship than submitting to Western scholars. Thirdly, facilitating more development on African academic methodological tools. The fourth is to engage in academic politics towards providing new development in biblical research in Africa. The fifth trend guards against individualism and competition in scholarship.

Discussion

In section A, the findings revealed that African Biblical scholarship is weak compared to what is obtainable in Western biblical scholarship. Hence, there is high expectation toward the growing level of African biblical scholarship. In section B the findings revealed that poor governmental policies do not encourage research. Hence, bad policies and laws has been one of the leading factors hindering research in Africa. When there are no laws encouraging research then the continent would be backwards when it comes to rigorous academic research, hence contributing to the challenges for effective development of African biblical scholarship.

Consequently, the finding revealed that lack of African literatures is another factor leading to poor biblical scholarship in Africa. The researcher observed that, not that there are no available African literatures, but these literatures are inadequate and scarce in most of the libraries within African universities and seminaries. This is leading most African to be depending on western writings and books. Thus, thwarting the developing of African Biblical scholarship. The study also shows that lack of social amenities that encourages researches is another leading factor the poor biblical scholarship in Africa. When there is poor electricity supply for studies, no centers for research, poor housing, inaccessible internet facilities for African Biblical scholars.

Also, the research shows that inadequate funding for research is another leading factor for poor biblical scholarship. Funds are necessary for good research in academic. When African biblical scholars lack funds, no matter how good a research is- they abandon it. This is not to the progress of academic excellence in African biblical scholarship. Another factor that the findings revealed as leading to poor biblical scholarship in Africa is laxity in research for something new in contribution to existing knowledge in scholarship. Therefore, it is reluctant or lazy to engage into rigorous research to bring something new for the progress of African biblical scholarship.

In section C, one of trends this study projects is encouraging individuals is to study in seminaries and universities within Africa. Environment has influence in learning. Therefore, African who study within African seminaries and universities are in touch with realities and experiences that are African. Thus, they are in the position to understand, appreciate and communicate their scholastic abilities that are Africans better than their counterparts who study in Western Seminaries and universities.

Another trend to advancing African Biblical scholarship is that biblical students should submit to African scholars for mentorship. If African biblical students should submit to foreign scholars for mentoring, then they are not free from the external pressures of yielding to Eurocentric traditions. On the other hand, submitting to local or African biblical scholars for advise and coaching would produce an Afrocentric tradition in their scholarship. Also by facilitating more development in African academic mythological tools. There are dynamic and contemporary subject matters, that African biblical scholars need to improve in their approach that will do justice to these subject matters and realities. African scholars has to do more in constituting their scholarship skills, by explaining and offering solutions in concurrent with everyday people's encounter.

Furthermore, this study project is engaging in academic politics towards providing new development in biblical research in Africa. Since academic politics involves the connection of knowledge and character towards commitment to collective advancement. Hence, in the community of scholars, African scholars should model their lives to portray the connection between knowledge and character. There is need for rationality with internal working that people's debates, ideas having interest in modifying African biblical curriculum and addressing their challenges. These would pave way for new development in biblical research in Africa.

Guarding against individualism competition in scholarship is one of the trend of advancing African biblical scholarship. Individualism is insisting on one's ideas while ignoring others ideas. In scholarship, individualism is dangerous since it has tendency of ignoring others efforts who present merit position. African biblical scholars should guard against individualism in academics since it can turn against colleagues and temper quality discourse of interchanging of ideas for a collective advancement of African biblical scholarship. Similarly, competition in business is healthy, but competition in academic institution for a collective development within African biblical scholars is unhealthy. This is because it can cause fragmentation and cause

African scholars to revert to isolation which would not pave way for a collective disseminating of contemporary academic mechanism.

Recommendations

1. African biblical scholars should not be contented with their present level of scholarship. They should aim high towards developing more of their scholarship.
2. The government have a role to play in encouraging African biblical scholarship. Thus the authorities concern should look into enacting laws that encourages academic break through.
3. African biblical learners and professors should be encouraged to write more in order to make available African literatures in our libraries. Both student and lectures in our seminaries and universities should constitute a habit of hard work. This would encourage rigorosity toward academic excellence. Thus this will motivate them to research more in order to always bring something new for solving problems in Africa. With this, more African literature would be available for scholars to interact with.
4. Stable electricity, good research centers, good housing and reliable internet facilities should be provided. This is capable of motivating and facilitating the advancement of African Biblical scholarship.
5. Africans should be encouraged to study in seminaries and universities within Africa. Also, seminaries and university biblical students should attach themselves to African biblical scholars for mentoring. This will prevent imported ideologies and philosophies that can thwart the development of African biblical scholarship.
6. African methodology can be develop more to give room for well-constructed arguments, modest preposition and incorporate institutional narratives that would result into good researchers.
7. African Biblical scholars should provide forums for exchanging information and interact with each other ideas. This is to avoid individualism and stop competing within themselves. However, they can promote and disseminate insight of up-to-date subject matters that would make their scholarship intense and visible around the globe.

Conclusion

There is need for growth in the present level of African biblical scholarship. African biblical learners, lectures and church leaders, etc. need to improve and employ all African scholarship methodologies in their writing skills. It is necessary to take cognizant of the current trends: government should look into enacting laws that encourages academic break through in Africa. African biblical learners and professors should be encouraged to write more in order to make available African literatures in our libraries. African biblical scholars should guard against imported ideologies and philosophies that can thwart the development of African biblical scholarship. All these should gear towards the advancement of African biblical scholarship and for the betterment of African continent.

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