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EDITORIAL

Methods of Biblical Interpretation in the African Context

Biblical hermeneutics is a critical component of biblical studies that helps in unearthing the meaning of ancient text/narrative critically. Until the early 1960s, biblical hermeneutics in many parts of Africa was dependent on hermeneutical philosophies of the Euro-American cultural norms.¹ This is due to the fact that the Euro-American missionaries and biblical scholars did not know the primal religio-cultural norms of Africa. They did not consider them as factors in the hermeneutical spiral. This has led to the assertions that the efforts of the missionaries were also a form of colonization of the African people. Therefore, some African scholars find the need to re-read/interpret the various interpretations inherited from the Global North as a means of decolonization.² It is difficult to determine whether those interpretations by the Euro-American missionaries and scholars were meant to colonize Africans consciously or unconsciously. However, since biblical hermeneutics involves the context of the users of the interpreted texts, many Africans believed that it was a deliberate exercise to colonize Africans because interpreted texts are expected to speak differently to different audiences at different times.

Many biblical scholars of African descent were educated in Euro-American universities and theological seminaries. After a while, they began to identify the need to interpret the Bible from African experiences of life and nurture, which may resemble how some Euro-American scholars interpret biblical texts with their context in view. It led to the proposition of many methods/approaches to biblical hermeneutics in Africa including mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics,³ postcolonial biblical interpretation,⁴ communicative interpretation,⁵ intercultural interpretation,⁶ African biblical hermeneutics,⁷ and African indigenous hermeneutics,⁸ liberation

¹ George Ossom-Batsa, "African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91-104.

² Musa W. Dube, "Reading for decolonization (John 4:1-42)," *Semeia* 75 (1996): 37-59.

³ John D. K. Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana): The Historical, Linguistic, and Theological Settings of the Gã, Twi, Mfantse, and Ewe Bibles* (Rome and Manchester, UK: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura and St. Jerome Publishing, 2011), 19; Benhardt Y. Quarshie, "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context – the Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures," *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol. No. 1 (2002): 4-14; Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)* 3(4) (2012): 575-579; Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "A comparative study of Matthew 6:12 and its parallel in some Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Bible; in Proceedings of International Conference on Research and Development, Vol. 3, No. 4, ed., Freda M. Nekang (Accra: Pan-African Book Company, 2010): 62-66; Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Interpretations of *mias gunaikos andra* (1Tim. 3:2a) in some Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Bible," *Journal of African Biblical Studies*, Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes (GABES) Publication. Vol.3 (January 2011): 43-61.

⁴ Musa W. Dube, "Reading for decolonization (John 4:1-42)," *Semeia* 75 (1996): 37-59.

⁵ George Ossom-Batsa, "African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91-104

⁶ Jean-Claude Loba Mkole, "Beyond Just Wages. An Intercultural Analysis of Mt. 20:1- 16," *Journal of Early Christian History* 4/1 (2014): 112-134; Jean-Claude Loba Mkole, "The New Testament and Intercultural Exegesis in Africa, in New Testament Interpretations in Africa," (Special Issue of the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30/1, Sheffield: SAGE, 2007b), 7-28; J. S. Ukpong, "Inculturation hermeneutics: An African approach to Biblical interpretation," in D. Walter & L. Ulrich (eds.), *The Bible in a world context: An experiment in contextual hermeneutics* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI. 2002a), 17-32; J. S. Ukpong, "Reading the Bible with African eyes: Inculturation and hermeneutics," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995a) 3-14; Chris U. Manus, *Intercultural hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and approaches* (Nairobi: Acton 2003).

⁷ M. Speckman, "African Biblical Hermeneutics on the Threshold? Appraisal and Wayforward," *Acta Theologica* Suppl 24 (2016): 204-224; David Tuesday Adamo, *Explorations in African Biblical Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001); David Tuesday Adamo, "What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?" *Black Theology*, 13:1 (2015): 59-72; Benjamin Abotchie Ntneh, "Human Complicity in Flood Occurrence: An African Biblical Hermeneutical Reading of Genesis 6:5-8:22," *Illorin Journal of Religious Studies*. Vol. 2. No. 2 (2012): 91-102; Benjamin Abotchie Ntneh, "The Survival of Earth: An African Reading of Psalm 104" in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*. The Earth Bible 4. Edited by Norman C. Habel (Sheffield Academic/The Pilgrim Press 2001), 98-108.

⁸ Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Hammond, IN: HippoBooks, 2019).

hermeneutics⁹ among others. Many of these methods/approaches are closely related in terms of engaging African realities in the hermeneutical process for Africans. The difference is in the varied contexts and experiences of African realities that are brought to the hermeneutical perspective. “African biblical hermeneutics does not necessarily mean that the interpreter must be an African or live in Africa, but should be any interpreter who takes into account the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political situations of Africa in his/her theologizing.”¹⁰

This volume contains twelve articles from scholars across Africa. Peter Adelaja Oyebanjo opens the volume. He identified the challenge many Churches in Nigeria face due to the diverse cultural milieu of Nigeria and how to contextualize and apply the Bible in such context. Oyebanjo observed that there is the need to integrate indigenous cultural rudiments and outlooks in many Churches in Nigeria to deepen the understanding of the biblical passages and their appropriation to contemporary issues. Dike, Uzoma Amos focused on the contemporary issues of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in biblical interpretation. He identified the lacuna that exist among scholars whether to use AI or not for effective biblical interpretation in Africa. He used AI as an aid to interpret Genesis 2:21-23 to argue that African biblical interpretation must adapt AI into its fibre of biblical interpretation. The amalgamation of AI tools in African biblical exegesis offers substantial aids, including enhanced accessibility to original biblical languages and resources, aiding scholars and the users of the interpreted text. Julius Ndishua investigates the hermeneutics of liberation and its effect on the church in the African context. He undertook an assessment of Hermeneutics of liberation, its challenges and prospects for biblical interpretation for Africans. Ndishua concluded that hermeneutics of liberation embrace excessive budding for the church in Africa in promoting the empowering marginalised communities and individuals.

Ayodeji Olanrewaju Ogidiolu examined the etymology of the philosophy of hermeneutics and its significance for intercultural hermeneutics in the twenty first century African Churches. The general philosophical understanding of hermeneutics has influenced intercultural hermeneutics in relation to how the Old Testament Literatures and African concept influence each other. Ogidiolu concluded that the philosophical understanding of hermeneutics if incorporated in the exercise of intercultural hermeneutics would help resolve series of misinterpretations, and misunderstanding of the contents of the Old Testament Literatures in African Churches. He recommended dynamism in the intercultural hermeneutics and the conceptual understanding of hermeneutics for a contextual biblical interpretation in Africa. Adetola Ipadeola offered an Afrocentric view of marriage relationship between a man and a woman using 1 Peter 3:1-7 as a case study. It is intended to provide guidance and solution to ubiquitous tensions for women's rights and liberty for married African Christian women. Decolonized and Africentric biblical interpretation could speak more certainly and convincingly to African Christians on contested grounds such as woman submission. Emmanuel Foster Asamoah the cultural milieu of the Bible and the contemporary society has created a gap that poses problem to the contemporary person's understanding of the Bible. He contended that the lacuna calls for Bible interpreters to meticulously consider the worldview of the contemporary community they intend to reach, for a more meaningful, relevant, and comprehensive Scripture interpretation.

Victor Umaru focused on indigenous African approaches to biblical interpretation. He discussed various methods of biblical interpretation in Africa such as feminist hermeneutics,

⁹ Gerald O. West, “Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa,” in *Trajectories of Religion in Africa* https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401210577_022; Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993).

¹⁰ Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, “Inductive Biblical Interpretation and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Proposal for Pentecostal/Charismatic Ministries in Ghana Today,” *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* 3/2: (Summer 2016): 140-160.

liberation theology, post-colonial scripture readings, etc. to indicate the role of indigenous African methods of biblical interpretation in Africa. Jiofack Kana C. Jésus examined the need for accuracy in the translation of the Bible from the biblical languages (source languages (SL)) into African languages which is the target language (TL) without losing or diluting the message. He argued that translators critically consider the triadic as a linguist, an interpreter of the word of God, and the hermeneut of God in the target community. He concluded that there is an intrinsic interplay between African hermeneutics, Linguistics and Bible translation in Africa. Jeremiah Agbeshie argued that difference approaches of biblical hermeneutics in the African context has yielded to varied interpretation of tithe in Churches in Africa. This has generated a controversy among Christians as to which theory of tithe to uphold. Agbeshie concluded that the theological ideology of pastors, and the denominational background is a key influencer of the various views of interpretations.

Kwame Anane discussed the role of mother-tongue in the understanding of biblical passages. He used Matthew 18:18 as a case study to examine how the passage was rendered in the Asante-Twi translation of the Bible, which poses problems to the users of the translated passage. An appropriate mother-tongue translation of Matthew 18:18 would help readers offer prayers that are theologically-balanced perspective. Livingstone Yao Torsu continued with the escapade of the mother-tongue in biblical interpretation to argue that mother-tongue is critical for the translation and contextualization of Scripture into native languages of African communities. It enable readers to associate more intensely with biblical passages, and fosters accessible and germane discourse for native readers. Torsu engaged Judges 4:15-20 to test how its mother-tongue interpretation will resonate with the Anlo Ewe people of Ghana. He concluded that advocates of mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics need to advocate for support in order to make the approach popular. Mark, Morris sought to boost the delivery of theology that emanates from the African culture and philosophical framework. He added that contextualization is a conducive strategy to produce balanced theology that is Scripturally accurate and context relevant.

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Navigating Critical Contextual and Intercultural Hermeneutics in African Christian Theology for Biblical Interpretations in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerian Churches face a significant challenge in navigating critical contextual and intercultural hermeneutics within the framework of African Christian theology to ensure biblical effective interpretations. This challenge arises from the diverse cultural landscape of Nigeria, influencing the way in which the Bible is understood and applied in the local church context. The problem lies in reconciling these cultural nuances with the universal truths, and messages of the Bible to provide meaningful interpretations that are both faithful to the text and relevant to the live experiences of Nigerian congregations. Therefore, this study explores the importance of contextual and intercultural hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Bible within the Nigerian church context. It delves into the significance of understanding the cultural, social, and historical contexts of biblical texts to ensure a relevant and meaningful interpretation for Nigerian congregations. This study is premised on postcolonial theory which seeks to analyze and critique the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics that continue to shape postcolonial societies following the end of formal colonial rule. The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, which include structured and unstructured interviews and review of extant literatures on African Christian theology, hermeneutics, contextual theology, intercultural studies, and biblical interpretation. It is observed that incorporating indigenous cultural elements and perspectives, Nigerian churches can deepen their understanding of the biblical message and its application to contemporary issues.

Keywords: Contextualization, Intercultural, Hermeneutics, Theology, African, Biblical Interpretation

Introduction

The interpretation of the Bible is a fundamental aspect of Christian faith and practice. The Bible is the foundation document as the source of African Christian Theology. It is primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture¹¹The Bible is not an ordinary book but embodies a revelation from God and tells the truths and facts that God wants His faithful Christians to know. Hence, the Bible cannot be interpreted just as any other book.¹² The interpretation of the Bible has valid standard principles. There are general and specific rules which guide biblical hermeneutics, in essence, biblical interpretations in different perspectives and cultures.¹³

¹¹ J.S. Mbiti, *Bible and theology in African Christianity*; (Nairobi: Heinemann Publishers, 1996). 25

¹² S.O.Y. Baba, *History and Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Ilorin, Amazing Grace Press, 2016) xiii

¹³ Baba, *History and Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* , viii

However, the existence of few African preachers who are experts in the application of critical Contextual and Intercultural Hermeneutics for proper theological exegesis has resulted into the elitist understanding of the scriptures by African readers. Most African preachers of the gospel still exist in the garb of western philosophical approach in the interpretation of the scriptures. Since the time hermeneutics has been applied to the study of the Christian Scripture, it has been carried out with the tools devised by Europeans. This has been carried out through all forms of literary criticism – form, source, redaction, and tradition-historical criticisms. While literary criticism is not to be rejected outrightly, African biblical scholars have discovered that all these criticisms are not relevant to an average Christian in Africa. An African Christian sees the Scripture as the Word of God. He or she does not bother himself or herself with the questions as to who wrote the Bible? When was the Bible written? What are the sources of the materials used by the author or the redactor of the Bible? What concerns the African Christian is how to make the Word of God a living reality in his or her life.

It is also observed that basic problem in Nigerian Churches is lack of knowledge of interpreting the word of God among pastors.¹⁴ In the same vein, it is opined that some people, pastors and Church members believe that when you receive a divine call there is no need for theological training just as in the days of Martin Luther.¹⁵ Also, In the Nigerian churches, there exists a challenge in achieving proper biblical interpretations due to lack of emphasis on critical contextual and intercultural hermeneutics in African Christian theology. Despite the rich cultural heritage and diverse contextual realities present in Nigerian churches, there remains a significant gap in the adoption and application of contextual and intercultural hermeneutics for biblical interpretation. These gaps hinder a deep understanding of the Scriptures within the local context, leading to potential misinterpretations, cultural clashes, and limited relevance of biblical teachings to the lives of the congregants. The gap also hinders the full integration of local cultural perspectives, beliefs, and practices into the interpretation of the Bible, leading to potential misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and the imposition of foreign theological frameworks on the Nigerian context.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with the utilization of contextual and inculturation hermeneutics in Nigerian churches. Key areas of concern include the lack of awareness and training among clergy and church members on contextual interpretation methods, the dominance of Western theological perspectives in biblical exegesis, and the potential conflicts between traditional cultural values and biblical teachings. In addition, the impact of globalization, modernization, and socio-political factors on the interpretation of scripture within the Nigerian context will be examined. By addressing these issues and proposing practical strategies for integrating contextual and inculturation hermeneutics into biblical interpretation practices in Nigerian churches, this study seeks to promote a more culturally relevant, inclusive, and transformative approach to reading and understanding the Bible within the local church context.

The way in which the Bible is interpreted can vary significantly depending on one's cultural, social, and historical context.¹⁶ In Nigeria, a country with a rich diversity of cultures and traditions, it is essential to consider the unique context of Nigerian churches when interpreting the Bible. Contextual and inculturation hermeneutics provide valuable tools for understanding the

¹⁴ Baba, *History and Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*, viii

¹⁵ Walther I. Brandth ed., *Luther's Works; The Christians in Society II, vol 45* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 342-343

¹⁶ J. Madu, Hermeneutics and the Nigerian Church: Towards an Authentic African Christianity. *Journal of African Christian Thought*. 2012, 15(2), 39

Word of God within the specific cultural framework of Nigerian congregations.¹⁷ The Nigerian Churches are grappling with the complex task of interpreting the Bible within the unique socio-cultural context of Africa while being faithful to the principles of Christian theology.¹⁸ The challenge lies in navigating critical contextual and intercultural hermeneutics to ensure that biblical interpretations are relevant, accurate, and meaningful to the diverse congregations in Nigeria. This task requires a deep understanding of African cultures, traditions, and worldviews, as well as a critical engagement with Christian theological principles. The problem at hand is how to effectively integrate these elements to foster a holistic and transformative approach to biblical interpretation that resonates with the realities and aspirations of the Nigerian Churches.

Biblical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is often used in the contexts which stress the responsibility of human beings rightly to interpret ancient writings that are thought to contain messages of the gods.¹⁹ The usage of the term hermeneutics dates back to classical Athens in the fourth century B. C. The term has a sacred origin. It is derived from the Greek word ‘*hermeneia*,’ which has a special reference to Hermes, the Greek god who was destined to act as the messenger of the gods in the Greek pantheon. Hermes was also believed to be the inventor or discoverer of language and writing.²⁰ In this role, Hermes doubled as the intermediary between the gods and humankind, as well as interpreting the message of the gods to men. In doing this, he has to first understand the message of the gods, find the appropriate words, idioms, and metaphors that are understood by those to whom he is to deliver the message, and then declare the message of the gods. From this sacred origin, over the years jurists and theologians began to adopt the terms as that branch of study that enabled them in the study and access specialized rules of interpretation of codes and texts.²¹

The etymology of the word “Hermeneutics” is from the Greek verb *hermeneuo* and from the Greek noun *hermeneia* which all mean “to interpret.” In classical literature, the verb “*hermeneus*” is used in such senses as “to express aloud,” “to explain,” or “to translate.” Biblical hermeneutics therefore is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is described as science because science is guided by rules within its discipline and there are principles to follow while doing hermeneutics. It is described as an art because the applications of its rules are guided by skill and not by mechanical imitation.²² As a science, it enunciates principles, investigates the laws of thought and language, and classifies its facts and results. As an art, it teaches what application these principles should have, and establishes their soundness by showing their practical value in the elucidation of the more difficult scriptures. The hermeneutical art thus cultivates and establishes a valid exegetical procedure.²³

i. Biblical Interpretation in Africa

Biblical interpretation in Africa has been on the front burner in the discourse of the African Christian Theology. African biblical scholars have been calling for decolonization of Biblical Studies. African biblical study has been described as the biblical interpretation that makes African

¹⁷Madu, *Hermeneutics and the Nigerian Church: Towards an Authentic African Christianity*, 40

¹⁸Madu, *Hermeneutics and the Nigerian Church: Towards an Authentic African Christianity*. 41

¹⁹E. Nihinlola and J.A. Owolabi, *CTH 601: Biblical Hermeneutics*. National Open University of Nigeria, 2006, p.2

²⁰ E. S. Malbon, “Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Contextual Meaning” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1983, 207-230.

²¹C.U. Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003, p. 30.

²² Bartlett, J. L., “The Meaning, Nature and Purpose of Hermeneutics: A Challenge to African Biblical Scholars,”

AJBS, Vol. Xvi, No. 1, April 2001, p. 7.

²³ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*[Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.], p. 2.

socio-cultural context a subject of interpretation.²⁴ It is the re-reading of the Christian Scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspectives. The purpose, according to Adamo, is not only to understand the Bible and God in our African experience and culture, but also to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold of the Eurocentric biblical scholars.²⁵ In other words, human beings perceive reality from the particular, not from the universal perspective.²⁶ Draper ascertains that the three key elements of African biblical interpretation are the biblical text, the African context, and the act of appropriation through which they are linked.²⁷ He however opines that in the process of appropriation, the African reader of the Bible is involved. This reader moves constantly back and forth between the biblical and African context.²⁸ Gerald West corroborates Draper by admitting that how the reader moves between text and context is determined by a range of factors, including their ideo-theological orientation, their ecclesio-theological missionary heritage, and their engagement with ordinary readers of the Bible in the church and community, and the important issues that require attention in the African context.²⁹

The above views have led to the proposition of different types of hermeneutics by African biblical scholars, which are judged to be the best for doing African biblical studies. The major types of such hermeneutics include Inculturation hermeneutics by Justin Ukpong, which is contextual in nature, calling for the rereading of the Bible with an African eye, and Intercultural hermeneutics by C. U. Manus, which is a contextual methodology that seeks to understand the biblical text by comparing the culture of the biblical author and that of the reader who reads and adapts the text to his or her own context. The contextualization principle, as championed by African scholars, affords the preachers of the Bible in Africa the opportunity to be able to apply the message of the Bible to speak to the reality of the audience that are hearing their messages. Or what is the essence of preachment that cannot meet the people at the points of their needs or give hope to the hopeless in the congregation? However, to be able to achieve this above stated purpose, hermeneutical principles must be applied to determine the meaning of a Bible passage so as to guard against the errors of eisegesis, that is reading in your own meaning into the text rather than reading out the meaning of the text, which is exegesis.

ii. Contextual and Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Conceptual Juxtaposes

It is important in this discourse to do a conceptual analysis of the contextual and Intercultural hermeneutics. Between Manus and Ukpong, contextual and Intercultural hermeneutics are the same. In fact, Manus calls contextual hermeneutics, intercultural hermeneutics. He ascertains that the procedure of contextual or intercultural hermeneutics is a desirable approach in biblical interpretation in contemporary Africa.³⁰ Abogunrin,³¹ Young³² and Oduyoye³³ ascertain that inculturation, acculturation, intercultural and contextualization are both indigenization. They are processes by which interpreters compare religion and social-cultural parallel between Africa and

²⁴D.T. Adamo, *Decolonizing African Biblical Studies*. Abraka: Delta State University, 2004, p. 7.

²⁵Adamo, *Decolonizing African Biblical Studies*, p. 7.

²⁶J.S Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eye," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, No. 9, 1995, p.6.

²⁷ Jonathan Draper, *Reading the Bible as conversation: a theory and methodology for contextual interpretation of the Bible in Africa*. 2002. Grace and Truth 19 (2):15.

²⁸ Draper, *Reading the Bible as conversation: a theory and methodology for contextual interpretation of the Bible in Africa*, 16

²⁹ Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa*, <https://academia.edu>. Accessed on 24th April, 2024

³⁰C. U. Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa; Methods and Approach* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003), 42.

³¹S. O. Abogunrin, "Biblical Research in Africa," *AJRS* 1 (1986) 1: 12-16, see also, Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa; Methods and Approach*, 40

³²J.U. Young, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*. London: Greenwood Press, n.d., p. 2.

³³Young, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, 2-3

the Scriptures.³⁴ In other words, there is a material encounter between the text and contemporary society. Abogunrin further explains that indigenization in form of inculturation and contextualization approach is also a new trend in biblical hermeneutics.³⁵ These scholars agree that one important observation from the study of those forms of hermeneutics is that the difference lies only in the nomenclature, because the step-by-step analysis involved in achieving the set goals are almost the same. However, current studies in the biblical scholarship show that there are lines of demarcation between these processes of biblical hermeneutics

Contextual hermeneutics is one of the major strands of ethno-cultural identity hermeneutics.³⁶ The term 'contextualization' was redefined in Lausanne Congress on Evangelisation in the year 1974. In the congress, it was observed that contextual hermeneutics is a process of doing theology in the context of a given culture. It is the presentation of the biblical message or messages to individual culture in different forms but without losing or diluting the content of the message. In other words, it is a process of presentation of the unchanging biblical message of the gospel to people in their culture in a form that the people would understand without losing or distorting the content of the message.³⁷ It means, contextual hermeneutics seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of texts within their original and contemporary contexts, taking into account the complexities of interpretation and the diverse perspectives of readers. Whereas, Intercultural hermeneutics seeks to facilitate cross-cultural understanding, promote dialogue, and navigate the complexities of interpreting texts and cultural practices in diverse cultural contexts.

The difference in the nomenclatures lies in the methods of biblical interpretations adopted by each of them. Contextual Hermeneutics and Intercultural Hermeneutics are two significant approaches in the field of hermeneutics that aim to interpret and understand texts, cultures, and contexts. While both approaches are rooted in the study of interpretation, they differ in their focus, methods, and goals, leading to distinct perspectives on how meaning is constructed and understood.

Contextual Hermeneutics, as the name suggests, emphasizes the importance of context in the interpretation of texts. This approach posits that meaning is not fixed or absolute but is shaped by the context in which it is situated. Contextual Hermeneutics seeks to uncover the historical, cultural, social, and linguistic factors that influence the production and reception of texts.³⁸ Proponents of Contextual Hermeneutics argue that understanding the context in which a text was created is essential for grasping its intended meaning and significance.³⁹ On the other hand, Intercultural Hermeneutics focuses on the interaction between different cultures in the process of interpretation.⁴⁰ This approach recognizes the diversity of cultural perspectives and experiences that shape how texts are understood across different cultural boundaries. Intercultural Hermeneutics seeks to bridge the gap between cultures, promoting dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect in the interpretation of texts. Proponents of Intercultural Hermeneutics argue that

³⁴Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approach*, 40

³⁵Abogunrin, "Biblical Research in Africa," 12-16

³⁶Baba, *History and Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*, 165

³⁷Baba, *History and Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*, 172

³⁸O. Adeyemi, Contextual Hermeneutics in Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria. *Journal of African Christian Thought*. 21(1) (2018), 18

³⁹Adeyemi, Contextual Hermeneutics in Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria, 18

⁴⁰LalsangkimaPachaua, "Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Word of Introduction," 2015, retrieved from <https://www.place.asburyseminary.edu>, accessed on 10th May, 2024

engaging with diverse cultural perspectives enriches the understanding of texts and fosters intercultural communication and cooperation.⁴¹

One key disparity between Contextual Hermeneutics and Intercultural Hermeneutics lies in their scope of analysis.⁴² Contextual Hermeneutics primarily focuses on the specific context in which a text is produced, emphasizing the historical, cultural, and linguistic factors that inform its meaning. This approach is concerned with uncovering the original intent of the author and understanding the text within its immediate context.⁴³ In contrast, Intercultural Hermeneutics expands the scope of analysis to include multiple cultural contexts and perspectives. This approach acknowledges the diversity of interpretations that can arise from different cultural backgrounds and seeks to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.⁴⁴

Another significant difference between Contextual Hermeneutics and Intercultural Hermeneutics is their approach to interpretation. Contextual Hermeneutics tends to prioritize the reconstruction of the original meaning of a text based on its historical and cultural context.⁴⁵ This approach often involves close textual analysis, historical research, and linguistic study to uncover the author's intended message. Contextual Hermeneutics aims to establish a coherent and internally consistent interpretation of the text within its original context.⁴⁶ In contrast, Intercultural Hermeneutics adopts a more relativistic and dialogical approach to interpretation. This approach recognizes that meaning is not fixed or monolithic but is subject to interpretation and negotiation across different cultural perspectives. Intercultural Hermeneutics emphasizes the importance of engaging with diverse viewpoints, challenging assumptions, and fostering empathy and understanding across cultural boundaries. This approach values the exchange of ideas and experiences that occur when different cultures interact and interpret texts together.⁴⁷

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory is a critical theoretical framework that emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonial theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as scholars and intellectuals from formerly colonized regions began to critically engage with the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. The theory seeks to analyze and critique the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics that continue to shape postcolonial societies following the end of formal colonial rule.⁴⁸ Postcolonial theory has been developed and expanded by a diverse group of scholars and thinkers from various academic disciplines. While it is difficult to attribute the theory to a single proponent due to its interdisciplinary nature and collaborative development, several key figures have made significant contributions to the field.⁴⁹ Contributors to the Postcolonial theory include Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gloria Anzaldúa and host of others.⁵⁰ These scholars, among others, have played key roles in shaping Postcolonial theory and have contributed to its

⁴¹Pachau, "Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Word of Introduction,"

⁴²Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, "Intercultural Constructions of the New Testament: Epistemological Foundation," 2021, retrieved from <https://www.ajol.info> on 13th May, 2024

⁴³Adeyemi, Contextual Hermeneutics in Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria, 19

⁴⁴Pachau, "Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Word of Introduction,"

⁴⁵E. Nwafor, Contextual Hermeneutics and Theology in Nigeria: Towards a Relevant Reading of the Bible in African Contexts. *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 2013, 16(1), 64.

⁴⁶Nwafor, Contextual Hermeneutics and Theology in Nigeria: Towards a Relevant Reading of the Bible in African Contexts. 64

⁴⁷Loba-Mkole, "Intercultural Constructions of the New Testament: Epistemological Foundation,"

⁴⁸J. Daniel Elam, "Postcolonial Theory," 2019, retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com>, accessed on 12th May, 2024

⁴⁹Duncan Ivison, "Postcolonialism," 2024, retrieved from <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>, accessed on 11th May, 2024

⁵⁰Ivison, "Postcolonialism,"

development as a critical framework for analyzing the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization in contemporary societies.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted in this research. Qualitative research methods such as structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with purposively selected 4 Universities and 3 Theological School lecturers of Biblical Studies from South-western Nigeria. The interviewees were selected from these Universities and Theological colleges base on their prominences among other Institutions. Also, the Bishop Theologian of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion was also interviewed as the Professor of Christian Studies and former Vice-Chancellor of one of the Universities purposively selected. The selected Universities were Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Redeemer's University, Ede and Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. The Theological schools included, Immanuel College of Theology, Ibadan, Vinning College of Theology, Akure and Methodist Seminary, Sagamu. Because of time constraint, most of the interviews were done through telephone conversation. Also, the research used participant observation to explore the perspectives, experiences, and practices of theologians, pastors, and church members in Nigerian churches regarding biblical interpretation and the influence of critical contextual and intercultural hermeneutics. The quantitative methods included conducting a comprehensive literature review of existing works on African Christian theology, hermeneutics, contextual theology, intercultural studies, and biblical interpretation to provide a foundational understanding of the topic and help identify key themes, debates, and gaps in the literature. The data collected was subjected to content analysis. The work is premised on the Postcolonial Theory.

Navigating Contextual and Intercultural Hermeneutics

Contextual Hermeneutics

In the Nigerian context, contextual hermeneutics can be particularly important for several reasons. In response to interview, Dairo,⁵¹ Babalola,⁵² and Alagi⁵³ opined that contextual hermeneutics is important to cultural diversity. Nigeria is a culturally diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own traditions, languages, and ways of understanding the world. Contextual hermeneutics can play a significant role in promoting cultural diversity in the interpretation of the Bible in Nigeria by facilitating a deeper understanding of how cultural contexts shape the reading and application of biblical texts.⁵⁴ Navigating contextual hermeneutics help promotes cultural diversity in biblical interpretations in Nigeria by encouraging respect for diverse perspectives, engagement with local traditions, empowerment of marginalized voices, relevance to contemporary issues, and promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding among culturally diverse communities of faith. By embracing the richness of cultural diversity in biblical interpretation, Nigerian Christians can deepen their understanding of the Bible and its relevance to their diverse cultural contexts.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Interview with Afolorunso O. Dairo, Professor of Biblical Studies; New Testament, Redeemer's University, on 19th April, 2024. Ede, He is 63 years

⁵² Interview with Lanre Babalola, Lecturer of Biblical Studies; New Testament, Immanuel College of Theology on 19th April, 2024. Ibadan, He is 47 years

⁵³ Interview with J.O. Alagi, Lecturer of Biblical Studies; Old Testament, Methodist Theological Institute on 21st April, 2024. Sagamu, He is 55 years

⁵⁴ Interview with Dairo, Babalola and Alagi

⁵⁵ Interview with Babalola

In line with Dairo, Babalola and Alagi, Okunoye⁵⁶ added that Nigeria faces various socio-political challenges such as corruption, poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, and political instability. Contextual hermeneutics can help Nigerian Christians to engage with these issues from a biblical perspective and to seek solutions that are grounded in the teachings of the Bible. In other words, Contextual biblical hermeneutics can be a powerful tool for addressing socio-political issues in Nigeria by providing a framework for interpreting the Bible in ways that are relevant to the social and political challenges facing the country. This can be achieved by providing a relevant, critical, and ethically grounded framework for interpreting the Bible in ways that promote justice, equality, reconciliation, and peace in Nigerian society. By applying the principles of contextual hermeneutics to their engagement with socio-political issues, Nigerian Christians can contribute to the transformation of their communities and nation in accordance with the values and teachings of the Bible⁵⁷

In addition, It is a known fact that Nigeria has a history of colonialism, which has left a lasting impact on its society, including its religious beliefs and practices. In reaction to this assertion Oyewole submits that contextual hermeneutics can help Nigerian Christians to critically examine the ways in which colonialism has influenced their understanding of the Bible and to reclaim their own cultural interpretations of biblical texts. This is possible in Nigeria by deconstructing colonial interpretations, reclaiming indigenous perspectives, decolonizing theology, empowering local communities, and promoting healing and reconciliation.⁵⁸

In many parts of Nigeria, traditional African religions have been syncretized with Christianity, leading to unique forms of worship and interpretation of the Bible. In fact Ottuh pointed out that, out of many challenges facing contextualization in Africa is the fear of syncretism.⁵⁹ Ottuh states thus;

To those outside of the soil of Africa and even within some African Christians, there seemed to be skepticisms as to whether if African interpretation of the bible will make the African Christian to believe in the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices. The Christian religion as seen in the bible is a monotheistic faith and as such it is universal. Being that religious syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions, there is the fear that African Christianity can be missed up with African traditional religion.⁶⁰

Albeit, this fear is dismissed with the understanding that biblical exegesis is universal but it can be contextualized without it losing its original meaning in Africa or elsewhere in the world.⁶¹ In response to the question on how contextualization can solve syncretism in Nigeria, Asaju responded that contextual hermeneutics can help Nigerian Christians to navigate the complexities of syncretism and to discern which elements of their cultural and religious heritage are compatible

⁵⁶ Interview with Job Okunoye, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies; Old Testament and Head of Department of Religious Studies Ajayi Crowther University, on 19th April, 2024. Oyo, He is 49 years

⁵⁷ Interview with Okunoye.

⁵⁸ Interview with J. Ola Oyewole, Lecturer of Biblical Studies; New Testament and Deputy Rector, Immanuel College of Theology, on 19th April, 2024. Ibadan, He is 54 years

⁵⁹ J.A. Ottuh, Contextualization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa, In *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, 2, pg 35

⁶⁰ Ottuh, Contextualization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa, pg 35

⁶¹ Ottuh, Contextualization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa, pg 36

with the teachings of the Bible.⁶² Asaju further states that, by embracing a contextual approach to biblical interpretation, Nigerian Christians can navigate the challenges of syncretism and cultivate a more authentic, culturally relevant expression of their faith rooted in the teachings of the Bible through critical engagement with cultural practices, reaffirming the authority of the Bible, culturally contextualizing the Gospel, providing education and theological training, and fostering spiritual discernment among believers.⁶³

Intercultural Hermeneutics

It is established that one of the ways to apply Intercultural Hermeneutics in the Nigerian context is to understand the cultural context. Intercultural hermeneutics encourages readers to consider the cultural background of the biblical texts and how they would have been understood by the original audience.⁶⁴ Folarin Opines that this approach can help Nigerian readers to better grasp the meaning and significance of the biblical stories within their own cultural framework.⁶⁵ Nigeria is a country with a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. Intercultural hermeneutics acknowledges and values this diversity, suggesting that different cultural perspectives can enrich our understanding of the Bible. By considering how different Nigerian cultures interpret the text, readers can gain new insights and perspectives on familiar biblical passages.⁶⁶

Navigating intercultural hermeneutics helps to address contextual issues as it encourages both the exegetes and the readers to engage with the social, political, and economic challenges faced by their communities.⁶⁷ In the Nigerian context, this approach can help to address issues such as corruption, poverty, and ethnic conflict through a biblical lens. By interpreting the Bible in light of these contextual challenges, readers can find guidance and inspiration for addressing social justice issues in their communities.⁶⁸

Finally, most scholars interviewed, agreed that navigating intercultural hermeneutics promotes dialogue and understanding, as it fosters dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultural groups. In a diverse country like Nigeria, this approach can help to bridge division and promote unity among Christians from different backgrounds. By engaging in intercultural dialogue around the interpretation of the Bible, Nigerian Christians can learn from one another and appreciate the richness of their shared faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from what has been discussed above, it is observed that while contextual hermeneutics emphasizes understanding a text within its specific context of origin, intercultural hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of texts across different cultural contexts and the dialogue that occurs between those cultures during the interpretive process. However, in spite of their disparity, both approaches are valuable in their own right and can be used in various disciplines to deepen understanding of texts and cultural phenomena especially in Nigeria. The contextualization and Intercultural principles, as championed by African scholars, affords the

⁶²Personal interview with Dapo Asaju, Professor of Christian religion, the Bishop Theologian of Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion and former Vice-Chancellor, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo in Ilesa on 19th May, 2024. He is 62 years;

⁶³Personal interview with Asaju.

⁶⁴Pachaua, "Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Word of Introduction,"

⁶⁵Personal interview with G.O. Folarin, Professor of Biblical Studies and African Christian Theology, Obafemi Awolowo University, in Ile-Ife on 17th May, 2024. He is 69 years

⁶⁶Personal interview with Folarin

⁶⁷Personal interview with J.A. Adedokun, Senior Lecturer of Biblical Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, in Ile-Ife on 17th May, 2024. He is 52 years

⁶⁸Personal interview with Adedokun

preachers of the Bible in Nigeria and Africa the opportunity to be able to apply the message of the Bible to speak to the reality of the audience that are hearing their messages.

Recommendations

In line with the discussion above, this work recommends that Department of Religious Studies in Universities and theological institutions in Nigeria where those who handle the word of God are being thoroughly trained in all the acts and methods of biblical interpretation should be well equipped to meet up the contemporary challenges of contextual and intercultural biblical hermeneutics. Some Universities and Theological colleges have taken a good step in the right direction through the introduction of courses relating to the biblical hermeneutics in Africa. As confirmed by Babalola⁶⁹ from Immanuel College of Theology and Ogidolu⁷⁰ from AjayiCrowther Universities that courses such as Old Testament in African Scholarship, New Testament in African Scholarship, African Christian Theology and course that are related to African Biblical Hermeneutics are being introduced into their curriculums

It is also highly imperative that theological training on biblical interpretations must be made compulsory for ministers who receive the call into the church ministry before they are fully integrated into the various ministries into which they are called. This is not denying, doubting, or diminishing the grace of God or the role of the Holy Spirit on those ministers who are being called into the ministries.

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⁶⁹ Personal Interview with Babalola

⁷⁰ Interview with Ayodeji Ogidolu, Senior Lecturer of Biblical Studies; Old Testament, Ajayi Crowther University, on 19th April, 2024. Oyo, He is 49 years

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Thinking Machines Taking Our Job? Exploring the Use of Artificial Intelligence in African Biblical Exegesis

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Abstract

The volume of works on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and religion indicates a growing interest in exploring the complex relationship between artificial intelligence and religion. More concern is raised from the possibility that AI will one day surpass human intelligence is making an inroad into the various aspects of everyday life. While some researchers are skeptical about the possibility of any usefulness of AI to the life of faith, others argue that AI brings in a fresh perspective, providing a technological lens to interpret and understand the Bible. Thus, the objective of the study was to demonstrate the use of AI in African biblical interpretation using Genesis 2:21-23. Interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology which allows collection and analysis of data taking place side by side is used. The integration of AI tools in African biblical exegesis offers significant benefits, including enhanced accessibility to original biblical languages and resources, aiding scholars and the public. These tools facilitate quick cross-referencing and word studies, align with historical and contemporary Bible study practices, and enable direct translations from original languages, thus bypassing Western interpretations. AI's ability to analyse historical contexts enriches biblical interpretation and helps bridge hermeneutical gaps. Additionally, AI can foster inter-religious dialogue and preserve African cultural heritage. The study underscored the fact that while the potentiality of AI to biblical interpretation cannot be denied, there is need for caution.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, African Biblical Interpretation, Hermeneutics, ChatGPT, Gemini

Introduction

The growing number of studies on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and religion reflects a surge in curiosity about their intricate connection. Sermonai offers a clear explanation of the potential benefits of AI for scholars and students of the Bible by providing clear explanations of how AI can be used for textual analysis, historical context, and language studies in biblical scholarship.⁷¹ On the curiosity that AI may one day surpass human intelligence, Sermonai emphasises that AI is a tool to enhance human understanding, not a replacement for critical thinking and faith. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a set of technologies that enables machines to imitate human intelligence. It is a process of simulating human intelligence by machines enabling them to perform

⁷¹ SermonAI Harnessing AI for Biblical Scholarship and study, 2023. <https://sermonai.com/blog?p=harnessing-ai-for-biblical-scholarship-and-study>

tasks ordinarily meant for humans.⁷² This description of AI naturally poses a question to an average thinking mind; has AI come to replace humans? Skepticism aside, AI is currently making waves into varied fields of human endeavour, of which, religion and in fact biblical scholarship is not left out. It has been observed that while AI arose as a possibility quite early in the history of computing, the idea of machines that could mimic human intelligence is traced to the idea of automatons.⁷³ By automatons, it means a mechanism that is designed to follow automatically a predetermined sequence of operations or respond to encoded instructions.⁷⁴ Simply put, automatons are self-operating. Okebukola collaborates with VanderLeest and Schuurman as he traces the history of AI to the antiquity of Greek myths of sacred mechanical objects believed to be capable of intelligent actions and emotions.⁷⁵ Artificial intelligence is no doubt a magic and the AI technology (computer) does not have a mind of its own. It is trained by humans on how to carry out specific tasks by providing the artificial object with a huge database and the algorithm from which to solve problems.⁷⁶ By this training, machines (Strong AI) will probably possess the ability to behave and take decisions like human being. The school of strong artificial generative intelligence projects that once human brains fully understood, can be replicated in the form of software as cognitive school tries to explain the human brain as a digital computer.⁷⁷ It is important to note that at the moment, there are no strong AI in practical terms. The narrow AI can perform a narrowly defined set of specific tasks such as self-driving vehicles, *Siri* – smartphones that able to recognize natural language and provide appropriate information among others. The perception here is that the simulation of the brain is always just a model of the brain.⁷⁸

Moreover, the possibility of AI-generated false representations in video or audio forms such as deep fakes and the use of AI to control drones in warfare justifies the concerns and skepticisms associated with the use of AI.⁷⁹ Strong AI experts have raised great alarm in the assertion that machines will eventually displace humans. For instance, Ray Kurzweil states; “Before 2030, we will have machines proclaiming Descarte’s dictum. And it won’t seem like a programmed response.... Should we believe them when they claim to be conscious entities ...?”⁸⁰ The concern extends to sermon preparation and biblical exegesis. Has the thinking machine come to replace biblical scholarship? This paper explores the development of AI along with ethical considerations of using AI in African biblical scholarship. It examines recent AI tools in biblical scholarship and surveys the relevance of AI tools in enhancing African biblical interpretation.

⁷² Peter A. Okebukola, Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Types. Video lesson No. 1 at Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education (VICBHE), 2024, <https://youtu.be/YY3zow8PNC0>

⁷³ Steven H. Vanderleest, Derek C. Schuurman, A Christian Perspective on Artificial Intelligence: How Should Christians Think about Thinking Machines? Squarespace, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dfa5286a03c582f1a53f04c/t/62e1a279170fd17867abac4a/1658954362002/A+Christian+Perspective+on+Artificial+Intelligence+How+Should+Christians+Think+about+Thinking+Machines_.pdf

⁷⁴ (Merriam-Webster, 2024)

⁷⁵ Peter A. Okebukola, Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Types. Video lesson No. 1 at Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education (VICBHE), 2024, <https://youtu.be/YY3zow8PNC0>

⁷⁶ Peter A. Okebukola, Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Types. Video lesson No. 1 at Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education (VICBHE), 2024, <https://youtu.be/YY3zow8PNC0>

⁷⁷ Martin Wan, Artificial Intelligence – a Challenge for our Future Theological and Ethical-Moral Reflections. English version of an Academic Thesis for the attainment of the degree “Magister theologiae” Submitted: 18 June 2014 English translation: August 2023. P. 7.

⁷⁸ Wan, Artificial Intelligence – a Challenge for our Future Theological and Ethical-Moral Reflections, 8.

⁷⁹ R. Bradley, "Voices: Wisely Using AI for Sermon and Lesson Preparation." Baptist Standard, 2023. <https://www.baptiststandard.com/opinion/voices/voices-wisely-using-ai-for-sermon-and-lesson-preparation/>

⁸⁰ Ray Kurzweil, "Spiritual machines." *Research & Development* 41, no. 7 (1999): p. 60.

Development of AI in Biblical Scholarship

The concept of AI dates back to antiquity beginning with the Greek mythology: Hephaestus, the god of fire, for instance whose box unleashes all the evils of the world.⁸¹ Of particular interest to this work is the Jewish legend of the golem, created by Rabbi Judah ben Loew in Prague to protect Jews from pogroms. It involves a clay figure brought to life by God's name written on its forehead. It is worthy of note that notable AI pioneers Marvin Minsky and John von Neumann of the 20th century AI history are descendants of Rabbi Loew.⁸² By this time, the idea of creating artificial thinking was present throughout the development of the first digital computers.⁸³ The genesis of generative AI started in the 2000s. Of particular relevance to this study is the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer (ETCBC) Founded in 1977 as a small research centre in Amsterdam set out to build simple concordance and text searching programs to aid the process of biblical interpretation. The focus was later broadened to include the examination of the process of interpretation itself.⁸⁴ Other strong inroads of AI in biblical scholarship include the introduction of OpenAI' GPT, Biblical Hebrew Syntax (BHSA) and the Text-Fabric (TF) Python library. 2010 and beyond witnessed the rise of AI with Apple Siri (2011), Google Now (2012), Microsoft Cortana (2014) and ChatGPT (2022). The development from this point has been so rapid that as at March, 2023 Elon Musk along with over one thousand concerned individuals signed a petition demanding AI research pause for human safety.⁸⁵ However, this paper concentrates on the use of two AI tools: OpenAI GPT and Gemini in biblical scholarship.

OpenAI GPT is a technology model that uses transformer architecture to process words in relation to all other words in a sentence simultaneously, rather than sequentially. Through unsupervised learning, it is trained on vast datasets, and excels at generating human-like text, understanding context and nuance, and performing tasks such as coding, translation, summarization, and creative problem-solving.⁸⁶ OpenAI' GPT is an advanced form of Natural Language Processing (NLP) which promises new ways to make translation process more efficient, ensure the quality of Bible translations and help researchers create high-quality resources for Bible translators. It can align translated words with the original Greek or Hebrew text. This enables checks for translation consistency, association with dictionary entries, images, articles, and maps, creation of draft translations, detailed linguistic analysis, identification of problematic passages, and production of exegetical resources to support translation efforts.⁸⁷

Gemini is a Multimodal AI model that has been designed for use in various data related tasks such as text, code, audio, images, and video developed by Google DeepMind. In comparison to other AI models, Gemini's multimodal and long context window make it an exception. Its multimodal capabilities could potentially assist in analysing biblical texts by combining textual information with relevant images, audio, or video. Obviously in biblical scholarship, an

⁸¹ Okebukola, Brief History, Current Development and Future of AI, Video lesson No. 2 at Virtual Institute for Capacity Building in Higher Education (VICBHE), 2024, <https://youtu.be/0eZPGq9Y5K8>

⁸² Lisa Nocks, "The Golem: between the technological and the divine." *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems* 21, no. 3 (1998): 281-303.

⁸³ Wan, Artificial Intelligence – a Challenge for our Future Theological and Ethical-Moral Reflections, 11.

⁸⁴ E. Talstra, Postma, F. and Vervenne, M. Exodus: Materials in Automatic Text Processing. Part I: Morphological Syntactical and Literary Case Studies. Instrumenta, Biblica. Amsterdam: VU Boekhandel, 1983

⁸⁵ The Guardian, 31 March, 2023

⁸⁶ OpenAI, "GPT-4 Is OpenAI's Most Advanced System, Producing Safer and More Useful Responses," n.d., accessed May 28, 2024.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Robie, Artificial Intelligence and Bible Translation.

appreciation of historical and cultural context is crucial. Gemini aptly provides the context as its long contextual understanding allows it to maintain context during interactions.⁸⁸

The operation of ChatGPT is on a simple concept: ask a question, and it attempts to provide an answer. So far, it has proven to be quite proficient at various tasks, including Bible study. Below is an example of how it works. For demonstration, two biblical texts are chosen: Genesis 2: 21 and John 1:1 using three different models of OpenAI: ChatGPT, Copilot and Gemini.

The following prompts could be given: I am an African Christian of the reformed tradition. I use the syntactical and grammatical hermeneutics for my bible study. Focusing on Genesis 2:21-23, provide the following:

1. The Hebrew text of Genesis 2:21-23
2. Provide a literal English translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:21-23.
3. Pick out the key words in these verses (Genesis 2:21-23) and reasons for the selection.
4. Provide any translation issues in Genesis 2:21-23. Are there any major disagreements between translators for this verse?
5. Are there other references of the Hebrew word translated as rib in Genesis? How are they translated?
6. What are some unique interpretations of rib in Genesis 2:21-23 in different cultural and historical backgrounds?
7. Are there some key differences between Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 2:21-23? What is its relevance to daily African life?
8. Provide a title for the verse and exegete including any relevant information.

⁸⁸ Maria Diaz, What is Gemini? Everything you should know about Google's new AI model, May 20, 2024. <https://www.zdnet.com/article/what-is-google-gemini/>

Applicable Cross References

S/N	Searching Questions	ChatGPT	Gemini	Remarks
1	The Hebrew text of Genesis 2:21-23	<p>ויפלו יהנה אלהים על האדם וישן ויקח אסות מצלעתיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה:</p> <p>ויבן יהנה אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לגשה ובהיה לאשה ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשרי מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת:</p>	<p>ויפלו יהנה אלהים על האדם וישן ויקח אסות מצלעתיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה</p> <p>ויבן יהנה אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לגשה ובהיה לאשה ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשרי מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת:</p>	Both ChatGPT and Gemini provided accurate Hebrew text of Genesis 2:21-23.
2	Provide a literal English translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:21-23.	<p>And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.</p> <p>And the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man, He made into a woman, and brought her to the man.</p> <p>And the man said, "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."</p>	I'm a language model and don't have the capacity to help with that	ChatGPT's translation aligns with most English versions. Here, the Hebrew <i>tsela</i> is translated as 'rib' indicating a reliance on existing translations. However, Gemini lacks the capability for the task
3	Provide any translation issues in Genesis 2:21-23. Are there any major disagreements between translators for this verse?	<p>Translation issues in Genesis 2:21-23 often arise from the nuanced meanings of Hebrew words and the cultural context of the text. Here are some specific issues and potential disagreements among translators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> **Tardemah (תרדמה) - "deep sleep"**: - **Issue**: The Hebrew term "tardemah" can mean a deep, trance-like sleep, implying a supernatural or divine-induced state. - **Translation Variations**: Some translations use "deep sleep" (NIV, ESV), while others might use "profound sleep" or "trance" to capture the intensity and divine nature of the sleep. **Tzelaotav (צלעתיו) - "his ribs"**: - **Issue**: The word "tzela" can mean "rib" or "side," leading to different interpretations of what exactly was taken from Adam. 	<p>Yes, there are a few translation issues and areas of disagreement among scholars in Genesis 2:21-23, particularly concerning these words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • צלע (tsela): This word can be translated as both "rib" and "side." Some interpretations focus on the physical rib God took from Adam. Others see it as a symbolic reference to Adam's side or incompleteness without Eve. • לגשה (ligishah): Literally translates to "female for" or "toward man." This can be interpreted in various ways, such as Eve being created as a helper, complement, or companion for Adam. • בשרי (basari) and עצם (etsem): These words emphasize the shared substance between Adam and Eve, "bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh." However, there's debate on the nature of this shared substance - physical or metaphorical, signifying a deep bond and unity. <p>These are just some examples. Reformed hermeneutics might delve deeper into the symbolic meaning of these</p>	ChatGPT picked and analyzed six words three of which are worthy of note: I. <i>Tzela</i> 'rib' or 'side' with the observation that most translations use 'rib' but some argue for side. II. <i>Ishah</i> and <i>Ish</i> III. <i>vayiven</i> It closes with a remark that the nuances of words like "tzela," and "vayiven" can lead to variations. For example, the difference between translating "tzela" as "rib" versus "side" can influence the

		<p>- Translation Variations: Most translations use "rib" (KJV, NIV), but some scholars argue for "side," which could imply more than just a rib was taken.</p> <p>3. Vayisgor (וַיִּסְגֹּר) - "and closed": - Issue: The term "vayisgor" implies a closing up or healing, which can have different connotations about the completeness of Adam's restoration. - Translation Variations: Most translations agree on "closed," but some might use "sealed" or "healed" to emphasize the completeness of the act.</p> <p>4. Vayiven (וַיִּבֶן) - "and He made/build": - Issue: The verb "vayiven" comes from the root "to build," which can imply a careful, crafted creation rather than a simple making. - Translation Variations: Translations vary between "made" (NIV) and "built" (NASB), reflecting different nuances of God's creative act.</p> <p>5. Ishah (אִשָּׁה) and Ish (אִישׁ): - Issue: The wordplay between "ish" (man) and "ishah" (woman) is significant in Hebrew but can be challenging to convey in English. - Translation Variations: Most translations try to maintain this wordplay by using "woman" and "man" (NIV, ESV), though the connection may not be as clear in English as it is in Hebrew.</p> <p>6. Zot (זֹאת) - "this": - Issue: The demonstrative pronoun "zot" emphasizes the woman's direct connection to the man, which can be lost in translation. - Translation Variations: Translations typically use "this" (NIV, ESV), but the emphasis might vary, with some translations opting for "now" or "at last" to convey Adam's recognition.</p> <p>Major Disagreements:</p>	<p>words, focusing on the relationship between Adam and Eve and its implications.</p>	<p>interpretation of the text's meaning regarding the creation of woman..</p> <p>Gemini analyzed six words two out of which is worth noting: I. Tsela with a remark that the term could be translated as both "rib" and "side." Some interpretations were said to focus on the physical rib that God took from Adam, while others viewed it as a symbolic reference to Adam's side or his incompleteness without Eve.</p> <p>Note that לְאִשָּׁה used in Gemini and translated as "female for" or "toward man" is a misreading of לְאִשָּׁה A combination of preposition 'to' and noun 'woman' meaning into woman</p>
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		<p>- While most mainstream translations agree on the general meaning of these verses, the nuances of words like "tardemah," "tzela," and "vayiven" can lead to variations. For example, the difference between translating "tzela" as "rib" versus "side" can influence the interpretation of the text's meaning regarding the creation of woman.</p> <p>- Some scholars argue for translations that capture more of the poetic and wordplay elements present in the Hebrew, while others focus on a more literal, straightforward rendering.</p> <p>These translation issues highlight the complexity of conveying ancient Hebrew texts in modern languages, where cultural and linguistic differences can significantly affect interpretation.</p>		
5	<p>Are there other references of the Hebrew word translated as rib in Genesis. How are they translated?</p>	<p>The Hebrew word translated as "rib" in Genesis 2:21-22 is צֵלָע (tsela). This word appears in several other places in the Hebrew Bible, and its translation varies based on the context. Here are some notable examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exodus 25:12-14; 26:20; 26:26-27; 37:3-5: These passages describe the construction of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translation: Here, "tsela" is translated as "side" or "side panel" to refer to the sides of the Ark or the boards of the Tabernacle. - Example (Exodus 25:12): "You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four corners, two rings on one side and two rings on the other side." 2. 1 Kings 6:5, 6:8, 6:15-16: These verses describe the construction of Solomon's Temple. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translation: In these contexts, "tsela" is translated as "side chamber" or "side room." - Example (1 Kings 6:5): "Against the wall of the house he built stories encompassing the walls of the house around both the nave and the inner sanctuary, and he made side chambers all around." 	<p>Yes, the Hebrew word translated as "rib" in Genesis 2:21 (צֵלָע - tsela) appears in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, but its translations vary depending on the context. Here's a breakdown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most Frequent Meaning (70%): "Side" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is the most common usage, referring to the sides of structures like the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:12), sacrificial altars (Exodus 27:1), or the sides of buildings (1 Kings 6:34). • Other References: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Door Leaves: In 1 Kings 6:34, "tsela" can refer to the two leaves or sides of a doorway. ○ Branch of a Mountain: In 2 Samuel 16:13, "tsela" is used figuratively to describe the side of a mountain. <p>Key Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In most cases, "tsela" refers to the "side" of something, not a specific body part like a rib. • This broader meaning suggests alternative interpretations of Genesis 2:21. Some scholars argue that God may have taken something from Adam's "side" rather than a literal rib. <p>Further Considerations:</p>	<p>The two AI tools agree on the fact that the translation of the Hebrew <i>tsela</i> as 'rib' is unique to the Genesis text only. Outside the creation narrative, it is variously translated as 'side' depending on the context.</p>

		<p>3. Ezekiel 41:5-8: These verses describe the visionary temple in Ezekiel's vision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translation: Here, "tsela" is translated as "side chamber" or "side room." - Example (Ezekiel 41:6): "The side chambers were in three stories, one above another, thirty in each story; there were offsets all around the wall of the temple to serve as supports for the side chambers, so that they should not be supported by the wall of the temple." <p>From these examples, it is clear that "tsela" is often translated as "side" or "side chamber" in architectural contexts, referring to structural parts of buildings. The use of "rib" in Genesis 2:21-22 is unique, influenced by the context of describing the creation of woman from part of Adam's body. This translation choice aims to convey the physical aspect of what was taken from Adam, but it is not the only possible interpretation of "tsela." The architectural uses emphasize the structural or supportive aspect, while the translation as "rib" highlights a more anatomical interpretation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The context of Genesis 2:21-23 is unique, focusing on human creation. This might influence the translation of "tsela." • Reformed hermeneutics might focus on the symbolic meaning of "tsela" even if literally translated as "side." <p>Resources for deeper exploration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.spwickstrom.com/rib/ (StudyLight.org [invalid URL removed]) • https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/archaeology-today/biblical-archaeology-topics/adam-and-eve/ (Biblical Archaeology Society) 	
6	<p>What are some unique interpretations of rib in Genesis 2:21-23 in different cultural and historical backgrounds?</p>	<p>Interpretations of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis 2:21-23 vary across different cultural and historical backgrounds, reflecting diverse theological, philosophical, and symbolic perspectives. Here are some unique interpretations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jewish Interpretations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Midrashic Tradition: Jewish tradition, especially midrashic literature, often expands on the narrative in Genesis. Some interpretations suggest that Eve was created from Adam's side to emphasize equality and partnership between man and woman. The use of "tsela" (rib) symbolizes closeness and mutual support in relationships. 2. Christian Interpretations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Augustine's View: Saint Augustine interpreted the creation of Eve from Adam's rib as symbolizing the unity and complementary nature of man and woman in marriage. He saw the rib as a metaphor for Eve being created from Adam's side, signifying equality and partnership. 	<p>Here are some unique interpretations of "rib" (tsela) in Genesis 2:21-23 across different cultures and historical periods:</p> <p>Symbolic Interpretations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat of Emotions or Strength: In some cultures, ribs were seen as the seat of emotions or strength. This interpretation suggests Eve being created from Adam's emotional or strong side, highlighting their complementary nature. <p>Mesopotamian Influence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation Myths: Mesopotamian mythology features creation stories where goddesses are formed from the ribs of male deities. This parallel suggests a possible influence on the Genesis story, with the rib being symbolic of Eve emerging from Adam's being. <p>Rabbinic Judaism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Unity: Some rabbis interpreted "tsela" as "side" rather than rib. This emphasizes the 	<p>ChatGPT expands interpretations of the text beyond the different biblical cultural and historical backgrounds. These interpretations range from views emphasizing equality and partnership between man and woman to symbolic representations of unity and complementarity in human relationships. Whether viewed through the lenses of theology, folklore, or psychology, the story of Eve's creation reflects broader themes about gender</p>

	<p>- Literal and Symbolic Views: Various Christian theologians and scholars have debated whether the rib should be interpreted literally or symbolically. Some emphasize the literal creation as a demonstration of God's creative power, while others see it as a symbolic representation of the close relationship and unity between man and woman.</p> <p>3. Islamic Interpretations:</p> <p>- In Islamic tradition, the creation of Eve from Adam is viewed as a sign of human unity and companionship. While the Quran does not explicitly mention Eve being created from Adam's rib, Islamic scholars interpret similar themes of creation and companionship between the first human pair.</p> <p>4. Folklore and Mythology:</p> <p>- Ancient Near Eastern Context: Some scholars suggest parallels between Genesis and ancient Near Eastern myths where the creation of woman from man's body part symbolizes the origin of humanity and the establishment of social order.</p> <p>- Folklore Interpretations: In various folk traditions, the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib might be used to explain gender roles, relationships, or the origins of human life in ways that reflect local customs and beliefs.</p> <p>5. Psychological and Philosophical Interpretations:</p> <p>- Depth Psychology: Psychologists and philosophers have explored the symbolic meanings of the rib as representing the integration of masculine and feminine aspects within individuals and society. Carl Jung, for instance, viewed myths like this as archetypal expressions of psychological truths about human nature.</p> <p>Overall, interpretations of Eve's creation from Adam's rib vary widely across cultures and historical contexts, reflecting deeper meanings related to gender relations, human origins, unity, and the divine purpose in creation narratives. These interpretations often blend theological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives to enrich understanding of the biblical text and its broader implications.</p>	<p>unity and shared essence of Adam and Eve, created from the same side or source.</p> <p>Early Church Fathers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hierarchy and Subordination: Some early Church Fathers viewed the rib as signifying Eve's derivation from Adam, creating a hierarchy with Adam as the head. This interpretation however, is not widely accepted in Reformed theology. <p>Modern Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literal vs. Symbolic: The debate continues on whether "tsela" should be interpreted literally or symbolically. Reformed theologians might focus on the deeper meaning of companionship and unity within the creation narrative. <p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These interpretations highlight the influence of cultural contexts on understanding biblical texts. Reformed hermeneutics would likely focus on the text itself while considering insights from various interpretations. <p>For further exploration, you can look into these resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> https://www.gotquestions.org/Adams-rib.html https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/20122/is-the-translation-rib-for-the-hebrew-%D7%A6%D6%B5%D7%9C%D6%B8%D7%A2-tsela-in-genesis-222-justifie 	<p>relations, companionship, and the unity of human nature.</p> <p>Gemini stayed within the biblical contexts. Views range from symbolic meanings, like representing emotions or unity, to potential Mesopotamian myth parallels, rabbinic ideas of shared essence, and early Church notions of hierarchy. Modern discussions continue to explore whether the term should be understood literally or symbolically, often focusing on themes of unity and companionship.</p>
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<p>7</p>	<p>Are there some key differences between Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 2:21-23? What is its relevance to daily African life?</p>	<p>Certainly! Here are some key differences between Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 2:21-23, along with considerations for its relevance to daily African life:</p> <p>### Key Differences Between Jewish and Christian Interpretations:</p> <p>**Jewish Interpretations:**</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> **Emphasis on Equality:** Jewish interpretations often emphasize the equality and partnership between man (Adam) and woman (Eve), viewing Eve's creation from Adam's rib as symbolic of their mutual support and closeness. **Midrashic Expansion:** Midrashic literature expands on the narrative, exploring themes of human relationships, moral lessons, and the significance of creation within the broader context of God's plan for humanity. **Cultural and Ethical Insights:** Jewish interpretations may draw on cultural and ethical insights to apply the narrative's teachings to daily life, focusing on themes of family, community, and ethical conduct. <p>**Christian Interpretations:**</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> **Christological and Ecclesial Themes:** Christian interpretations often relate Eve's creation to Christ and the Church, seeing Adam as a foreshadowing of Christ and Eve as a type of the Church, emphasizing spiritual and theological implications. **Marital Symbolism:** Augustine and later Christian theologians interpret the rib as symbolizing the unity and complementary nature of man and woman in marriage, reflecting theological views on family, sexuality, and the sacrament of marriage. **Salvation History:** Some Christian interpretations place the creation of Eve within the broader narrative of salvation history, highlighting themes of redemption, grace, and the restoration of humanity through Christ. 	<p>Key Differences in Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Genesis 2:21-23:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hierarchy vs. Equality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some Christian interpretations emphasize a hierarchy, with Adam being created first and Eve from his rib, suggesting his dominance. Judaism often focuses on the unity and shared essence of Adam and Eve, created from the same "side" (possible interpretation of "tsela"). Focus on Text vs. External Traditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christians might draw connections to the concept of "original sin" and Eve's role in the fall of man. Judaism generally interprets the text more literally, with less emphasis on external theological concepts. <p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both religions acknowledge the creation of Eve from Adam and the importance of their relationship. Both traditions grapple with the symbolic meaning of the creation story. <p>Relevance to Daily African Life: While the specific details of Genesis 2:21-23 might be interpreted differently, the core themes hold potential relevance in various African contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complementarity and Partnership: The concept of Adam and Eve being created to complement each other can resonate with African traditions emphasizing cooperation and interdependence within families and communities. Respect and Equality: Reformed theology's focus on equality within relationships aligns with efforts promoting gender equality in many African societies. Importance of Storytelling: The creation story serves as a foundational narrative, similar to the 	<p>Both AI models aptly carried out the task</p>
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8	Provide a title and outline for the text and exegesis including any	<p>Title: The Creation of Woman: Eve Formed from Adam's Rib</p> <p>Outline:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Divine Intervention (Genesis 2:21): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God causes a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. 	<p>Title: Interpreting the Creation of Eve: Examining "Rib" and Partnership in Genesis 2:21-23 from a Reformed Perspective in an African Context</p> <p>Outline:</p> <p>I. Introduction:</p>	Task well carried out

<p>applicable cross references.</p>	<p>- He takes one of Adam's ribs and closes the flesh.</p> <p>2. **Formation of Eve (Genesis 2:22):** - God forms the rib into a woman. - He brings her to Adam.</p> <p>3. **Adam's Recognition (Genesis 2:23):** - Adam acknowledges Eve as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. - He declares she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man.</p> <p>**Exegetical Analysis:**</p> <p>1. **Contextual Setting:** - Genesis 2:21-23 occurs within the broader context of the creation narrative, detailing the formation of Eve as a suitable companion for Adam after God's observation that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18).</p> <p>2. **Divine Intervention (Genesis 2:21):** - The phrase "deep sleep" (תַּרְדֵּמָה, tardemah) indicates a state of unconsciousness induced by God, underscoring His direct involvement in the creation of Eve. - "Rib" (צֵלָע, tsela) is traditionally translated as "rib," though it can also mean "side," suggesting the closeness and intimate connection between Adam and Eve.</p> <p>3. **Formation of Eve (Genesis 2:22):** - God forms the rib into a woman, highlighting His creative power and intentionality in shaping Eve from Adam's own substance. - Bringing Eve to Adam signifies God's role as the initiator of human relationships and the establishment of marriage.</p> <p>4. **Adam's Recognition (Genesis 2:23):** - Adam's declaration, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," signifies his recognition of Eve as part of himself, emphasizing their unity and mutual belonging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefly introduce Genesis 2:21-23 and its significance in the creation narrative. Highlight the concept of "rib" (tsela) and its potential for varied interpretations. State the focus of the analysis: Reformed hermeneutics, partnership, and African context. <p>II. Exegesis of Genesis 2:21-23:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze key words and phrases: "tardemah" (deep sleep), "tsela" (rib/side), "ligishah" (woman for man), "etsem" (bone), and "basari" (flesh). Explore the meaning of Eve's creation from Adam's "side" - literal or symbolic interpretation within Reformed theology. Discuss the emphasis on partnership and companionship in the creation story. <p>III. Cross-references and Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefly discuss how other biblical passages (if any) inform the understanding of Genesis 2:21-23 (consider potential connections to creation narratives or concepts of marriage). Acknowledge alternative interpretations of "rib" across different cultures and historical periods (mention Mesopotamian myths or Rabbinic Judaism). <p>IV. Relevance to Daily African Life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore how the themes of partnership and shared essence in Genesis 2:21-23 connect with African traditions emphasizing cooperation and interdependence. Discuss how Reformed theology's focus on equality aligns with efforts promoting gender equality in African societies. Briefly consider the role of storytelling in African cultures and how the creation narrative might resonate within that context. <p>V. Conclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize the key points of the analysis: Reformed perspective, partnership, and African context. 	
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	<p>- The naming of Eve as "Woman" (אִשָּׁה, ishah) reflects Adam's understanding of her role as his counterpart and companion.</p> <p>5. Cross-References:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This verse establishes the foundational creation of humanity as male and female, setting the stage for Eve's creation. - Matthew 19:4-6: Jesus references Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 (regarding a man leaving his father and mother and being united to his wife) to teach on marriage and God's original intention for human relationships. - Ephesians 5:31-32: Paul interprets Genesis 2:24 in light of Christ and the Church, emphasizing the profound spiritual significance of marriage and unity between husband and wife. <p>Conclusion:</p> <p>Genesis 2:21-23, titled "The Creation of Woman: Eve Formed from Adam's Rib," illustrates God's intentional design in creating Eve as Adam's companion and counterpart. This passage serves as a theological foundation for understanding marriage, human relationships, and the unity of the sexes, pointing towards deeper spiritual truths and ethical considerations within the Christian faith.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly acknowledge the ongoing debate around interpreting "rib" and the importance of considering cultural contexts. • Conclude by emphasizing the message of unity and partnership within creation, drawing connections to African values. <p>Note: This is a flexible outline. You can adjust it based on your specific needs and the resources you consult.</p>	
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Relevance of AI tools in African Biblical Exegesis

Access to the original language. The first and second prompts take the exegetes to the original language of the Old Testament – that is Hebrew language. By exegesis, it means the process of careful analytical study of Bible to produce useful interpretations of a passage of the scripture. It infers the discovery of what the biblical author intended his audience to understand and not what one thinks about a text.⁸⁹ Thus, narrow line exists between exegesis (digging into the text to draw out meaning) and eisegesis (reading meaning into the text) resulting the reality of swinging in between the two worlds (exegesis and eisegesis) unintentionally. Translating from the original languages to the language of one's audience is one of the starting points of good biblical interpretation. Right translation begets right interpretation consequent on right doctrinal stance or theology.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, many African interpreters do not have access to the original language of the scriptures but depend on translated materials. Above all, in the quest for an authentic African Christian Theology, Dike turns her scholarly lens on Justin Martyr the Greek apologist of the second century A.D. as an exemplar for African biblical interpreters. She submits that just as Justin Martyr and other Greek apologists defined a common goal for the inculturation of the gospel: reasserting the claims of Jesus Christ from in their Greek context; the preoccupation of an African hermeneutics must be to define the Christian reality using the African worldview.⁹¹ Thus, access to the original language gives the African the ability to move from the worldview of the Bible directly to the African worldview without first passing through the predominantly western worldview in biblical scholarship.

As has been demonstrated above, these AI tools are powerful tool in studying the original languages of the Bible - Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, being to analyze the use of words, their semantic fields, the construction of sentences, and more.⁹² This makes AI tools invaluable assets to help African biblical scholars to gain a better understanding of the linguistic shades for a more accurate translation and interpretation of the Bible. If prompted, it can provide clues on translation issues within the text. This enables the researcher to have various perspectives on the passage and strive towards a fair interpretation or translation. However, it has been noted that NLP systems like ChatGPT and Gemini are not optimized for Bible translation.⁹³ Rightly remarked above, Gemini could not attempt translation of the text and honestly confessed its lack of the capacity to handle such task.

Access to the historical Context of the Bible

Hermeneutics as a field of biblical studies is necessitated by the gap that usually exists between the interpreter and the materials to be interpreted.⁹⁴ The gap may be historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical/biological and philosophical. The sixth and seventh prompts are specifically designed to take the researcher through the historical context. It has been noted that good interpretation requires a grasp of the historical and cultural context in which the text was written.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Karen Engle, What Is Exegesis & Why Is It Important? Plus, How to Start. Logos, 2023. <https://www.logos.com/grow/what-is-exegesis-and-why-is-it-important/>

⁹⁰ Ikho Poswayo, How The Original Languages Can Benefit The African Church, Bible and Theology, September, 2021. <https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-the-original-languages-can-benefit-the-african-church/>

⁹¹ Uzoma Amos Dike, Justin Martyr's Apologetic Framework as a Paradigm for African Biblical Hermeneutics. *Re-Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics in the Diasporised Contemporary World: Trends, Trajectories and Methodologies*. May 2023. P. 159.

⁹² SermonAI, Harnessing AI for Biblical Scholarship and Study, February 24, 2024. P. 1. <https://sermonai.com/blog?p=harnessing-ai-for-biblical-scholarship-and-study>

⁹³ Jonathan Robie, Artificial Intelligence and Bible Translation, *Biblical Archaeology Society*, January 3, 2024. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/artificial-intelligence-and-bible-translation/>

⁹⁴ Emiola Nihinlola, CTH701: Biblical Hermeneutics, National Open University of Nigeria 2006. P. 3

⁹⁵ SermonAI, p. 2

The AI tools used demonstrate ability to analyze large archeological data, historical records of the biblical data among others. This access to the historical context can significantly enrich scholars understanding of biblical narratives, culture and teachings. Through access to the historical context of the text, the hermeneutical gaps are broken and fair interpretation is achieved.

Inter Religious and Cultural Studies

Prompt six and seven take the researcher beyond the walls of the Christian worldview or perceptions of text. Comparing and analysing religious texts from different faiths, identifying common moral codes, themes, and stories. This has the capacity of fostering a better inter religious understanding and dialogue, promoting a culture of respect and mutual learning.⁹⁶

Relevance of AI tools in African biblical Exegesis

Access to the Original Language

The first and second prompts in the table indicating the “Applicable Cross References” take the exegete to the original language of the Old Testament – that is Hebrew language. It is a clear demonstration that the use of AI technologies in African biblical exegesis can enhance accessibility⁹⁷ by making biblical texts and other resources readily available in their original languages, hence more accessible to a broader audience. Scholars and the public, especially those who do not have the privilege of learning the languages as experts, could now have direct access to the rare or fragile manuscripts. This would be great advancement of the quality of African biblical exegesis.

The task also shows how the use of AI tools could facilitate quick access to cross-references and word studies, aligns with the historical longstanding of the aspiration of the 16-17th century reformers and contemporary preference for self-guided Bible reading, especially among African Pentecostals. AI technologies give the convenience to analysing large volumes of texts, identifying patterns and uncovering new insights in scriptural texts could equally work to the advantage of enhancement of thoughts in African biblical exegeses.

Translation from the original languages to the language of one’s audience is one of the starting points of good biblical interpretation. Ikho Poswayo attests to this when he argues that right translation begets right interpretation, consequent on right doctrinal stance or theology.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, many African interpreters do not have access to the original language of the scriptures but depend on translated materials. Above all, in the quest for an authentic African Christian Theology, Dike turns her scholarly lens on Justin Martyr the Greek apologist of the second century A.D. as an exemplar for African biblical interpreters. She submits that just as Justin Martyr and other Greek apologists defined a common goal for the inculturation of the gospel: reasserting the claims of Jesus Christ from in their Greek context; the preoccupation of an African hermeneutics must be to define the Christian reality using the African worldview.⁹⁹ Thus, access to the original language gives the African the ability to move from the worldview of the Bible directly to the African worldview without first passing through the predominantly western worldview in biblical scholarship

⁹⁶ SermonAI <https://sermonai.com/blog?p=harnessing-ai-for-biblical-scholarship-and-study>

⁹⁷ Rey Ty, “Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead”, *Religion and Social Communication*, 21 (No. 2, 2023), 351

⁹⁸ Ikho Poswayo, *How The Original Languages Can Benefit The African Church, Bible and Theology*, September, 2021. <https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-the-original-languages-can-benefit-the-african-church/>

⁹⁹ Uzoma Amos Dike, *Justin Martyr’s Apologetic Framework as a Paradigm for African Biblical Hermeneutics. Re-Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics in the Diasporised Contemporary World: Trends, Trajectories and Methodologies*. May 2023, 159.

As has been demonstrated above, these AI tools are powerful tool in studying the original languages of the Bible - Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, being to analyze the use of words, their semantic fields, the construction of sentences, and more.¹⁰⁰ This makes AI tools invaluable assets to help African biblical scholars to gain a better understanding of the linguistic shades for a more accurate translation and interpretation of the Bible. If prompted, it can provide clues on translation issues within the text. this enables the researcher to have various perspectives on the passage and strive towards a fair interpretation or translation. However, it has been noted that NLP systems like ChatGPT and Gemini are not optimized for Bible translation.¹⁰¹ Rightly remarked above, Gemini could not attempt translation of the text and honestly confessed its lack of the capacity to handle such task.

Access to the Historical Context of the Bible

Hermeneutics as a field of biblical studies is necessitated by the gap that usually exists between the interpreter and the materials to be interpreted.¹⁰² The gap may be historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical/biological and philosophical. The sixth and seventh prompts are specifically designed to take the researcher through the historical context. It has been noted that good interpretation requires a grasp of the historical and cultural context in which the text was written.¹⁰³ The AI tools used demonstrate ability to analyse large archaeological data, historical records of the biblical data among others. This access to the historical context can significantly enrich scholars understanding of biblical narratives, culture, and teachings. Through access to the historical context of the text, the hermeneutical gaps are broken, and fair interpretation is achieved.

Inter Religious and Cultural Studies

Prompts six and seven take the researcher beyond the walls of the Christian worldview or perceptions of text. Comparing and analysing religious texts from different faiths, identifying common moral codes, themes, and stories. This has the capacity of fostering a better inter religious understanding and dialogue, promoting a culture of respect and mutual learning.¹⁰⁴ The may not also overlook the additional benefit of the AI tools, which could also help to preserve African cultural and religious heritage through digitalisation.¹⁰⁵ Some of these cultural and religious elements could be oral traditions, songs, and stories related to biblical interpretations. They could serve as indispensable resources for African biblical exegesis.

But many scholars and pastors are still troubled about what AI tools will mean for future biblical interpretation in general,¹⁰⁶ and particularly African biblical exegesis. How would these technologies shape the reception of the Bible by the African? How could experts navigate the ethical challenges that come along with the use of these technologies? Some of these ethical challenges would be highlighted in the next section.

¹⁰⁰ SemonAI, Harnessing AI for Biblical Scholarship and Study, February 24, 2024. P. 1.

<https://sermonai.com/blog?p=harnessing-ai-for-biblical-scholarship-and-study>

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Robie, Artificial Intelligence and Bible Translation, Biblical Archaeology Society, January 3, 2024.

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/artificial-intelligence-and-bible-translation/>

¹⁰² Emiola Nihinlola, CTH701: Biblical Hermeneutics, National Open University of Nigeria 2006. P. 3

¹⁰³ SermonAI, p. 2

¹⁰⁴ SermonAI Harnessing AI for Biblical Scholarship and study. <https://sermonai.com/blog?p=harnessing-ai-for-biblical-scholarship-and-study>

¹⁰⁵ Rey Ty, "Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead", Religion and Social Communication, 21 (No. 2, 2023) 359-353

¹⁰⁶ Kaitlyn Schiess, "Why Do We Want AI to Interpret Scripture?" *Christian Today*, November 20, 2023,

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/december/ai-artificial-intelligence-interpret-scripture-bible.html>

Ethical considerations of using AI in African biblical scholarship

Pope Francis, while acknowledging generally the opportunity of technology, warns against the threat of sole dependence on AI.¹⁰⁷ Some of the threats revolves around significant ethical and moral issues for users, developers, humans, and society.¹⁰⁸ They challenge the core human and religious values and question the foundation of many faith communities such as the understanding and interpretation of religious texts. In other words, the integration of AI into African biblical scholarship would raise important ethical concerns that warrant careful examination and reflection. As the AI technologies become increasingly prevalent in scholarly research and interpretation, the place and indispensable role of human agency are put to test.¹⁰⁹

Authenticity and Integrity of Biblical Interpretation

Some of the disturbing concerns however, revolve around the authenticity and integrity of the interpretation. AI technologies can create deep fakes and other manipulated content, which could distort biblical texts and religious messages. This can lead to the spread of false interpretations and misinformation.¹¹⁰ The technologies can also be used to generate altered versions of biblical texts that might appear authentic, leading to confusion and potential manipulation of religious teachings. Again, the absolute reliance on AI algorithms might result in superficial interpretations that lack theological depth and fail to capture the spiritual and existential dimensions of African biblical exegesis. But more challenging is when one takes into consideration the interpretive process of biblical exegesis, which is deeply human. It involves personal reflection, spiritual insight, and communal discussion. Over-reliance on AI could then question the role of human engagement in this process.

Authority and Tradition

AI-generated interpretations of biblical texts, especially in African context, might challenge traditional religious authorities and established interpretations without subjecting the “AI text interpretations” to further scrutiny because of the inability of the AI to subject itself to human faculties that foster dialogue. Following the argument of Schiess closely, one may conclude that the deployment of AI tools to African biblical exegesis fail many a time because its lack of accountability in interpretation, especially when the user is unwilling to make compromise in matters of faith, and its lack of engagement in handling disagreements and diverse interpretations. At this point, the absolutisation of AI-tools at the expense of human agency in the quest for knowledge and truth does not only expose humanity to the risk of induced “illusion of omnipotence”, thinking of becoming “like God *without* God” (Gen 3).¹¹¹ As a matter of fact, AI tools do not ensure avoidance of human agency in the interpretation of the Word of God, they can facilitate bypassing this valuable aspect.¹¹² This can potentially cause confusion and division

¹⁰⁷ Pope Francis “Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication” Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 58th World Day of Social Communication. (Vaticana: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice, 2024), 2-3.

¹⁰⁸ Keng Siau and Weiyu Wang, “Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ethics,” *Journal of Database Management*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 74–87, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Rey Ty, “Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead”, *Religion and Social Communication*, 21 (No. 2, 2023) 359-360

¹¹⁰ Rey Ty, “Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead”, *Religion and Social Communication*, 21 (No. 2, 2023) 355-356

¹¹¹ Pope Francis “Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication” Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 58th World Day of Social Communication. (Vaticana: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice, 2024), 2.

¹¹² Kaitlyn Schiess, “Why Do We Want AI to Interpret Scripture?” *Christian Today*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/december/ai-artificial-intelligence-interpret-scripture-bible.html>

within faith communities, and the society at large. It raises further serious ethical concern, when the information from AI false-generated interpretations is manipulated for propaganda agenda or narrow interests that can negatively influence public opinions and belief systems.

Low Level of Cultural Sensitivity for African Socio-Cultural Context

It is important to stress the ethical danger often associated with the low level of cultural sensitivity in the use of AI technologies. The AI systems to a larger extent lack the nuanced understanding of African cultural and historical contexts necessary for accurate biblical exegesis. This can result in interpretations that are culturally insensitive or misaligned with African traditions. The AI algorithms created and structured on biased data can perpetuate stereotypes and cultural biases, which can negatively impact the interpretation of biblical texts within African contexts. When this is connected to the current digital divide¹¹³ in many African regions that limits access to advanced AI tools and technologies that hinders the ability of scholars and communities to utilise these resources for biblical exegesis, the stereotypes and cultural biases become exacerbated and challenging.

The Place of Human Agency

The exploration underscores the paramount importance of the "human agency" guided by the Spirit in the pursuit of genuine African biblical exegesis and in broader religious and theological inquiries. Biblical exegesis in this sense transcends contemporary understanding of science. It goes beyond being merely "data-driven" or "facts and causes" venture. It is and should be a "spiritual-driven," "norms and purposes" endeavour.¹¹⁴ Regardless of the text genre and the technological tools employed, the interpretations and readings of the exegete are invariably influenced by certain perspectives or traditional history. This reminder is timely if the exegete and other biblical text users should come to terms with the reality that theology deals with what is most absolute. It is simply about God and the word of God—the Bible.¹¹⁵ It is necessary to note that God's revelation through narratives, epistles, prophecies, and poetry defies reduction to mere data points or social science.¹¹⁶ And as finite, and imperfect beings, humans urgently need guidance to understand and appreciate the Word of God accurately. Instead of seeking independent interpretation of the Bible that relies solely on AI tools, individuals are advised to judiciously seek for guidance, drawing from the collective wisdom of the traditions of the Church globally and throughout history, as well as from those who assemble regularly to receive the teachings of the Lord.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

The integration of AI tools in African biblical exegesis offers significant benefits, including enhanced accessibility to original biblical languages and resources, aiding scholars and the public. These tools facilitate quick cross-referencing and word studies, align with historical and contemporary Bible study practices, and enable direct translations from original languages, thus bypassing Western interpretations. AI's ability to analyse historical contexts enriches biblical

¹¹³ Rey Ty, "Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead", *Religion and Social Communication*, 21 (No. 2, 2023) 359.

¹¹⁴ Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019). 47

¹¹⁵ Willem H. Oliver, "The Bible in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: What's in It for Me", *HTS Theological Studies* 76(4, 2020): 1-21, a6020, <https://doi.org/10.04102/hts.v76i6020>

¹¹⁶ Cf. Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019). 47

¹¹⁷ Kaitlyn Schiess, "Why Do We Want AI to Interpret Scripture?" *Christian Today*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/december/ai-artificial-intelligence-interpret-scripture-bible.html>

interpretation and helps bridge hermeneutical gaps. Additionally, AI can foster inter-religious dialogue and preserve African cultural heritage.

However, ethical concerns arise regarding the authenticity and integrity of AI-generated interpretations, potential over-reliance on AI, cultural insensitivity, and the risk of superficial interpretations. Maintaining human agency, guided by spiritual and communal insights, remains essential in biblical exegesis.

To balance AI's potential with its risks, investments in digital literacy, public awareness, and ongoing collaborations among religious, technological, and cultural experts are crucial. Establishing regulatory and ethical guidelines will ensure AI tools enhance rather than hinder African biblical exegesis.

Recommendation

The paper, therefore, advocates for human capital investments in digital literacy¹¹⁸ and public awareness about the potential and limitations of AI among scholars, religious leaders, and laypersons and the public. There should be ongoing collaborative and engaging discussions with religious leaders, AI-technologists, theologians, and cultural experts to develop AI tools that are user-friendly, purposeful in meeting the needs and sensitivities of African contexts and enhance rather than hinder African biblical exegesis. A multidisciplinary committee of experts and stakeholders, championed by religious leaders, may be instituted to establish regulations and ethical guidelines to govern the use of AI,¹¹⁹ in religious contexts,¹²⁰ ensuring transparency, accountability, and respect for cultural heritage.

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¹¹⁸ Rey Ty, "Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead", Religion and Social Communication, 21 (No. 2, 2023) 364.

¹¹⁹ Pope Francis "Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication" Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 58th World Day of Social Communication. (Vaticana: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice, 2024), 2.

¹²⁰ Rey Ty, "Impact of AI-Powered Technology on Religious Practices and Ethics: The Road Ahead", Religion and Social Communication, 21 (No. 2, 2023) 359-365

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Hermeneutics of Liberation and Its Influence on the Church in Africa

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Abstract

This article investigates the hermeneutics of liberation and its influence on the church within the African context. The problem addressed in this article is the need to understand the extent to which the Hermeneutics of liberation has been embraced and applied by the church in Africa and the challenges encountered in its implementation. The trust of this paper is that the hermeneutics of liberation hold great potential for the church in Africa in promoting social justice, addressing systemic inequalities, and empowering marginalised communities. A descriptive approach, particularly in observational studies, is employed in the study. The findings reveal the importance of creating spaces for dialogue and collaboration between African theologians and practitioners to promote a more contextualised understanding and application of the hermeneutics of liberation. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on liberation theology in Africa, providing insights into the current state of its implementation within the Church in Africa.

Keywords: Church, context, hermeneutics, liberation, influence

Introduction

During social, economic, and political turmoil, the Church in Africa has sought to reclaim its prophetic voice and engage in a transformative mission. One key catalyst for this movement has been the hermeneutics of liberation, a biblical interpretation approach that prioritises the experiences and perspectives of marginalised communities. Emerging from the Latin American liberation theology movement, this hermeneutics has resonated to address the continent's pressing challenge. Despite the growing adoption of the hermeneutics of liberation in African Christianity, a significant disconnect remains between its theoretical frameworks and practical application, hindering effective social transformation and justice.

Marten H. Woudstra cites Gustavo Gutierrez, who observes that the fundamental difficulty with liberation hermeneutics and its theology is the relationship between theory and practice, that is, between understanding the faith and social practice.¹²¹ The theory and praxis are the front lines in the struggle for liberation hermeneutics. A significant difficulty for many theologians today is achieving a connection between theory and praxis in the church and society. The main thrust is that through a critical application of the hermeneutics of liberation, the church in Africa can effectively address social injustices, promote contextualised theology, and empower marginalised communities.

The Concept of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation. It involves understanding the meaning of texts and considering historical, cultural, and social contexts. The primary goal of

¹²¹ Marten H. Woudstra, "A Critique of Liberation Theology by a Cross-Culturalized Calvinist," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society JETS* Vol. 23, no. 1 (March 1980): 3-12.

hermeneutics is to understand and interpret texts, especially biblical texts, so that the author's intended meaning is understood and applied to contemporary situations. This field of study acknowledges the complexity of the Bible as a collection of ancient works in a range of genres, languages, and cultural settings.¹²² Similarly, Julius Ndishua states, "Hermeneutics involves principles and tasks in interpretation, making it both an art and science of interpreting."¹²³

Kelebogile Thomas Resane avers that the "social and material life" of Africans is often regarded as the starting point for liberation hermeneutics.¹²⁴ African liberation hermeneutics aims to liberate the masses from the repressive and tyrannical rule of the powerful in society. Additionally, by tracking the political and economic limbs of the populace within the African environment, African liberation hermeneutics aims to preserve the spiritual and material well-being of the population.¹²⁵ Resane argues that political and economic analysis should take centre stage, with religion and culture playing a supporting role. The crucial categories of liberation hermeneutics are race and class, not religion and culture.¹²⁶ The issues of "race" and "class" form the basis of liberation hermeneutics. Gustavo Gutierrez, cited by Ephraim Tshuma, states that freedom is a process of salvation that leads to total transformation.¹²⁷ Individuals may be freed from socio-economic or political servitude through the procedure. The historical development of liberation hermeneutics is essential in this research.

Historical Development of Liberation Hermeneutics

Gustavo Gutierrez and James Cone are credited with coining "liberation theology" in 1968.¹²⁸ In the 1960s and 1970s, liberation hermeneutics arose amid political, social, and economic upheaval. It was a fresh mandate for the church to work toward equality, social justice, and the protection of human dignity. It is a family of theologies that includes 'feminist organisations, Black people, and Latin Americans', as was previously noted. As a result, it emphasises theologising with the underprivileged, oppressed, and social outcasts.¹²⁹ The main goals of liberation theology are to identify the need for freedom from oppression on the political, economic, social, sexual, racial, and religious levels and to maintain that theology should emerge naturally from the core Christian

¹²² Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 6; Olusayo B. Oladejo, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Decision-Making: A Critique of the Dispensationalist Approach." *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, no. 2 (February, 2016): 27039-27043, <http://www.journalcra.com>, accessed April 22, 2021; also see Hendrik Birus, "Hermeneutics Today Some Skeptical Remarks." *New German Critique*, 42 (Autumn, 1987): 71-78, www.jstor.org/stable/488257. Accessed April 22, 2021; Jose Angel Garcia Landa, "Theories of Interpretation: Classical to Romantic Hermeneutics." *Electronic Journal* (January, 1993), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282613712> accessed April 22, 2021; and Donald K. McKim ed., *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends-in Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 12; Cate L. Robert. *How to Interpret the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1983), 14; Bernard L. Ramm, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971), 10.

¹²³ Ndishua, Julius. "Hermeneutica Sacra and its Implications for Old Testament Theology," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (March, 2022): 77-84.

¹²⁴ Kelebogile Thomas Resane, "Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of Biblical Texts: Africa Approaches," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 99, (2018) :4; <http://www.pharosjot.com> accessed May 14, 2021.

¹²⁵ Resane, "Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of Biblical Texts: Africa Approaches," 4.

¹²⁶ Resane, "Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of Biblical Texts: Africa Approaches," 4.

¹²⁷ Ephraim Tshuma, "Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa," *Perichoresis* Vol. 14, Issue 1(2016): 3-20.

¹²⁸ Samuel O. Okanlawon, "Liberation Theologies of the Twentieth Century: Insights for Integral Development of Africa in the Twenty-first Century," *E-Journal of religious and Theological Studies* Vol. 7, Issue 1 (January 2021):1-8.

¹²⁹ Okanlawon, "liberation Theologies of the Twentieth Century: Insights for Integral Development of Africa in the Twenty-first Century," 2; see Lesekele Victor Makhetha, "Doing Liberation Theology in the Context of the Post-Apartheid South Africa," *University of South Africa* (November 2014), 87; and Gerald West, "Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa," *University of KwaZulu-Natal*, (January 2014), 15; <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334791925> accessed May 18, 2024; Edward J. Martin, "Liberation Theology, Sustainable Development, and Postmodern Public Administration," *Latin American Perspective*, Issue 131, Vol. 30, no. 4 (July 2003): 70-71.

communities rather than being imposed from above.¹³⁰ This style of theology, when understood, implies that academics and theologians approach the Bible with the idea that God primarily addresses the impoverished. Theologians within this school of thought use “the Marxist view of social analysis” because they regularly read the text from the perspective that God is speaking to the underprivileged.¹³¹

Adewale demonstrates how liberation theology originated in Latin America and gave rise to the field known as liberation hermeneutics today. According to Adewale, liberation theology is a theological reflection that emerged from the experience of joint efforts to end the unfair circumstances that exist today. It calls for a connected hermeneutical technique that will challenge rather than uphold the status quo.¹³² Adewale adduces that liberation hermeneutics is approached from below, i.e., through the eyes of the underprivileged and the racial, gender, and class disadvantaged. His observation is that the oppressed’s experience proves the Bible’s applicability beyond concerns of religion and spirituality. However, the world’s social, political, and economic realities also worry it. It is also known as the theology of praxis and hermeneutics because it emphasises the theologian’s action in emancipating the citizenry.¹³³

Adewale further asserts that liberation hermeneutics examines the Bible to determine what God’s word has to say about the plight of the oppressed. For instance, it interprets the Exodus as a divine summons to assist in the liberation of the oppressed. It also looks at the prophets as a model of modern theologians, particularly Amos. Jesus’ statement in Luke 4:18 serves as a special invitation to join the struggle for freedom.¹³⁴ The experience of the oppressed is a privileged hermeneutical ground, and identifying with the poor is the first step in comprehending the Bible or the modern world, according to Gustavo Gutierrez, who also claims that feminist, Latin American, and black theologies all make similar claims.¹³⁵ This discussion is extended to the overview of liberation in Africa.

Overview of Liberation in Africa

This section provides a basic overview of African liberation. Ephraim Tshuma avers that at the Berlin Conference in 1884, the colonisation of Africa was officially declared. He noted the absence of Africans at the meeting. Partitioning the continents were the colonial overlords, mainly France, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, and Belgium. These colonisers aimed to replace the depleted European resources that had exploded due to the Industrial Revolution with labour, land, and minerals from Africa.¹³⁶ Tshuma adds that some missionaries neglected to consider Africa’s history and experience in favour of evangelisation. He notes that Africans lived communal lives, while Western Christianity promoted an ideology focused on individualism. The Africans were forced to adopt a new culture and give up their cultural heritage. Regretfully, most Christian missionaries only applied Romans 13:1–7 without question; hence, they did not publicly disagree with the colonial governments’ practices.¹³⁷

Tshuma also asserts that, in the eyes of the Christian missionaries, the local governments were legitimate despite their oppression of the populace because God ordered them. The Africans

¹³⁰ Okanlawon, “Liberation Theologies of the Twentieth Century: Insights for Integral Development of Africa in the Twenty-first Century,” 2.

¹³¹ Okanlawon, “Liberation Theologies of the Twentieth Century: Insights for Integral Development of Africa in the Twenty-first Century,” 2.

¹³² Olubiyi Adeniyi Adewale, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Abeokuta: Crowther Theological Publishers, ND), 26.

¹³³ Adewale, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 27.

¹³⁴ Adewale, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 27.

¹³⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, “The Hermeneutical Privilege of the Oppressed: Liberation Theologies, Biblical Faith, and Marxist Sociology of Knowledge,” N.P.:N.D: 155-181.

¹³⁶ Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 9.

¹³⁷ Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 10.

were able to consider “wholeness” because of the Christian message of salvation. Salvation needed to be extended to the whole person; it was insufficient to confine it to metaphysics. He continues by pointing out that there were significant differences between Black and White people in every area of society. As a result, Africans found a way to express their desire for freedom through the church. African clergies rose to prominence as advocates of self-actualisation and independence. They extracted concepts of emancipation from the Bible. The narrative of the Israelites’ Exodus aided their creation of a focal point.¹³⁸

Tshuma discloses that the Hebrew tale originated with their experience of Egyptian subjugation. The nationalist leaders took on the role of their “Moses,” negotiating with the white authorities, or Pharaohs, to gain permission to travel to the “promised land.” He points out that living in a free nation where they could exercise adult decision-making was what the Africans saw as the Promised Land. They desired the freedom to take part in the political process so they could significantly impact their nation’s government.¹³⁹

Tshuma further notes that mission schools were the primary source of education for the majority of those who went on to lead liberation movements. According to Acts 7:23–25, many oppressed people were motivated by Moses’s use of God’s divine authority to fight the Egyptian authorities. Although most Africans used weapons to resist European colonisation, using violence to achieve liberation presents some difficult questions. To appease the natives, the colonialists themselves used force and fear tactics.¹⁴⁰

According to Tshuma, the African Christians also turned to Old Testament priests and prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos, who addressed social justice issues. They considered how these religious leaders have denounced injustice at different crossroads in the community. He points out that several African clerics, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reverend Allan Boesak, Reverend Frank Chikane of South Africa, Bishop Abel Muzoewa of Zimbabwe, Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and Canaan Banana of Zimbabwe, and a host of other significant figures, were forced to choose between morally endorsing and actively participating in the liberation movements.¹⁴¹

Tshuma adduces that some African clerics who received severe warnings were imprisoned or prohibited from travelling. He points out that Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings in the New Testament (Lk. 4:16–20) inspired the African’s liberation hermeneutics. Jesus’s confrontations with the authorities in Bethlehem and Galilee indicate that he opposed all injustices. Jesus was frequently perceived as standing out for the underprivileged and marginalised. Jesus commanded his disciples to love their adversaries even as he chastised the ruling class of his day (Matt. 5:44).¹⁴² This research used the descriptive approach to analyse the data.

Research Methodology

The researcher analysed his data using a descriptive methodology, primarily drawing on observational studies. Descriptive research, in the words of Sunaina Singh, is an exploratory technique that aids in the description of a population, situation, or phenomenon. It can assist in providing answers to inquiries about what, where, when, and how, but not why. As stated, this approach does not entail modifying the variables under investigation or attempting to establish a causal relationship.¹⁴³ This research methodology serves as the foundation for several academic

¹³⁸ Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 10.

¹³⁹ Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 10.

¹⁴⁰ Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 11.

¹⁴¹ Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 11.

¹⁴² Tshuma, “Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa,” 11.

¹⁴³ Sunaina Singh, “What is Descriptive Research? Definition, Methods, Types and Examples, <https://research.life> accessed May 29, 2024.

and scientific fields. Its primary importance stems from its capacity to offer a thorough summary of a phenomenon, allowing researchers to obtain a more nuanced comprehension of the variables involved. This method also helps to formulate hypotheses, produce insights, and establish the framework for more in-depth studies.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, observational studies involve observing participants in their natural surroundings. These include cross-sectional and longitudinal studies for an insight into a population or patterns over time, as well as case studies focusing on a particular case or individual.¹⁴⁵ The findings and discussion are addressed in the next section.

Core Values of Biblical Liberation Hermeneutics

The fundamental principles of biblical liberation hermeneutics are the selection of interlocutors, one's understanding of God, social analysis, the use of theological instruments, and the connection between theory and practice.¹⁴⁶ These core values are explained below.

The Choice of the Interlocutors

Scholars and theologians have focused on social interactions rather than ideas or methods of the choice of interlocutors since the post-Enlightenment era began. According to West, the interlocutors are primarily low-income individuals. The decision made by the interlocutors is not only ethically significant, but it also requires an interpretive foundation in the sociological analysis of individuals with low incomes. West argues that low-income individuals should be considered in any interpretive act.¹⁴⁷ It appears from the choice of interlocutors that learning liberation hermeneutics is crucial. God's perception is another fundamental principle of biblical liberation hermeneutics.

The Perception of God

The concept of the interlocutors' decision technically influences how God is understood. According to West, knowing God's side in the world of the oppressed is more important than knowing whether God exists, as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) so eloquently put it.¹⁴⁸ There is not much of a problem with God's existence. The question remains, nevertheless, if God is concerned about the suffering of His people, particularly the impoverished segments of society. In a culture where people rule abundance without regard for God, it is not unusual to discover a high concentration of underprivileged individuals. Social analysis is an additional fundamental value.

Social Analysis

The choice of interlocutors has an impact on the sociological analysis as well. West asserts that a conflictual understanding of social reality underpins social analysis from the choice of low-income people as the primary interlocutors of biblical liberation hermeneutics. This choice affirms a difference between the perceptions of the privileged "from above" and the impoverished "from below."¹⁴⁹ The potential conflicts where social analysis is required include the fight for power control between men and women and the friction between the rich and the poor. The dominant culture's domination over the less dominant in society and the church is the root cause of this

¹⁴⁴Sunaina Singh, "What is Descriptive Research? Definition, Methods, Types and Examples, <https://research.life> accessed May 29, 2024.

¹⁴⁵ Singh, "What is Descriptive Research? Definition, Methods, Types and Examples.

¹⁴⁶Gerald West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* (July, 2010): 1-28.

¹⁴⁷ West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics," 3.

¹⁴⁸ West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics," 3.

¹⁴⁹ West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics," 3.

ethnic strife. Social actors' responses differ depending on the situation. Selecting theological instruments is still another fundamental principle.

The choice of theological tools

Biblical liberation hermeneutics cannot overlook the choice of tools the interlocutors use in social analysis. According to Frontin, "Liberation theologians need different tools for their theological reflection with a different interlocutor and a different perception of God," as quoted by West.¹⁵⁰ Interpreting religious texts and interacting with society can be done in several ways. Several concepts and instruments of liberation hermeneutics include contextual interpretation, praxis-oriented approach, preferential option for the poor, social-historical analysis, and multidisciplinary engagement. Another essential core value is the relationship between theory and practice.

The relationship between theory and practice

The interface between praxis and biblical interpretation is another essential core value of liberation hermeneutics. According to West, biblical interpretation is "a second" act" in biblical liberation hermeneutics. The first act is the praxis of action and reflection. He opines that the action is actual action in a particular struggle; integrally related to this action is a reflection on the action, refined or reconstituted by the reflection on and reconsideration of theory.¹⁵¹ From the core value of biblical liberation hermeneutics, the following section focuses on the biblical foundation of liberation hermeneutics.

Biblical Foundation of Liberation Hermeneutics

Liberation hermeneutics approaches the Scripture with a focus on various aspects that highlight the themes of liberation, justice, and the preferential option for the marginalised. Some critical elements of liberation hermeneutics in the Scripture include:

Exodus Narrative

The Israelites' escape from Egyptian enslavement and subsequent trek to the Promised Land constitutes one of the central themes of the Hebrew Bible. The Exodus narrative is emphasised by liberation hermeneutics as a call to reject oppression and pursue freedom and a paradigm for comprehending God's liberating action in history. Tshuma asserts that the story of Exodus implies that oppression was the reason the Jewish people were forced to flee Egypt. This was due to the ascension of a Pharaoh who was ignorant of Joseph. The Egyptian hosts became oppressors. The slavery cum more complex labour episode raises questions about labour laws and working conditions on the Egyptian land. The story also raises questions about the treatment of immigrants and expatriate workers in the Ancient Near East.¹⁵² This Exodus narrative is similar to the poverty and scarcity confronting some African nations today.

Prophetic Call for Justice

Books in the Bible that are prophetic, like Isaiah, Micah, and Amos, contain strong messages of social justice and the condemnation of social injustice. Liberation hermeneutics highlights the prophetic call to challenge oppressive systems, advocate for the rights of the poor and marginalised, and pursue a just society.

¹⁵⁰ West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics,"3.

¹⁵¹ West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics,"4.

¹⁵² Tshuma, "Liberation as a Paradigm for Full Humanity in Africa," 5.; see Masiwa Ragies Gunda, "Understanding the Role of the Exodus in the Institutionalization and Dismantling of Apartheid: Considering the Paradox of Justice and Injustice in the Exodus," *Religions* (August, 2021): 1-13.

Jesus' Ministry

Liberation hermeneutics emphasises Jesus' ministry as one of liberation, healing, and justice. It focuses on Jesus's solidarity with the marginalised, his proclamation of the kingdom of God, and his critique of oppressive religious and political systems.

Preferential Option for the Poor

Liberation hermeneutics underscores the biblical mandate to prioritise the needs of the poor and marginalised. It draws attention to passages such as the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12) and Jesus's teaching on caring for the least among us (Matt. 25:31:46) as expressions of God's concern for the oppressed and a call to action.

Call to Liberation from Sin

Liberation hermeneutics recognises that liberation extends beyond social and political dimensions. It emphasises the biblical call for liberation from sin and spiritual bondage, offering a holistic understanding of liberation that encompasses personal and societal transformation. Apostle Paul notes that "for freedom, Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1), implying liberation from sin insofar as it represents a selfish turning in upon oneself. To sin is to refuse to love one's neighbours and, therefore, the LORD himself. Sin- a breach of friendship with God and others, according to the Bible, is the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice, and the oppression in which many people live.¹⁵³

Community Building and Inclusivity

Liberation hermeneutics highlights the biblical vision of inclusive and egalitarian communities. It draws attention to passages that emphasise breaking down barriers, including the marginalised, and pursuing unity and equality among all believers.

Kingdom of God

Liberation hermeneutics interprets the concept of the kingdom of God as a transformative and liberating reality. It views the kingdom of God as a reality that challenges oppressive structures and envisions a future of justice, peace, and liberation. The influence of liberation hermeneutics is discussed below.

Influence of Liberation Hermeneutics on the African Church

Liberation hermeneutics has significantly impacted the Church in Africa, influencing its theology, practices, and engagement with social issues. Okanlawon observes that "liberation" belongs to the socio-economic context of development because it was first used in the context of socio-economic development to designate a more embracing approach to development than the approaches people are familiar with."¹⁵⁴ Some of the critical impacts of liberation hermeneutics on the Church in Africa include:

Empowering the Marginalised

Liberation hermeneutics has empowered marginalised communities within the Church in Africa. By highlighting the biblical mandate to prioritise the needs and perspectives of the poor, oppressed, and marginalised, liberation hermeneutics has given a voice to those historically marginalised and has encouraged their active participation in the life and leadership of the church.

¹⁵³ Gustavo Gutierrez, "A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation," *Translated and edited by Sisti Caridad Inza and John Eagleson* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 23-24.

¹⁵⁴ Okanlawon, "Liberation Theologies of the Twentieth Century: Insights for Integral Development of Africa in the Twenty-first Century," 6.

Addressing Socio-Political Injustice

Liberation hermeneutics has prompted the Church in Africa to actively address socio-political injustices. By interpreting the Scripture through the lens of liberation and justice, the church has been motivated to challenge oppressive systems, advocate for human rights, and work towards social transformation in poverty, corruption, inequality, and ethnic tensions.

Promoting Contextualised Theology

Liberation hermeneutics has contributed to the development of contextualised theology in the African Church. By integrating African communities' cultural, social, and historical contexts into the interpretation of Scripture, liberation hermeneutics has encouraged the emergence of indigenous theological frameworks that resonate with Africans' experiences and challenges. This has resulted in a more profound sense of ownership and relevance of theology within local contexts.

Encouraging Prophetic Witness

Liberation hermeneutics has inspired the Church in Africa to engage in prophetic witness against injustice. Drawing on the prophetic tradition in the Bible, liberation hermeneutics has called the church to speak truth to power, challenge oppressive regimes, and advocate for human rights, often at the risk of persecution and opposition.

Fostering Solidarity and Unity

Liberation hermeneutics has fostered a sense of solidarity and unity within the Church in Africa. By emphasising the biblical call to love and care for one another, liberation hermeneutics has encouraged the church to break down barriers of ethnicity, tribe, and social status, promoting unity and cooperation among diverse Christian communities.

Transforming Worship and Spirituality

Liberation hermeneutics has influenced the worship and spirituality of the Church in Africa. By integrating themes of liberation, justice, and the preferential option for the poor into liturgy, prayers, and hymns, liberation hermeneutics has enriched the spiritual life of believers, inspiring them to live out their faith in ways that promote social transformation and the pursuit of justice. These impacts of liberation hermeneutics on the Church in Africa demonstrate its transformative potential in shaping the theology, practices, and engagement of the church with the socio-political realities of the African context. A few recommendations are suggested in this research.

Recommendations

Liberation hermeneutics holds significant prospects for the African context, and several ways exist to further its development and application. Some recommendations for pastors, scholars, theologians, and theological institutions are explained below.

Recommendations to Pastors

Church leaders in Africa should emphasise contextualisation. This involves integrating African cultural, social, and historical contexts into the interpretation of Scripture and theological reflection. By doing so, liberation hermeneutics can become even more relevant and meaningful to the lived experiences of African communities. There is a need for liberation to be embraced and practised at the grassroots level within African communities. This involves empowering local leaders and congregations to apply the principles of liberation hermeneutics in their contexts and

encouraging bottom-up approaches to social transformation. Grassroots engagement can significantly impact addressing the specific challenge faced by local communities.

Recommendations to Scholars and Theologians

Encouraging collaboration and dialogue among African theologians, scholars, and practitioners is crucial. This includes creating spaces for conversations and exchanging ideas, experiences, and best practices in applying liberation hermeneutics. Collaboration can help refine the theological frameworks and foster a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for liberation in the African context.

Recommendations to Theological Institutions

Investments in liberation hermeneutics-focused educational and training initiatives are crucial. This includes equipping African theologians, pastors, and church leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage with liberation hermeneutics effectively. Educational institutions and theological seminaries can be vital in offering courses, workshops, and resources that promote a robust understanding and application of liberation hermeneutics.

Recommendations to the Civil Society

Paying attention to gender and intersectionality is another essential way forward for liberation hermeneutics in the African context. Recognising the unique experiences and challenges faced by women, children, and other marginalised groups can contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive liberation theology that addresses various forms of oppression and discrimination. Liberation hermeneutics should not remain confined to theological discourse but inspire activism and advocacy for injustice and liberation in Africa. This involves supporting and participating in social movements, grassroots initiatives, and advocacy campaigns that challenge oppressive structures and promote social transformation. By pursuing these prospects and ways forward, liberation hermeneutics can continue to evolve and develop in the African context, significantly impacting the church and society.

Conclusion

The hermeneutics of liberation has profoundly impacted the church in Africa, empowering marginalised communities and informing context-specific theologies. By prioritising the experiences and perspectives of the oppressed, this approach can foster critical engagement with biblical texts that challenge dominant power structures and promote social justice and equality. Liberation's hermeneutics can bridge the gap between theory and action and inspire a transformative mission by emphasising praxis-oriented interpretation. Thus, by emphasising the biblical themes of liberation, justice, and the preferential option for the marginalised, liberation hermeneutics can empower the church to address socio-political injustices, embrace contextualised theology, and foster solidarity and unity.

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Intercultural Hermeneutics in twenty first Century through a Biblicist Spectrum

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Abstract

Shrouded overview of interpretations at contemporary calls for re-evaluation through hermeneutics for appropriate interpretation in the context of intercultural-spectrum; hence the study drenched itself into etymology of hermeneutics and the significance of intercultural hermeneutics in the twenty first Century. The study ventured into the research work through historical method of hermeneutics. The commencement of hermeneutics and how it has influenced intercultural hermeneutics in relation to Old Testament Literatures and African concept was studied. The commencement of hermeneutics was traced by the study and the significance is scoped on intercultural hermeneutics, highly influenced in twenty first century by socio-cultural hermeneutics. It was realized that series of misinterpretations, misleading and misunderstanding of the contents of the Old Testament Literatures in African concept needs attention. The concern of this study is to correct the misconception and misinterpretation of the Literatures of the Old Testament through the African intercultural heritages. It was realized that the cultural heritage in Africa continent is dynamic and not dogmatic. The constant changes in the cultures are of great influence to intercultural hermeneutics. The study recommended room for dynamism in the intercultural hermeneutics to meet up with the right interpretations of any particular context of socio-cultural-hermeneutic method, especially at every stage of life with consciousness of maintaining the mind of the author.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Hermeneutic, Intercultural, Etymology, Socio-cultural-hermeneutic theory

Introduction

Hermeneutics is generally believed to be a means of interpretation. The evergreen problem has been that the etymology remains shrouded to many generations of scholars which is in the best interest of this study. Hermeneutics is the breaking down of the context of words to the smallest indivisible words or voice for every context to be understood. It is to the interest of this study to note that there is a gap and high difference between hermeneutics and hermeneutic. The former word is a plural tense while the later is a singular tense. The difference goes beyond singular and plural tenses. Hermeneutics is a noun while hermeneutic is an adjective. Hermeneutics can be used alone without any qualifier. Hermeneutics is absolute statement that stands alone. It needs not to qualify any word, neither does it require a qualifier. It can stand without leaning on any other word. Hermeneutics could be called or used alone. When using hermeneutic with other words, it becomes a qualifier, that is, an adjective, when it conveys a usage without 's'. There is slight difference between the singular and the plural tenses of hermeneutic. The tense in singular form

(hermeneutic) is adjective, while, the tense in plural form (Hermeneutics) is noun.¹⁵⁵ Good instance is when one uses hermeneutic method, hermeneutic approach, etc. it is an adjective. With and without letter 's' in hermeneutics conveys a huge meaning.

Hermeneutics is therefore the explanation, interpretation, illustration or the elucidation of a particular context in question. Hermeneutics is the study or methodical theory of interpretation of text, most importantly, the Biblical holy texts, the ancient Greek herald and messenger of the gods and the god of roads, commerce, invention, cunning, and theft.¹⁵⁶ Roman Mythology refers to Hermes as Mercury.¹⁵⁷ Scholars have been able to underline some differences between Mercury and Hermes, but the fact remains that they still have some attributes are synonymous. Then, the Greece tradition believes that Hermes was the smallest among other Greece gods and he was the most appropriate being to be saddled with accrued petitions of gods and humankind to the Supreme Being.

Hermeneutics is a research tool in the Biblical Studies, Religious Studies, Ethical Courses, Psychology, Mass Communication, Education, History, Mathematics, Statistics and International Studies, and other research works that need the input of interpretation of the context of the Studies. It is divided into two, which are: general hermeneutics, and special hermeneutics. Intercultural hermeneutics¹⁵⁸ are two separate words. It deals with the culture from another source. Intercultural Hermeneutics is the study of how messages are passed between cultures and the process of communication that takes place. It deals with what happens in the course of that transmission.

Theories of Hermeneutics

There are many types of hermeneutics that cannot be exhausted. Daily, there are propounded laws and theories related to hermeneutics and other ways of interpretations. Related to intercultural hermeneutics are needed to be touched. Forster "hermeneutics" as the theory of interpretation, which otherwise means the theory of achieving an understanding of texts and utterances.¹⁵⁹ This simplifies the presentation and representation of what it is been spoken and how such could be understood. This has an indication towards bringing to understanding the literatures that had been written over two thousand years ago in the current contemporary age. Kitchen and McCarthy in the works of Walton,¹⁶⁰ had opinions about the dating of the Pentateuch when their analyses began, and both find the covenant or treaty comparison supportive of their respective positions. It cannot be aborted that some events in the Torah days are currently on scene in the current dispensation. Decalogue in a unique way plays a big role in getting constitution for the current nations of the world, but in a different perspective, polygamy and incest which were welcome ideas in the then age is an abomination to the contemporary age. The roots of hermeneutics in the West are, in part, in the analysis of religious texts, and in particular the attempt to bridge the gap between a simple exegesis of an historical text and the contemporary moral, spiritual, or practical applications of that text. Gadamer's use of phronesis comes in part from the need to bring an ever-receding historical text in relevance, a serious thought must be engaged here for as there are thought about what cultural competence actually means, and how those texts are formative in a culture.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ L. Pachua, *Intercultural Hermeneutics: A word of Introduction*, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu>, February 2015

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hermes>, 25th May 2024

¹⁵⁷ V. Marrotta, *Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Cross-cultural Subject*, 2009

¹⁵⁸ Terry C. Muck, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, Vol. 1 of *Intercultural Theology*, 2024

¹⁵⁹ Michael N. Forster. *Hermeneutics, An Article on the interpretations*, Department of Philosophy, The University of Chicago, Princeton University PhD, 1987, 1. Hermeneutics Author Michael N. Forster (2).pdf

¹⁶⁰ John, H. Walton, *Library of Biblical Interpretation, Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, Grand Rapid: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989, 106

¹⁶¹ Janz Bruce, 'Hermeneutics and Intercultural Understanding', in, Jeff Malpas, Hans Halmuth Ganders, eds, *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics* Routledge, 2015, 488

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335867170_Hermeneutics_and_Intercultural_Understanding/citation/download?_tp=ey

This study alludes to the fact that Eastern studies, Egyptology, and the social and natural sciences, all have the aim of crossing artificially constructed scholarly boundaries and integrating fragmented and specialized studies,¹⁶² which in turn affects the spoken language and the interpretation. The languages in the days of the Torah may not be as the same Hebrew that is being spoken today. Integrating another country's language into your personal language is a serious work of intercultural hermeneutics. Africans are very open hearted as they welcomed Christianity and Islam, two eastern religions from the eastern world¹⁶³ without fear or prejudice.

The artifacts and ruins in the eastern world are proofs for the historical existence of once upon a time. Although pottery studies in the eastern Mediterranean have usually focused on chronologically oriented linear typologies that are used to date archaeological deposits or strata and to reconstruct interregional economic and trade relations, ceramic analysis can also answer a variety of broader questions concern in cultural processes and ideology.¹⁶⁴ It defines the cultures and heritages of the pasts, the kind of lives that were lived and supposedly understanding about the traditions and beliefs were left in the artifacts. The materials located about a particular time are in procession of the ideology of the time.

Sometimes, there is a spiritual thought to critically evaluate the curses upon Africans as spiritual and as over productive that gave birth to stagnation.¹⁶⁵ Africans are not cursed but blessed.¹⁶⁶ Africa has a very rich heritage of what past generations of African thought, did, experienced and passed on to their children. This oral tradition is encapsulated in myths, tales and idioms. This heritage of Africa will help in tracing the genealogy of Africans from Noah. This section is extremely essential to correct the wrong notion that many people have against the Africa continent to be the cursed continent for the sake of Ham's sin. When Ham committed the sin, Noah was reluctant to curse Ham, but he cursed the youngest son of Ham called Canaan. Canaan sons were Sidon, Hittite, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathines. All these nations had their geographical settlements in the in the Eastern world that God later gave to the Israelites. This is geographically located in Asia, which is classified which is classified under the current European continent. Almost all the aforementioned nations were destroyed, as Israel made some of them slaves and killed other in fulfillment of the curse of Noah, Africa is not inclusive.

Hem, Ham and Japheth were the sons of Noah. Each of them have generations of offspring. Ham was the second born who saw the nakedness of his father after Noah drank from the vineyard that he planted. Shem and Japheth covered the nakedness and their father cursed Ham's youngest son named Canaan. Canaan's inhabitation was cursed to be slaves of the offspring of his uncles' children. Genesis 10 has the details of the nations that came out of Noah's sons, as only sons were counted or mentioned not daughters. The Jewish traditions do not make count of females. The women married the males and the children produced were not from angels. The women were born like men in higher number but were not usually counted.

Jjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19, Retrieved on 27th May 2024.

¹⁶² Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Studies of Egyptian, Canaanites, Philistines and Early Israel, 1300-1100 B.C.E.* Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature, 1997, 2

¹⁶³ Ayodeji Olanrewaju Ogidiolu, "Yorubaland, African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity: Convergences and Divergences", in Akin Ibidapo-Obe and Chiedozi Okoro, eds., *Awise Agbaye: The Voice of the Oracles, Essay in honour of Professor Ogunwande Abimbola at 85*, Concept Publications, 77

¹⁶⁴ Ann E. Killebrew. *An Archaeological Studies of Egyptian, Canaanites, Philistines and Early Israel, 1300-1100 B.C.E.*, 1997, 2

¹⁶⁵ Africa's Natural Resources: A Paradox of plenty. African Bank 2007, Ch 4 11/10/07 13:54. 98. African Development Report 2007 - Chapter IV - Africa's Natural Resources: The Paradox of Plenty (afdb.org)

¹⁶⁶ Ayodeji Olanrewaju Ogidiolu, *Critical Studies in Old Testament and Modern Concepts*, Oyo: Ajayi Crowther University Publishers, 2021, 117-118

Africa, as a continent, came out from Cush, the first son of Ham. It was the last son of Ham that was named Canaan that was cursed. The curse was not on the first son. It was through Cush that Africa came out. Sons of Cush were Seba (or Sheba), Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sebeca. The Hamath are located in Southern-eastern part of Asia and the North-eastern part of Africa. Egypt, Libya and Sheba (Ethiopia) are well pronounced in Biblical days. The Northern part of African was first occupied, before other parts at the south was taken over by the immigrants. Therefore, Africans are not under curse. Africans are Cushites not Canaanites. Majority in the globe, Africans inclusive have resolved that the poor management of economy in Africa is as a result of the curse of Noah which is far from the truth.

Moreover, viewing through history of Christianity, some cultural values acclaimed that Christianity is not absolutely dependent on Judaic origin of the birth of Jesus Christ. There was an argument of Ahmed Osman that Christianity is as a result of Egyptian Culture which interfaces with the Christian literatures in the New Testament.¹⁶⁷ This has to do with the events in the records of Ancient Egyptians such as Osman places his claim on the Genesis 17 and Hosea 1: 1, that 'out of Egypt I will call my Children...' This alluded to the fact that many of the Egyptian cultures are in Christianity. There is serious influence from the Egyptians on intercultural. Of a truth, the narratives of the highest library of Christianity are in Egypt which was burnt of in 391 AD¹⁶⁸ through the influence of Roman government.

By inculturation, the issue of Urim and Turim¹⁶⁹ of Israel are borrowed idea from the worship of the Egyptians. The finest record of the chronology of the Egyptian kings is unfortunately the most damaged and now incomplete. It is a papyrus known as the Royal Canon of Turin, in which museum it is to be found.¹⁷⁰ This was found useful at the commencement of Israel as a nation. There was nothing in life that does not have a source for commencement. These sources will in a way or other influence what it produced. Affirmatively, Egyptians' traditions were of immense influence to Decalogue of the Hebrews. Moses lived for forty years in palace of Pharaoh and learnt many sciences. It was not in any form strange to him when the snake in his hands was thrown down to turn snake. The magicians in the palace saw it as a usual game that they used to play, when Moses was in Pharaoh's Palace.

Seriously, the Old Testament cultural values greatly influenced the New Testament cultural practices.¹⁷¹ The space of the work here is not enough to express many cultures in Old Testament, but few out of many occurred at the naming ceremony of Jesus Christ (Leviticus 5:7, Matthew 2:21-38). Joseph and Mary could not afford lamb, which made them to bring pigeon. Jesus Christ practiced Judaism in his earthly ministry. He also observed Passover. Osman opined that, Tutankhamun of Egypt was been anointed by his wife Ankhsepheska-neferuaten, which was discovered at the back of the throne that was found in his throne.¹⁷² Anointing of Mary Magdalene (John 12:1-10), was influenced by Egyptology due to long period of 430years (Exodus 12:40) of living in Egypt by the ancestors. All the afore-mentioned instances are New Testament events that were influenced by pre-generational occurrence in both Israel and Egypt nations. Definitely, some Egyptian cultures were imbibed into Israel culture and literatures of the Old Testament are indicators to the existing stories of the New Testament. There were interpretations through intercultural hermeneutics.

¹⁶⁷ Ahmed Osman. *Christianity and Ancient Egyptian Religion*. 140-147

¹⁶⁸ Ahmed Osman. *Christianity and Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 148

¹⁶⁹ Urim and Turim are consultative implements from the hands of the Priests who are believed to be very close to YHWH.

¹⁷⁰ Peter A. Clayton, *Chronicles of the Pharaohs, The Reign by Reign Record of Rulers and Dynasties of Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, 12

¹⁷¹ Gerald O. Collins S.J., *Christology, A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, Second Edition, Oxford: University Press, 2008, 24

¹⁷² Ahmed Osman, *Christianity, an Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 166

Methodology

The study is interested in bringing out the historic commencement behind the shrouded word called hermeneutics. This is achieved through historical method of the study of religion. The commencement of hermeneutics and how it has influenced intercultural hermeneutics in relation to Old Testament Literatures and African concept was studied. The commencement of hermeneutics was traced by the study and the significance is scoped on intercultural hermeneutics. Events that brought in hermeneutics to the scene of education were traced for the visibility of reasons behind interpretations. Books in the libraries, e-books, the internet facilities and unconstructive interviews were of great advantages to the study. It was realized that series of misinterpretations, misleading and misunderstanding of the contents of the Old Testament Literatures in African concept needs attention; which is the context of the passages that this work arranged.

Concepts of Hermeneutics

Etymology of hermeneutics is essential for discussion here. It must be openly slated that the quest for Biblical interpretation gave birth to hermeneutics as a method of interpretation. This granted a simple overview of the take off this unique skill of interpretation. The word hermeneutics is really new development in the academic spheres with interference in many courses such as Religious Studies, Communication, Mathematics, Education, Media Studies, Statistics, History and International Studies.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation.¹⁷³ The etymology of hermeneutics has its root from the Greece tradition of worship and belief. Hermeneutics is a coined word from the name of Greece god was is believed to be in charge knowledge and interpretation. This is called Hermes. Hermes was the smallest among the many gods of Greece but was also the smallest among all the gods. Being the smallest among others Hermes was the smallest to convey the errands of other gods. He could be better discoursed as the chief servant among other gods on serious messages to be presented to the Supreme Being. The presentations of Hermes have always been appealing to God to the extent that all the requests of Hermes are always granted. For instance, if somebody with a complain manner requested for something from Hermes in an ugly way, god Hermes will not place the request to the supreme Being raw. Such request will be better modify with the senses of welcome that the Supreme Being will have no option than to grant all the petitions. Hence, the quest for apt interpretation pertaining to sphere of life was exhumed through the interpretation of Biblical Hebrew Old Testament Literature called Tanak. Interpretation of Koine Greek and Aramaic Literatures into English Language was the imitator of a new method towards the interpretation.

Languages are dynamic, not statics. The dynamism of languages made words spoken in a generation defers to another generation. The language of Old Testament days was Hebrew. One will expect the same Hebrew language to continue all along, but in the days of Jesus Christ, Aramaic was spoken by Jesus Christ and his generation not the expected raw Hebrew language. The Mesorates did their best possible to sustain Hebrew language by introducing vowels to the existing twenty two Hebrew alphabets letters that were automatically consonant letters. This was to make Hebrew language relevant to the nations around who are familiar all the while with the vowel letters. In as much as language can never be caged from its dynamism, there was progress of evangelizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Greek language. In advancement, other tongues

¹⁷³Margo Paterson and Wendy Pentland, *The Use of Hermeneutics in a Mixed Methods Design* Claudia von Zweck Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, Ottawa, *The Qualitative Report* Volume 13 Number 1 March 2008 116, <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-1/vonzweck.pdf>

embrace the propagation of the message that commenced from the Old Testament Bible in diverse languages with their mother tongues.

It must be seriously noted that the new languages or dialects came into the Bible languages with their culture. Language is a principal portion of culture. Across the rigorous academic works on hermeneutics is the jamming of cultures which in turn is known as acculturation.¹⁷⁴As languages spread communications so thus cultures move with languages. The culture of the language cannot be overstated.

Whenever a race makes interpretation, the culture of that race must definitely influence the language that he is interpreting. Obviously, polygamous is well pronounced and elevated in the Old Testament literature. The westerners influence in the interpretation magnifies the aspect of monogamy to overshadow polygamy and yet never condemned people like Abraham, Jacob, David, etc, who were father of faith and polygamists. The interpreters were able to come into the influence through the New Testament literature in their narratives and robe it with the sayings of Jesus Christ that many people will believe; and never condemned that those who still practice the same are condemned for hell. If Jesus Christ could say that the New Testament has not exist in order to condemn the Old Testament but to fulfill the same (5:17). It means that the Old Testament cultures are inclusive in the expected list of the fulfillment in the New Testament. The Old Testament culture is in transit to fulfill the New Testament prophesies.

General Hermeneutics works on the study of the rules that apply generally to the interpretation of the Biblical texts on issues of historical, cultural, contextual, theological, or syntactical issues, etc. There are two classes of Hermeneutics, namely; General and Special Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is general when the interpretations within it are having the same meanings all over the world. Special Hermeneutics treats or focuses on a particular interpretation that is different from other interpretations. By special hermeneutics, individuals have different interpretations on particular coded words. Over special hermeneutics, the results of the interpretations are not usually the same thing. In Grammatical Historic Method, the parents or grandparents will explain through tales or story to the younger ones from their infancy, the stories of their ancestors and some reasons behind the taboos or dos and don'ts of the particular land. The tales are often been given some interpretations in favour of the adherents. There are applications of the hermeneutical rules on specific issues like parables, prophecy, allegories, etc., in the religion and other spheres of life. When the story is told, it is received and expressed from a generation to another which is tagged as the Oral Tradition. This same story will be transferred from one generation to another generation and on and on, without any limit.

Intercultural-hermeneutics goes with injecting outside or new culture into already existing culture who is the recipient of the new interpretation. Intercultural-hermeneutics brings two or more cultures into context of interpretation. Intercultural hermeneutics intercultural hermeneutics may be defined simply as the theory and practice of interpretation between cultures. As such, intercultural hermeneutics concerns the different modes of interpretation and understanding in and between different cultures.¹⁷⁵ Hermeneutic understanding operates within a tradition, whereas phenomenological philosophy investigates the constitution of traditions and the collection of traditions that forms a culture.¹⁷⁶It is one of the most vital tasks of hermeneutics to build bridges and foster

¹⁷⁴Margo Paterson and Wendy Pentland, *The Use of Hermeneutics in a Mixed Methods Design* Claudia von Zweck Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, Ottawa, The Qualitative Report Volume 13 Number 1 March 2008 117, <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-1/vonzweck.pdf>

¹⁷⁵Xie, Ming. "Introduction: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics." In, *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*, University of Toronto Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt7zwbwr.4>. Revisit

¹⁷⁶Angus, Ian, "The Intercultural Horizon of Contemporary Understanding." In, *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 23–42, University of Toronto Press, 2014 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt7zwbwr.5>.

dialogue between cultures.¹⁷⁷The short definition of intercultural hermeneutics is that it is the proper study, and thereby understanding, of any message passed between cultures and what happens in the course of that transmission.¹⁷⁸

Etymology is the commencement or beginning of anything. On the course of this study, it is plainly on how hermeneutics began. The commencement of hermeneutics was traced by the study to the reminiscence period.¹⁷⁹ The reminiscence period was the period of reformation led by Martin Luther. Books in the libraries, e-books, the internet facilities and unconstructive interviews were of great advantages to the study. The term “hermeneutics” is derived from the name of the god Hermes, who in Greek mythology acts as the messenger between the gods and human beings. In this process Hermes makes intelligible to human beings God’s message which otherwise is not intelligible to them. In Listra, Paul was taken for Hermes (Acts 14:12) for between the crippled man and Barnabas it was Paul who spoke.¹⁸⁰

Hermeneutics is giving the best meaning or knowledge about a particular text of the Bible or Words it connotes in Communication Sphere. According to J.O. Akao, it was first used by J.C. Dann Haver¹⁸¹ in 17th Century. Haver published his work during the Reformation or Renaissance for a better understanding of what the Bible says to mankind at every part of the cosmos. This helped the understanding of people in their daily interpretation of texts of the Bible.

Etymologically, “hermeneutics” is derived from the Greek noun “*ermets*”, which means an interpreter in the sense of a translator or explainer. But very often, the origin of the name is traced to Hermes, the Greek god, who reportedly served as messenger for the gods. As their messenger, Hermes was charged with the responsibility of transmitting or interpreting the communications between them and the human recipients of such messages. But research has shown that Hermes, *ermev*, was only a messenger and not an interpreter of the gods.¹⁸²

The god Hermes to an average Greece is the god of knowledge who is expected to be approached when anybody needs wisdom. The word Hermes in Roman Empire was used as ‘interpreter’ or ‘translator’. Hermes is understood by an average Greece as a messenger among gods who swiftly present messages to the Supreme Being. The Biblical cultures and the cultures of twenty first century will be given a priority for the best understanding.

Avoidance of the followings will make a good outcome of the use of hermeneutics:

1. Prejudice: This is a bias thought on a particular issue which colours the rightful image of a particular interpretation. Someone with a bias mind will find it difficult to get a clear picture of a given context.
2. Wishful thinking: This is to wish so strongly that something is true. The true colour of an occasion will be pre-empted by the interpreter of somebody who always wishes. If unfortunately the message to be interpreted is negative, the fore-thought will be disappointing to the recipient of the message when positive words are heard.

¹⁷⁷Grondin, Jean, “Do Gadamer and Ricoeur Have the Same Understanding of Hermeneutics?” In, *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 43–64, University of Toronto Press, 2014
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt7zwbwr.6>.

¹⁷⁸ Robert E.Allinson, ‘Intercultural Hermeneutics’, in, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, First Edition, 2003, 6, e-Book ISBN9780203953624

¹⁷⁹ Ayodeji Olanrewaju, Ogidiolu, *Critical Studies in Old Testament and Modern Concepts*, Oyo: Ajayi Crowther University Publishers, 2021, 131

¹⁸⁰ Rev. Dr. Joseph Pamplany & et al, eds. *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Kerala: Alpha Institute of Theology and Science, 2020, 6

¹⁸¹ J.O. Akao, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Principles and Practice*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2000, 3.

¹⁸² Akao, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Principles and Practice*, 2000, 3.

3. Generalization: The risk of generalization is a fallacy drawing sweeping conclusion from particular instances.¹⁸³ It is a means by which general resolution is been cast upon an interpretation without scientific proof.
4. Appeals to popular thoughts: This is citing the general opinion of the majority without verifying the authenticity of the context. Majority opinion may be wrong. Therefore, that majority are reasoning in such dimension, it does not make such opinion right.
5. Appeals to an authority are an attempt of pleading for discussion. The presenter in this case will not consider whether a presentation is right or wrong. When the discussant is behaving too apologetic, the panel may suspect that he wants to trick his/her bosses or look for means to attract their favour.
6. Preconceived opinion is good enough to conclude over without right verification.
7. Neglecting cultural attachment out of the context of interpretation is a big risk. This is the actual outlet intercultural hermeneutic. The culture that wants to be recipient of the information must be put into serious consideration.

There are biblical cultures that were imbibed into the current dispensations, which originally are eastern cultures, but have crept into cultural African heritage through Christianity. Such cultural heritage exists in marriage, language and naming.¹⁸⁴ The serious influence is highly remarkable, as the space here will not accommodate it. Old Testament past cultures and personal lives have been traced through Archaeology as a science studies the physical remains of the human past. The material of walls, roads, pieces of pottery, artwork and other issues the plants seeds, animal bones and human skeletons.¹⁸⁵

This study hereby propounded socio-cultural-hermeneutic theory.¹⁸⁶ Socio-cultural-hermeneutic theory is a means by which the existing events of life are being interpreted by social-media-hermeneutic languages. These are the meanings that are supplied to the particular events of life which in turn is generally embraced and use as usual ways of the effects of life. Socio-media Hermeneutic theory exists in all facets of languages, tongues, tribes and nations of cosmos. The transmission of socio-cultural-hermeneutic theory has been tested with both cultured and uncultured events that engulfed the interest of the contemporary youths who depends solely on the media words to build up their cultural lives. The cultured are ethical ways of life in any particular locality that are endorsed by the locality. Uncultured ways of life are unwelcomed and bad behaviours that the ways of life refuses to honour. The later carries the danger of damaging the existing traditional culture, as local languages are seriously affected. The evil perpetrated in the social media sector is as serious as the good sides. It means that socio-cultural-hermeneutic theory benefits every sector in two opposite ways- in both good and bad ways. This has given room to the informal use of words that were received from the contemporary life. Issues and events of life are being spoken to with the intensity of languages that are trending on social life and are received from unidentified sources.

Conclusion

Africans have been seriously affected negatively by condemning what belongs to her and giving her fake in return. There is nothing bad in making applications to things that are good in Old

¹⁸³ Gene Taylor, *Hermeneutics, how to study the Bible, A Practical Approach to Understanding Scripture*. Gene Taylor. All Rights Reserved, 1995.

¹⁸⁴ This is deeply underscored in Influence of Social Media in the Intercultural Hermeneutics at twenty first Century through a Biblicalist Scholarship.

¹⁸⁵ Okey Ogba, *Exploring Old Testament, (Volume 1)*, Ibadan: Jilog Nig. Coy, 2001, 97.

¹⁸⁶ This is a new theory being propounded by the author to indicate the new trend of interpretation of words or deeds of life in the recent dispensation. As it is first appearing in the context of this work.

Testament literature like king David in Building a strong and Peaceful Jewish Nation¹⁸⁷ and the possibility of applying the same to African Continent; but with caution of right applications. There is urgent need for the Africans to rise against every literature that condemn African and give a rightful proof to the support of the Africans. Africans should engage in serious battle by rejecting what is wrong about her identity and embracing what is right about her culture. The Biblicists need to use the implement of intercultural hermeneutics and exegesis to analyze the right posture of the Old Testament Literature. For instance, some Africans belief they Noah cursed the generation of African which is not true. Africans are not cursed but blessed. It is to the interest of the work to note that Africans have been on the theater stage of the globe since the creation of the whole universe.

Recommendations

The study recommends room for dynamism in the intercultural hermeneutics to meet up with the right interpretations of any particular context of the Old Testament Literature at every stage of life with consciousness of maintaining the mind of the author. Africans should stop been intimidated with the Western culture that is in serious combat with her culture and see a need to make better interpretation of the contexts of the Bible with African Lens. At junctions where the inculturation has taken place in the literatures that parade the universe, pen and paper should be a good medium to combat the anti-African cultures. Asides this, social media should be engaged in the presentation of the correct versions of African cultures. Right tutelage should also be engaged in the guiding the African youths on what to embrace and what to jettison. African mother tongues should be projected in social media and not to be bastardized with foreign words that give ignominy to African languages. At each locality, the local languages should the compulsory subject irrespective of the course that such child dream for future.

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¹⁸⁷Ayodeji Olanrewaju Ogidiolu, "King David's nation-building precepts and the possibility of application in Nigeria", in, *Bernard B. Fyanka, ed., Humanus Discourse*, Vol. 1., No.1, 2021, 201.

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Understanding Woman Submission in I Peter 3:1-7: An Afro-Centric Approach

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide a biblical, yet Afro-centric reorientation for Christian women on matters of submission and related issues in marriage. This is considered pertinent and urgent in view of the ubiquitous agitations for women's rights and liberation, even among contemporary Christian women. Women decry the traditional cultural mindset and biblical portrayal of submission as patriarchal; one which only subjugates and predisposes to feminine gender violence or relegation. This paper seeks to unravel the hermeneutical gaps between the Eurocentric view fueling woman right agitations and an Afro-centric view of the issue. Thus, an Afro-centric approach of bible interpretation (Specifically Africentric hermeneutics) is employed to set woman submission as intended in 1 Peter 3:1-7 particularly in African socio-cultural context. This paper seeks to advance the claim that decolonized African Biblical Studies, severed from Eurocentric biases and influences, could speak more naturally and convincingly to African Christians on contested grounds such as woman submission. Moreover, it asserts that to be an African woman (a status widely contested and lost now) is to voluntarily submit to one's husband as enjoined in the bible, particularly in I Peter 3:1-7. Therefore, the paper calls and challenges African Christian women to acknowledge the actual biblical concept of woman submission divorced from Eurocentric misinterpretations cum negative cultural extremes, and exemplify it without fear (as Sarah) in their sane Social Cultural milieu.

Keywords: Woman Submission; Afro-centric; Decolonize; Africa; African woman; I Peter 3:1-7

Introduction

Woman submission, particularly married women, is a widely contested issue today. Ify Moge kwu made a reel highlighting 9 responsibilities of women as wives and mothers on her ifys.kitchen instagram page that has about 1.9M followers sometimes early in the year 2024.¹⁸⁸ That reel attracted over 2,437 comments with very few in support and a lot of rebuffs showcasing the extent of resentment against the mention of 'woman submission and related responsibilities.' Much of the rebuffs, most of which were from Christian women, centered on queries about men's responsibilities in the home if women were to do one, some or all she listed. Allusions to the bible's injunction worsened the rebuffs. Yet, none of the highlighted responsibilities would be offensive in a typical traditional African context. In fact, as this paper will unravel, a good African woman is typified by those responsibilities.

Notably, in I Peter 3 (precisely in verse 6), similar fearful resentment of the idea of submission is observed. It could be surmised that feelings of indifference and rebellion against the patriarchal order might have been the experience in the early church too. Yet, the author of that passage who was the elder of the church at the time cautioned against that fearful resentment and reenacted submission as sacrosanct and powerful. This paper attempts to recapture the nature,

¹⁸⁸ Ify Moge kwu, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C6yvY0nIY5N/> (accessed April 2024)

essence and power of woman submission from traditional Africa socio-cultural cum biblical lens. It advocates that an Afrocentric method of interpreting I Peter 3:1-7 and related passages could have salvaged Africa from losing her valued cultural heritage of Patriarchal family structure and thus getting lost and confused in the labyrinth of convoluted and complicated gender and family issues in the modern world.

Women Submission in the African Context

Oscar Maisiri's MA Thesis¹⁸⁹ focuses on describing African Christians' perceptions, attitudes and practices with regard to male headship and female submission in marriage. His research, via interview conducted among African Christians, established that even though "the coming of the European missionaries exposed oppressive practices with regard to women in African society, the attitudes of the colonisers towards Africans in fact had a negative impact on male-female relations in African marriages."¹⁹⁰ Thus Shona people of Zimbabwe insist that "teaching about gender equality is not biblical and results in women refusing to submit to their husbands. Women should not ask their husbands to perform roles and responsibilities meant for females, such as household and child-rearing tasks."¹⁹¹ Maisiri however concluded the study delineating that while traditional African concept of male headship and female submission is similar to the patriarchal context of the bible, the true intersect of African culture and the bible must be love which is the spirit of the gospel. In other words, to the extent that an African marriage reflects mutual love between the couples, to that extent it can be considered biblical.

While Maisiri is to be commended for attempting to provide this significant clarification and connection, he made a concluding statement which appears to reflect European sentiment (an overgeneralization) that the African man is an oppressor. He said African husband should understand that women are not to be treated with contempt but should be loved and treated as God's treasured creation.¹⁹² Statements like this that have fueled agitations for women right and gender equality upon the backdrop of erroneous association of male headship with oppression and female submission with contempt. Consequently, the truth of male headship and female submission is obliterated in contemporary redefinition of marital relation to at best an egalitarian concept of headship and submission which Maisiri also advocates for.

Alternatively, Eucharia Opara Ugochi and Michael Matthew¹⁹³ expound that women even in African Traditional society were greatly valued. While of course women in the society were required to be modest and meek following their husbands' directives, all of these do not rob them of their dignity and unique relevance in the family, African traditional worship, business and political governance of the society. In fact, their humility proves their worth and selfless devotion to their husbands and others (elders) in the society.¹⁹⁴ Thus, Ugochi and Matthew correctly reckon that "African women are remarkable role models who embody the essence of what it is to be a woman."¹⁹⁵ This is, however, being frustrated and changing dynamics with the arrival of colonisation and advocacy for woman independence which means freedom from male headship and dominance; thus, instead of serving complementary role, women now compete with men in

¹⁸⁹ Oscar Maisiri, "Male Headship and Female Submission in Marriage Among African Christians: A Pastoral Perspective" *MA Thesis of University of Pretoria* (October 2015), [https:// repository .up .ac .za/ bitstream/ handle/2263/53064/Maisiri_Male_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/53064/Maisiri_Male_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (accessed January 2024)

¹⁹⁰ Maisiri, "Male Headship and Female Submission," 7.

¹⁹¹ Maisiri, "Male Headship and Female Submission," 82.

¹⁹² Maisiri, "Male Headship and Female Submission," 87.

¹⁹³ Eucharia Opara Ugochi and Michael Matthew, "A Comparative Cultural Approach in the Social Status of Women in African Societies," *Veritas Journal Of Humanities* Volume 5 (2024): 123-133.

¹⁹⁴ Ugochi and Matthew, "A Comparative Cultural Approach," 126-127.

¹⁹⁵ Ugochi and Matthew, "A Comparative Cultural Approach," 131.

the contemporary society.¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile where women right movement is essentially about freedom from abuse at home, political participation and freedom from all forms of discrimination or slavery and increased access to western education for the enhancement and empowerment of African women, Ugochi and Matthew rightly deem this as acceptable on the ground that such will further empower them to contribute positively to the society.

Accordingly, as Maisiri, Solomon O. Ademiluka¹⁹⁷ clarifies the sense and basis in which the New Testament employed the Graeco-Roman Patriarchal view of marital relationship through his contextual re-reading of Ephesians 5:22-33 among Nigerian Yoruba Christians. He underscores that while indeed the husband is the head of the wife, he must actively and fearfully take up that onerous responsibility as Christ does for the church, loving her sacrificially. Thus, the license to oppress, enslave, subjugate or beat the wives is incongruous in biblical patriarch view. Meanwhile, unlike Maisiri, Ademiluka upholds the biblical verdict of woman submission succinctly cautioning that “Nigerian Christians should change the general assumption that submission in marriage implies suppression and subjugation of their wives.”¹⁹⁸

While “the Christian husband should assume the character of the head who seeks the pleasure and comfort of his wife over his own,”¹⁹⁹ Ademiluka also insists that “the wife should submit to her husband as one who has authority over her. She should respect her husband within the confines of his culture insofar as her obedience to Christ is not compromised.”²⁰⁰ This is the biblical Africentric balance missing in most modern Christian concept of male-female relation in marriage fueled by culturally biased European interpretation of the bible. This biblical Africentric balance will be further clarified and established through an Afrocentric approach to interpreting I Peter 3:1-7 in the following section.

Furthermore, quite challenging and persuasively, Daniel Egun Ogoma²⁰¹ expounds that solid marriages are not built on love but on readiness for and mastery of spousal responsibilities which are delineated in traditional African culture and society. He laments the weakness of the society, incessant breakages of homes, and serial divorces on the obliteration of these roles and responsibilities occasioned by Eurocentric views stirring feminist liberation. For instance, he succinctly notes that:

Traditionally, people accept their places at home. No competition, no supremacy and no struggle. Yoruba women were taught that: “oko ni oloṛi aya” (the husband is the head of the wife) before getting married, women had known this and they are prepared to accept this position. Then, there was no feminist to advocate the equality of man and woman. Then one to preach that when the woman is grinding pepper, the man should be making eba after all they love each other, after all, they will both eat the food.²⁰²

The implication of westernized departure from the traditional African teaching on spousal roles and responsibilities is the pervasive weakening of marriage bond leading to serial divorces even among Christian couples and clergies. While Ogoma admits that all was not good about the traditional African marriage concept, devotion to spousal responsibilities remains a solid foundation of marriage that must not be compromised and jettisoned. He alluded to Sarah in the

¹⁹⁶ Ugochi and Matthew, “A Comparative Cultural Approach,” 130.

¹⁹⁷ Solomon O. Ademiluka, “For the husband is the head of the wife: A contextual re-reading of Ephesians 5:22–33 among Nigerian Yoruba Christians,” *In die Skriflig 55(1)*, a2613 (February 2021), <https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.4102/ids.v55i1.2613> (accessed January 2024).

¹⁹⁸ Ademiluka, “For the husband is the head of the wife,” 9.

¹⁹⁹ Ademiluka, “For the husband is the head of the wife,” 9.

²⁰⁰ Ademiluka, “For the husband is the head of the wife,” 9.

²⁰¹ Daniel Egun Ogoma, “Reflection on an African Traditional Marriage System,” *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Affairs* Volume 4, Number 1 (2014): 94-104.

²⁰² Ogoma, “African Traditional Marriage System,” 101.

bible as one whom even contemporary Christian women do not consider to copy again.²⁰³ Apparently, Ogoma denigrates the power of love as a critical foundation to marriage but implicitly what he rebuffed is the selfish irresponsible love which has characterized the western culture. The kind of Christ's sacrificial love upon which a biblical Africentric balanced view rests is one that epitomises selfless responsibilities toward others at its peak.

Oseni Taiwo Afisi²⁰⁴ refutes the thought that traditional African marriage system is based on gender inequality. He insists that the distinction of gender roles in African marriage system epitomises complementarity of gender. Whereas, of course, the patriarchal system was a given, it did not denigrate the unique and powerful roles of African women. In traditional African societies, "the African woman possessed the power that binds the society together. In fact the survival of the family and the future of marriage depended a great deal on the African woman."²⁰⁵ Afisi avows that the claim, sense and ideology of gender inequality came with the advent of colonialism.²⁰⁶

It was after contact with British colonialists, Africans learnt and adopted the European cultural system that relegate women as second fiddle to men. Thus, the traditional Patriarchal system in African became perverted to women oppression, subjugation, domination and manipulation to the point that African women were treated about as a slave, having little or no opportunity to live the life they desire. It is this warped patriarchal system that the modern women in the post-colonial era rightly rebels against by the feminist liberation movements. Unfortunately, this rightly driven movement is advancing in the direction of gender equality- one that is inimical to the complimentary gender roles in the traditional African society.

Of course, the modern trend of gender equality is achieving some good results of changing the negative trend of woman subjugation, molestation and relegation but also inhibiting the indispensable traditional African roles of women as wives and mothers. In other words, whereas modern women are now more equipped and empowered, "the traditional care-giving, home-making and nurturing roles of women in the African family which formed the basis of their identity as wives and mothers are gradually been abandoned, as they have become increasingly involved in new roles and relations outside the home."²⁰⁷ Consequently, children (having no one to tutor them) have become corrupt, lawless, and fraudulent while the society suffers for it.

The prayer is for the revival of the complimentary gender roles and responsibilities of the traditional African system within the purview of modern realities. Interestingly, the following Afrocentric hermeneutics of I Peter 3:1-7 clearly reflects this.

Methodology

The Afrocentric method of biblical interpretation, which can also be described as Africentric hermeneutics, is adopted in this paper. This is an African bible study methodology that makes African socio-cultural context a subject of interpretation.²⁰⁸ It tries to explore the treasure in interpreting the Bible within Africa's socio-cultural frame (understanding) apart from attachment to the normative patterns of interpretation which are not without European biases. This methodology becomes germane to this paper because the concept of woman submission in I Peter 3:1-7 and related passages have obviously been muddled up and confused by colonial and modern

²⁰³ Ogoma, "African Traditional Marriage System," 101.

²⁰⁴ Oseni Taiwo Afisi, "Power and Womanhood in Africa: An Introductory Evaluation," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.3, no.6 (March 2010): 229-238.

²⁰⁵ Afisi, "Power and Womanhood in Africa," 229.

²⁰⁶ Afisi, "Power and Womanhood in Africa," 234.

²⁰⁷ Afisi, "Power and Womanhood in Africa," 229.

²⁰⁸ David Tuesday Adamo, *Decolonizing African Biblical Studies: The 7th Inaugural Lectures of Delta State University, Abraka*, <https://pdf4pro.com/cdn/decolonizing-african-biblical-studies-b46b1.pdf> (accessed January 2024): 3.

interpreters. Thus, African cultural concept on the issue has not only been entirely disparaged but also denigrated and refuted as unbiblical.

This method cannot and does not have to stand in absolute exclusion of western biblical methodology,²⁰⁹ yet it focuses on how the historical and literary contexts of I Peter 3:1-7 relates to the African context. In other words, Africentric hermeneutics in this paper starts with historical-grammatical analysis of I Peter 3:1-7 but with focus on associations to and implications on the traditional African concept of woman submission. The goal of doing this is contextualization and decolonization. Whereas it may be argued that contextualization could breed syncretism since all cannot be claimed as good in the traditional African marriage, yet it also gives Africans the opportunity to uphold her good culture upon sound biblical African understanding. Also with contextualization and decolonization, Igboin rightly observes that “Africa can divest the Bible of the cloak of foreign influences that have disallowed her to access the resources of the text for her own good. At the extremes, not to decolonize is to ‘de-create’ the African and retain the projection of the West.”²¹⁰

An Africentric Reading of I Peter 3:1-7

1. Submission in the context of extended family structure

I Peter is traditionally reckoned as authored by Simon Peter based on convincing internal and external evidences which override modern queries of Petrine authorship.²¹¹ Meanwhile, of significant note is the observation that Peter had a wife and in fact his mother-in-law stayed with them at a point in time (if not all the time) according to Mark 1:30 and I Cor. 9:5. Notably after Peter’s mother-in-law was healed by Jesus of fever, she began to serve them (that is, according to a contemporary version, she fixed dinner for them). It is unknown where Peter’s wife was at the time or what she was doing, but what Peter’s mother’s in-law rose to do as soon as she got healed is reflective of a cultural expectation which would not have been unlike Peter’s wife and also suggestive of the extended family structure at the time.

Indeed, I Peter 3:1-7 corroborates the extended family member nature of the traditional African family. Interestingly Roman-period households (the context of writing of I Peter 3:1-7) comprise more than just the immediate (nuclear) family but also extended family members, slaves, teachers, nurses, staff to work in the fields or shops, and other dependents whose work relates to the activities of the household.²¹² Thus, as noted above Peter’s mother-in-law lived with Peter. Similarly, in African traditional family-whether matrilineal or patrilineal; monogamous or polygamous- a family unit is an extended one. It is one which comprises not only the couple but also the mothers and fathers as well as brothers and sisters of both couple, their servants, workers and even the immediate community.

Perhaps in a bid to react to perceived negative tendencies in the traditional African family culture such as polygamy sometimes occasioned by childlessness in marriage, Christian colonial influence redefined, altered and isolated I Peter 3:1-7 and related passages to suggest and impose the western cultural mindset of an ideal family unit as nuclear. Thus, the cherished communalism spirit in African family structure got increasingly weakened and replaced by individualism (me

²⁰⁹ Adamo, “*Decolonizing African Biblical Studies*,” 7.

²¹⁰ Benson O. Igboin, “Contextuality, Interculturality & decolonisation as schemes of power relations,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(4), <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/download/255847/241704> (accessed January 2024), 5.

²¹¹ Olugbenga Olagunju, *A Concise Introduction to the New Testament* (Ogbomoso: Ogunniyi Publishers, 2012), 198-200.

²¹² Johnson Hodge and Caroline E., “Holy Wives in Roman Households: I Peter 3:1-6,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought*, Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 1 (2010): 1-24.

and my wife, with or without children).²¹³ Worse of, in the modern world, there is confusion as to what an ideal family is or should be. A family can now comprise of homosexual parents (with or without children) as well as single parents (with or without children). There is no mention of children in this passage but related passages (referred to as the household codes) significantly do.

2. *Woman submission affirms Africa's Patriarchal family structure*

While the theme of suffering is predominant in I Peter, Jobes rightly observed that I Peter also has as its overarching theme the quest for Christian engagement with culture.²¹⁴ Thus the book “encourages a transformed understanding of Christian self-identity that redefines how one is to live as a Christian in a world that is hostile to the basic principles of the gospel.”²¹⁵ It also enunciates that “the relationship between Christ and the world defines the basic principle of Christian self-understanding and engagement with culture.”²¹⁶

Fika J van Rensburg clarifies that the socio-historic context of the exhortation of I Peter 3:1-7 is patriarchal; whereby, “the superiority of husband over wife is generally accepted and viewed as an integral part of an orderly society.”²¹⁷ Thus, Philo is cited as noting that “Wives must be in servitude to their husbands, a servitude not imposed by violent ill treatment but promoting obedience in all things. Parents must have power over their children ... The same holds of any other persons over whom he (a man) has authority.”²¹⁸ And Josephus as stating that “The woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed, for the authority has been given by God to man.”²¹⁹

Concisely, Peter wrote to exhort Christians in a context that considered subordination of women to men not as discrimination but as norm. Yet, observably in line with the other class of household codes²²⁰ in the New Testament, Peter also wrote with particular burden on how Christians (both wives and husbands) can or must live within their patriarchal culture to reflect Christlike devotion (I Peter 2:20-25), engender conversion of pagan spouse (I Peter 3:1) and acknowledge God as witness in the spousal relationship (I Peter 3:7).

Viewed from African socio-cultural lens, I Peter 3:1-7 would have been comprehended as affirming Patriarchal marriage system where husbands are the masters (Lord) of their wives. The nature and pattern of the Lordship of the husbands over their wives, however, is also clearly specified in the immediate context of the passage and other related passages in the New Testament. Husbands are to be Lord like Christ the Lord with all sense of divine leadership responsibility, readiness to suffer and demonstration of wisdom in living with their wives.

In traditional African Patriarchal marriage structure, well before colonial influence, husbands were for instance in the Yoruba culture referred to as “Oluwa mi” (my Lord) but such

²¹³ A detail expression of this phenomenon is noted in Gabriel E. Idang, “African Culture and Values,” *UNISA Phronimon* 16, no. 2, (2015): 108, <https://scielo.org.za/pdf/phronimon/v16n2/06.pdf> (accessed May 2024) and Racheal Mafumbate, “The Undiluted African Community: Values, The Family, Orphanage and Wellness in Traditional Africa” *Information and Knowledge Management*, Vol.9, No.8, (2019):8-10, <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Undiluted%20African%20Community.pdf>

²¹⁴ Karen H. Jobes, *I Peter: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament I* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 23.

²¹⁵ Jobes, *I Peter*, 25.

²¹⁶ Jobes, *I Peter*, 25.

²¹⁷ Fika J van Rensburg, “Sarah's submissiveness to Abraham: A socio-historic interpretation of the exhortation to wives in I Peter 3:5-6 to take Sarah as example of submissiveness,” *HTS 60 (1&2) 2004*: 255,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45681293_Sarah's_submissiveness_to_Abraham_A_socio-historic_interpretation_of_the_exhortation_to_wives_in_I_Peter_35-6_to_take_Sarah_as_example_of_submissiveness

²¹⁸ Rensburg, “Sarah's submissiveness,” 254.

²¹⁹ Rensburg, “Sarah's submissiveness,” 254.

²²⁰ Household code is a term originally coined by Martin Luther to describe NT passages that highlight instructions to members of a household; passages such as Col 3:18-4:1, Eph 5:21-6:9, I Peter 2:18-3:7...

was not without headship responsibility of nurture and care, as well as protection. A husband is not considered man enough until he can provide for his household and shield them like a king. He proves that from the beginning of the marriage by paying a bride-price during engagement ceremony for instance in Yoruba culture and many other African culture. This bride-price is never a money paid to the family of the bride to purchase her but one of attestation of gratitude and commitment to take care of the bride and her family till death.

3. Woman submission refers to a voluntary submission; not coerced.

I Peter 3:1-7 opens with the Greek word Ὁμοίως (likewise or similarly). This word significantly reflects the thought and intention of the author (Peter) on the subsequent injunction. Ὁμοίως must be an implicit analogy between Peter's earlier injunction on slaves/masters relationship in I Peter 2:18 and wives/husbands relationship in 3:1. Notably the same Greek participle, ὑποτασσόμενοι, used for slaves was used for wives. However, that word also refutes a layman or cursory implication that wives were treated or esteemed no more than slaves even in the thought of Peter. ὑποτασσόμενοι is a present middle/passive participle, a form of imperatival participle, which implies an injunction to continue to be subject to or to subject oneself to.

According to Strong, the range of meanings of ὑποτασσόμενοι include such relegating words like: "1) to arrange under, to subordinate; 2) to subject, put in subjection; 3) to subject one's self, obey; 4) to submit to one's control; 5) to yield to one's admonition or advice; 6) to obey, be subject"²²¹ Yet the middle or passive (rather than active) voice of ὑποτασσόμενοι indicates voluntary submission (rather than involuntary servitude). By implication, whereas the passage truly reflects the hierarchical placement of husbands above wives (a patriarchal order) typical of the Graeco-Roman context, it makes submission of the wives to that order a personal, willing and voluntary one with a divine pattern and purpose in view. Accordingly, even slaves were also thus enjoined to submit voluntarily to their masters; not because they must but because they desired and decided to. In traditional African family also, good women did not have to be coerced to submit they have been taught to willingly do as it was considered sacrosanct.

4. Woman submission is considered sacrosanct and powerful.

Indeed I Peter 3:1-6 is striking in that "it simultaneously reinforces patriarchal control of non-Christian husband and empowers the Christian wife in her submission."²²² It is intriguing how that Peter paints the possibility of invincible and transformative influence over ungodly husbands by godly wives from verse 1. He espoused that submission is a silent but laudable tool at the wives' disposal. Peter implies from verses 2 to 4²²³ that a life of chaste conduct accompanied by reverential fear, modesty, gentleness, quietness are all reflective of a life of submission expected of wives. If any husband should despise a wife's effort at submitting in this way, Peter underscored that the gentle and quiet spirit of a woman is of very great worth in the sight of God. Precisely, he used the Greek word πολυτελής which means very costly or precious. Accordingly, submission was implicitly regarded as not only sacrosanct but also powerful.

Submission of wives is similarly sacrosanct and powerful in African traditional family. Before a young woman gets married, she is taught in Yoruba culture for instance: *Ile oko, Ile eko ni* (meaning a husband house is a house of lesson); "*obe ti bale ile ko kii je, iyale ile kii se*" (meaning good wives are not defiant to their husbands' directives). Furthermore, she is taught to

²²¹ James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*, electronic ed. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G5293

²²² Hodge and Caroline, "Holy Wives in Roman Households," 13.

²²³ See the amplified version for a detailed description.

respect and esteem not just the husband but also the husband's sisters (senior or younger in age as long as she met them in the house) as mothers; that is reflective of a deliberately willing submissive spirit. Yet, in this submission lies the power of African women. Women's role in traditional Africa was so powerful that the life and survival of the family and society depended on them.²²⁴

5. *Women's resentment of submission is perennial and it is occasioned by fear*

The divine pattern for slaves and wives is described as Christ's in I Peter 2: 19-25. In other words, Peter would have implied that even if voluntary submission meant enduring some suffering, it will not be unlike Christ and so would be divinely commendable. In fact, according to I Peter 3:5-6, voluntary submission is: 1) the true and lasting adornment of holy women who put their hope in God; 2) doing what is right; 3) obedience to one's husband in the esteem of him as Lord. Otherwise, according to 3:6b, Peter reckons that women who do not submit in this way or at all are being afraid of terror or intimidation.

Meanwhile, derogatory, oppressive and inhuman acts that have characterized Africa's patriarchal system cum colonial influence are indeed worthy of fear and consequent rebellion and agitations by modern feminist movement. Illustrating essentially with the Yoruba culture, Familusi identified five aspects of African culture that have not only marginalised women but also unjustly oppressed them.²²⁵ First, the cultural practice of inheritance is a disservice to the woman folk in the sense that women (wife or daughter) cannot inherit their husband or father's property; in fact, the wives are themselves considered as part of the inheritance (property) to be inherited by another male folk who may be younger or older. Second, Yoruba proverbial sayings clearly relegate women as less important or worse off immoral. Few examples of such (with English meaning) are: "*Omo to dara ni ti baba eyi ti ko dara niti iya*" (a well behaved child belongs to the father, one not well behaved belongs to the mother); *Owu ti iya gbon lomo n ran* (The attitudes of the mother are emulated by her offspring); "*Adekunle ni oruko okunrin, Adetule ni oruko obinrin*" (A male child populates the family while the female one depopulates it).

Third, sexual fidelity is demanded from women before and during marriage. Otherwise such woman (or women) suffers public ridicule and punishment. Such may even lead to the cancellation of the proposed marriage or termination of an existing marriage. A typical African woman is taught and warned through this proverbial saying: "A k ii moko omo tan, ka tunmale omo" meaning it is not proper to know one's daughter's husband and her concubine. Yet, this same rule does not apply to an African man. Conversely, for an African man, "adultery is construed as proving the valour of men."²²⁶ This truly is unfair and unjust. Fourth, Yoruba culture was not favourably disposed to educating the female child. Fifth and finally, the cultural practices demanded from widows are dehumanising. In spite of these atrocious patriarchal practices, Peter urged women not to surrender submission to the wind for fear. This is how a typical African woman would have comprehended this passage apart from Euro-modern influence. Rather than sanitising the culture, modern violent rebuffs that have liberated women to live without or apart from men for fear of these practices have only brought untold consequences.

6. *Subjugation and Oppression of women (wives) are both unbiblical and alien to traditional African.*

I Peter 3:7 accordingly (Ὁμοίως) cautions Christian husbands to keep living with their wives according to γνῶσις (wisdom or knowledge). In fact, the Greek imperatival participle used here-

²²⁴ Afisi, "Power and Womanhood in Africa," 230-232.

²²⁵ O.O. Familusi, "African Culture and the Status of Women: The Yoruba Example," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.5, no.1 (March 2012): 301-307, https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol_5_no1/5.1AfricanCulture.pdf (accessed May 2024).

²²⁶ Familusi, "African Culture and the Status of Women," 304.

συνουκοῦντες- is in an active voice, implying that the husbands were not left with any alternative but to heed the command unless of course they want their prayers hindered. Whatever that wisdom or knowledge connotes, it would never have included license to oppress, despise, or brutalise. Rather of ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν (continuously and forever showing or giving honour); that is placing premium on the wives as fellow heirs of the grace of life.

In face of some of the negative extremes of patriarchal marriage system highlighted in the preceding section, an afri-centric hermeneutics of I Peter 3:7 would have cautioned an African man and rather focused him on caring and nurturing of his wife- a notion which is not strange to an African man. Thus, in Yoruba culture, for instance, the *oriki* (praise poetry) of women are associated with care: *ayinke* (one cared for through praise); *abake* (one worth caring for); *ajoke* (jointly cared for); *aduke* (much loved and cared for); *abeke* (one begged to care for); *asake* (specially chosen to be pampered or cared for); *apeke* (called or born to be cared for or pampered) and such others.

7. God remains the utmost witness in spousal relationships: A biblical caution for traditional African Patriarchal extremes.

An Afri-centric hermeneutics of I Peter 3:7 would have taught a Christian African man to desist from any and every patriarchal acts that can arouse the anger of God who constantly watches over the marriage union.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the foregoing findings and discussions showcasing the values of an Afri-centric hermeneutics devoid of modern Eurocentric biases, the following are accordingly recommended to African Christian women and men in the modern world.

1. Christ women should re-foster the communal spirit in extended family structure typical of the traditional African family through submission, and not continue to conform to modern woman spirit of isolation and individualism (me and my husband and my children).
2. Christian women should acknowledge that Patriarchal family structure is godly, biblical and African. They should trust God to model this in their submission to their husbands, as unto God, in the modern world.
3. Christian women should submit to their husbands voluntary out of desire, not of compulsion. Submission is true and biblical only to the extent that it proceeds from a willing, understanding and cheerful heart.
4. Christian women should accept and explore the power in their wholehearted submission for winning over hardened hearted and ungodly men, restoring shattered lives and homes and transforming the society to the glory of God.
5. Christian women should trust God with their (often legitimate) fears of being used, wasted, abandoned, marginalized by men or ridiculed by the world system as they choose submission which is of great worth in the sight of God.
6. Christian men should beware of any thought, feeling, attitude or propensity to subjugate or oppress a submissive wife; knowing that it is both ungodly and unbiblical to do so. Otherwise, one faces God's wrath and displeasure.
7. Christian men should return in ardent devotion to the African care concept of women, not only calling them sweet reverential names but also esteeming them in practice and exposure to opportunities for personal development as fellow heirs worthy of greater, careful, deliberate, divine and purpose care.

Conclusion

The Afrocentric method of biblical interpretation is advocated in this paper as the method that could have salvaged Africa from losing her valued cultural heritage of Patriarchal family structure and thus getting lost and confused in the labyrinth of convoluted and complicated gender and family issues in the modern world. While it is conceded that there were negative extremes of the patriarchal family structure which stiffened submission and fueled legitimate agitation for woman emancipation, the unfortunate outcome of that in the modern world is gravely lamented.

Meanwhile, this paper discovered that much of the negative extremes that have characterized the patriarchal family structure were even a product of perversion or confusion of the traditional African culture upon colonialism. Before colonialism, African's patriarchal culture engenders complimentary gender roles and responsibilities, not gender inequality nor female brutality and relegation as it's predominantly the case in the modern world. In any case, this paper has shown that viewing I Peter 3:1-7 from Africa's socio-cultural lens provides better understanding of woman submission both to African Christian women and men. Returning to this understanding is crucial to regaining sanity to the marriage institution, restoring broken homes and reviving the society.

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Exploring The Correlation Between Worldview And Bible Interpretation

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Abstract

Bible interpretation plays a crucial role in communicating the gospel message to a new language group distinct from the original recipients. Given that the Bible was originally written within the worldview and cultural milieu of its primary audience, distinct from present-day readers situated in diverse contexts, interpreters endeavour to incorporate the original readers' worldview into the interpretive process. This can present challenges for contemporary readers seeking to grasp certain concepts within the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Employing a descriptive-qualitative mode, incorporating interviews and drawing on Gordon Doss' three interconnected dimensions of worldview, crucial in shaping interpretive assumptions to align with cultural patterns, this article contends that there exists a correlation between worldview and Bible interpretation. It argues that Bible interpreters should diligently consider the worldview of the new language group, such as the Asante Twi reading community they intend to reach, asserting that a more meaningful comprehension of the scriptures arises when readers' worldviews are integrated into the interpretative process. The paper recommends that good Bible interpretation should be in line with the theological, philosophical, and cultural worldviews of the new setting, whether it is Asante, Ghanaian, or African. This will help the Asante Twi (Ghanaian or African) reading community understand God's word better in their own unique cultural setting.

Keywords: Worldview, African Christianity, Bible Translation and Interpretation, Biblical Hermeneutics (Exegesis), Scholars and Practitioners.

Introduction

The interaction of cultural, historical, and personal perspectives shapes the sophisticated process of the interpretation of religious texts.²²⁷ This complexity finds a vivid manifestation in the Asante Twi Bible reading community in Ghana, where the individual's worldview emerges as a critical determinant which profoundly influences their understanding of scripture. This viewpoint aligns with the scholarly insights of Van der Toorn and Malina, who emphasise the pivotal role of cultural context in the interpretation of religious texts.²²⁸

Bible or biblical interpretation, which is a component of biblical hermeneutics, focuses on the examination of significance and principles of interpretation within theology.²²⁹ Exegesis, the critical investigation of biblical texts to uncover their original meanings, is expanded upon to make them relevant for modern audiences.²³⁰ It makes biblical texts applicable to the present by extracting insights from interpretation. While biblical hermeneutics and interpretation are sometimes used interchangeably, they fundamentally involve the process of revealing the meaning

²²⁷ Ellen White, "Michal the Misinterpreted." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 31(4), (2007): 451. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089207080051> on January 1, 2024.

²²⁸ Karel Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Harvard University Press, 2007); Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (Routledge, 1996).

²²⁹ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.

²³⁰ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 1.

and importance of a text. Braaten posits that Bible interpretation entails a scientific contemplation of how biblical words, texts, or historical events can acquire existential significance in our contemporary setting, considering language, society, and worldview.²³¹

Over time, scholars have developed three main methodologies to determine the meaning of a text: author-centred, text-centred, and reader-centred.²³² Examining the historical context, the author-centred method seeks to grasp a book's intended meaning, offering authenticity for modern readers. Tate highlights the text-centred approach, asserting that a text's true meaning originates within itself. Regarding the reader-centred approach, Tate deems it the most current, directing attention to the readers or the community of readers. Consideration of readers' perspectives, issues, experiences, interests, and cultures yields significance. This approach contends that a book lacks meaning until someone assigns its importance, emphasising the reader's role in meaning creation.²³³ The dynamic interaction between reader and text underscores the collaborative process of deriving meaning, where culture plays a crucial role in interpretation. This work uses the reader-centred approach.

The history of interpretation reflects the ongoing endeavour of Bible scholars to grasp and analyse scriptures within their original linguistic contexts, including Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, shaping diverse approaches to understanding biblical texts across different epochs and cultures.²³⁴ Ukpong asserts that the roots of organised Christian efforts to interpret the Bible can be traced back to Africa, a region that has significantly contributed to the development of biblical interpretation. Bible interpretation occurred as a result of the shift in Biblical studies from using the allegorical technique of interpretation to adopting the historical-critical approach in the eighteenth century. A variety of literary approaches emerged during the nineteenth century.²³⁵ Van Eck suggests that in addition to deconstruction and social-scientific criticism, certain 'post-modern' interpretations of the biblical text were also included. The introduction of contemporary methods in the mid-20th century had a significant impact on sub-Saharan Africa. By the 1970s, the use of these techniques in the interpretation of the Bible had become customary. Although it is possible to trace the origins of Biblical interpretation back to Africa, Van Eck believes that modern Western interpretation and exegesis techniques are currently having a significant influence. He reveals that African Biblical scholars have recently established a parallel technique of exegesis that aims to engage both the Biblical text and the African environment. This approach establishes a connection between the Biblical text and the African setting, with the primary emphasis on interpreting the text based on the communities that receive it rather than the communities that authored it or the text itself. Put simply, the strategy acknowledges the reader(s) or reading community and their role in the process of communication.²³⁶ Mulrain's work establishes the foundation for the methodology, demonstrating that biblical interpretation has always been influenced by and reliant upon a specific cultural code, patterns of thought, and social context of the interpreter.²³⁷ In other words, individuals who engage in biblical interpretation in their native

²³¹ C. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 131.

²³² Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 1-329.

²³³ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 1.

²³⁴ J. S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutic Directions," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (J TSA)*, 108 (2000): 3-4, in E. van Eck, "The Word is Life: African Theology as Biblical and Contextual Theology," *HTS Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (2006): 680-681. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v62i2.359> on December 2, 2023.

²³⁵ Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutic Directions," 3-4, in Van Eck, "The Word is Life: African Theology as Biblical and Contextual Theology," 680-681. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v62i2.359> on December 2, 2023.

²³⁶ Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JET ERAPS)* 3, no. 4 (2012): 575.

²³⁷ G. Mulrain, "Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context," *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (1999): 117-121.

language will inevitably consider the cultural code, thought pattern, and worldview of their group. In this scenario, the African interpreter (specifically the Asante Twi interpreter) will consider their audience of readers. However, this does not imply that the interpreter is displaying bias. In the pursuit of understanding this complex relationship, this article endeavours to explore the dynamic connection between worldview and Bible interpretation within the Asante Twi community.

Methodology

This research, conducted over three years, employed a descriptive-qualitative mode, incorporating interviews and emphasising a literature review from various sources, including the Holy Bible, pertinent books within the field of study, peer-reviewed journal articles and materials from Google Scholar, Holy Bible, and information from the internet. The researcher then subjected the collected publications to context-content thematic analysis using the six-phase approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data.²³⁸ Following thorough familiarisation with the collected data, the next step involved extracting codes and identifying recurring themes. These themes were then carefully examined and labelled before defining them in the research report.²³⁹ The correlation between worldview and Bible interpretation was drawn to inform practice, and a conclusion was drawn.

Background and Meaning of Worldview

Rousseau and Billingham establish that “worldview” is equivalent to *Weltanschauung*,²⁴⁰ coined by Kant in 1790.²⁴¹ Its usage varies across disciplines, emphasising distinct aspects.²⁴² In management, it signifies an individual or group’s values, while in theology, it relates to perspectives on God.²⁴³ However, worldviews are intricate, evolving as individuals integrate knowledge and experiences into a coherent framework.²⁴⁴ To Rousseau and Billingham, a worldview is “the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world,” functioning as a “map of reality” guiding decision-making in all domains.²⁴⁵ This means that a worldview is an overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world; it is a set of simplifying assumptions about how the world works. It is a collection of beliefs, attitudes, and values held by an individual or a group that influence their thinking and behaviour. It involves the basic assumptions behind a culture’s beliefs and behaviour. For instance, Westerners assume a lifeless external world, while many Africans view the earth as a living organism or an active universe.²⁴⁶

²³⁸ V. Braun and V. Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, accessed November 20, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

²³⁹ Braun & Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” 77–101, accessed November 20, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

²⁴⁰ D. Rousseau and J. Billingham, “A Systematic Framework for Exploring Worldviews and Its Generalization as a Multi-Purpose Inquiry Framework,” *Systems* 6, no. 27 (2018): 3, accessed October 14, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems6030027>.

²⁴¹ I. Kant and M. J. Gregor, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 111-112; P. G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 13.

²⁴² D. K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002); J. W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); P. G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

²⁴³ Rousseau and Billingham, “A Systematic Framework for Exploring Worldviews and Its Generalization as a Multi-Purpose Inquiry Framework,” 3, accessed October 14, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems6030027>.

²⁴⁴ R. A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality*, 1st ed. (London: Guilford Press, 1999); W. James, “The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature,” in *Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902* (London: Longmans Green, 1902).

²⁴⁵ Rousseau and Billingham, “A Systematic Framework for Exploring Worldviews and Its Generalization as a Multi-Purpose Inquiry Framework,” 3, accessed October 14, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems6030027>.

²⁴⁶ Illustratively, within the Akans (Asante) community in Ghana, the term for Earth is “Asaase Yaa,” translating to “Earth Yaa.” Here, “Yaa” signifies a female born on Thursday. This nomenclature implies the conceptualisation of the Earth as a female entity,

This defines a worldview as an organised and accepted set of ideas that attempts to explain the social, cultural, physical, and psychological world.²⁴⁷ This is seen in Africans, and for that matter, in Asante's interpretation of events such as natural disasters, death, and the afterlife.

Worldviews permeate beliefs, guiding judgements and actions at both individual and communal levels.²⁴⁸ They intricately shape our values, distinguishing the crucial from the trivial and influencing how individuals navigate the world.²⁴⁹ This dynamic is evident in African tribes, such as the Asante and Yoruba, underscoring the diverse and evolving nature of their distinct worldviews. Doss adds that worldview is the "deepest assumptions about what is really real," encompassing perceptions and assumptions about reality.²⁵⁰ According to Munsil, a person's worldview involves "the values, ideas, or the fundamental belief system that determines his attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately, actions."²⁵¹ Clark asserts that worldviews are the beliefs and assumptions through which individuals interpret hidden experiences embedded within the language and traditions of their surrounding society.²⁵² Typically, this includes their view of issues such as the nature of God, man, the meaning of life, nature, death, and right and wrong. According to Hiebert, people's comprehension of Scripture is profoundly moulded by their individual worldviews.²⁵³

From the outset of life, a person's worldview starts to take form, evolving steadily through infancy and beyond. This assertion finds backing in Johnson's research, which highlights that visual development, crucial for shaping a cohesive and steadfast perception of the world, commences even before birth and continues through the initial years of visual experience.²⁵⁴ Interactions with family, peers, church members, acquaintances, and encounters are pivotal in shaping this worldview. Their geographic context notably shapes a person's worldview. These worldviews, in essence, comprise shared values and assumptions that form the foundation for the customs, norms, and institutions within a given society. They are subtly conveyed through "origin myths, narrative stories, linguistic metaphors, and cautionary tales," establishing the essential guidelines for shared cultural meaning.²⁵⁵ For example, a Ghanaian, and for that matter, an Asante in particular, who does not know anything about snow may not be able to talk about winter. Their only familiarity lies in the descent of rainfall. Similarly, a Westerner residing in Europe throughout their life may be unfamiliar with intense downpours or the expression "raining cats and dogs" unless exposed to alternative sources. A person's worldview takes shape in early infancy, shaped by interactions, life experiences, and the geographical environment in which they are situated.

born on a Thursday. See; Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Supplement Series (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2012), 38-39.

²⁴⁷ M. Mascolo, "Worldview," *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. Edited by Teo, T., 1952-1956 (Springer, New York, 2014), accessed November 19, 2023 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_480.

²⁴⁸ M. E. Koltko-Rivera, "The Psychology of Worldviews," *Review of General Psychology*, 8(1), (2004): 3, accessed December 24, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.1.3>.

²⁴⁹ B. J. Walsh, and J. R. Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 54.

²⁵⁰ G. R. Doss, "Culture, Worldview, Biblical Interpretation, and Mission," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 12(1), (2016): 131.

²⁵¹ Tracy F. Munsil, "What's Your Worldview," *Focus on the Family: Helping Families Thrive* (n.d.), accessed September 10, 2023, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/christian-worldview/whats-a-christian-worldview/whats-your-worldview>.

²⁵² M. Clark, *In Search of Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁵³ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 267.

²⁵⁴ S. Johnson, "Development of Visual Perception," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 2, no. 5 (2011): 515, accessed September 24, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.128>.

²⁵⁵ Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, 5.

Worldview Dimensions in Bible Interpretation

Doss identifies three intertwining dimensions: theological (perception of God), philosophical (meaning of life, knowledge, and beliefs), and cultural (behaviour).²⁵⁶ This intertwining nature signifies the complex and interconnected elements shaping an individual's or a group's overarching perspective on the world. Kraft suggests that they play a crucial role in shaping how we interpret assumptions (or dimensions) to align with our cultural patterns.²⁵⁷

The influence of diverse worldviews on biblical interpretation becomes evident when individuals engage with scripture outside the context of its author or original recipients. Within African communities, this diversity manifests in various approaches to interpreting the Bible. However, when interpretations are not properly done, the risk of inaccuracies arises, impeding conversion and obstructing precise theological reflection, as highlighted by Asamoah.²⁵⁸ Therefore, ensuring precision in scriptural interpretation is paramount for the gospel to effectively achieve its intended purpose. Hiebert underscores that Scripture is a divine revelation embedded in a particular historical and sociological context.²⁵⁹ Hence, interpreters must refrain from transplanting the meaning of an idea from the author's world to a new cultural context, as it might acquire a different significance in the new environment.²⁶⁰ Instead, interpreters should conduct biblical interpretation within their worldview, preserving the original text content. This approach ensures that the Word of God is vivified and stays pertinent in its new cultural setting.

a. Theological dimension

The essence of theology lies in its exploration of the divine, encapsulating the study of God. Within the realm of worldview, the theological dimension delves into how individuals or communities perceive and comprehend God.²⁶¹ According to Thiessen (1989: 3-30), it involves beliefs about the nature and existence of God, exploring questions such as: What is the nature of God? Does God exist? How does one relate to the divine? This dimension shapes a person's spirituality, religious beliefs, and the lens through which they interpret the divine aspects of life. The answers to these questions are found in the Bible.²⁶² In essence, this aspect of worldview aids Bible

²⁵⁶ Doss, "Culture, Worldview, Biblical Interpretation, and Mission," 131.

²⁵⁷ C. H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 56.

²⁵⁸ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "Understanding and Interpretation of Revelation 1:8 by Some Asante Twi Speaking Scholars," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 6 no. 3 (2020): 187-188.

²⁵⁹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 11, 273.

²⁶⁰ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "A Comparative Study of Alpha kai to Omega in the Greek New Testament (Revelation 1:8) and Asante Twi Bible," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)*, 2 no. 1 (2020): 70-76; Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "Role of Culture in Bible Interpretation: A Reference to Asante-Twi Bible Reading Community," *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 5 no. 5 (2020): 1-14.

²⁶¹ E. Frick, *The Cardinal Meaning: Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics: Buddhism and Christianity*, edited by Michael Pye and Robert Morgan (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1973). *Horizons* 2 no. 1 (1975): 148. accessed February 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S036096690001207X>.

²⁶² God is one (Deut. 6:4). The Bible affirms the existence of God through various verses. Genesis 1:1 declares, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," establishing God's role as the Creator. Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands," pointing to creation as evidence of God's existence. Paul states in Romans 1:20, "Since the world's creation, people have clearly seen and understood God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—so they have no excuse." Furthermore, Hebrews 11:6 emphasises faith in God, saying, "And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." These verses collectively testify to the existence of God and His active presence in the world. The nature of God is multifaceted, encompassing love, holiness, justice, mercy, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and faithfulness. God is love, as expressed in 1 John 4:8 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, demonstrating patience, kindness, and selflessness. 1 Peter 1:16 and Isaiah 6:3 proclaim his holiness, emphasising his pure and perfect nature. Deuteronomy 32:4 and Psalm 89:14 emphasise God's justice, highlighting his righteousness and fairness. His mercy is evident in Psalm 103:8 and Ephesians 2:4-5, showing his compassion and grace. Jeremiah 32:17 and Revelation 19:6 affirm God's omnipotence, demonstrating his boundless power. Psalm 147:5 and 1 John 3:20 note his omniscience, revealing his all-encompassing

interpreters in their task by recognising the presence and influence of God in their endeavours.²⁶³ However, Thiessen contends that this perspective can vary widely, influencing moral values, ethical principles, and the overall worldview framework. He concludes that the existence of God plays a crucial role in defining an individual's or a group's spiritual identity and their connection to the metaphysical realm.²⁶⁴

b. Philosophical dimension

According to Thiessen philosophy commences by positing some fundamental entity or concept as the basis for explaining the existence of all other things.²⁶⁵ Following Thagard, philosophy strives to tackle universal inquiries regarding the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and values.²⁶⁶ It aims to grasp the broader meaning and purpose embedded in various aspects of existence. Whether on an individual or communal level, those with distinctive philosophical worldviews engage with pivotal questions: What constitutes the meaning of life?²⁶⁷ How should knowledge be sought and comprehended?²⁶⁸ Which foundational beliefs shape our perception of the world?²⁶⁹ What lies beyond our immediate surroundings?²⁷⁰ How do spirit and matter interconnect?²⁷¹ And what defines the boundaries between good and evil?²⁷²

Within the realm of Bible interpretation, the philosophical dimension of worldview thus endeavours to interpret the Scriptures by examining how the target language comprehends knowledge, perceives reality, and upholds values. This dimension plunges into the intellectual framework underlying an individual's perception, thereby influencing their perspectives on truth, morality, and the very nature of reality. Its impact extends beyond theoretical abstraction, actively shaping attitudes, steering decision-making processes, and laying the groundwork for ethical considerations within the specific context of a given worldview.

c. Cultural dimension

In the realm of Bible interpretation, this dimension encompasses the behavioural and interactive aspects of individuals within their cultural milieu as they receive and interpret the Bible. It acknowledges the role of cultural context in shaping the worldview of individuals, emphasising how their cultural background influences the interpretation of biblical messages. Within this

knowledge. Psalm 139:7–10 and Jeremiah 23:24 declare God's omnipresence, indicating his presence everywhere. Finally, Lamentations 3:22–23 and 2 Timothy 2:13 celebrate his faithfulness, demonstrating his unwavering loyalty and trustworthiness. Relating to the divine in the Bible involves faith, love, obedience, and prayer. Hebrews 11:6 states, "And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Jesus teaches love as central to this relationship: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). Obedience is also crucial, as Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commands" (Jn. 14:15). Prayer is a way to communicate with God: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Php. 4:6). These verses highlight faith, love, obedience, and prayer as essential aspects of relating to the divine.

²⁶³ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Revised by

Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 3-30.

²⁶⁴ Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 3-30.

²⁶⁵ Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 3.

²⁶⁶ Paul Thagard, 'What Are Minds?' *Brain-Mind: From Neurons to Consciousness and Creativity* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2019), accessed May 30, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190678715.003.0001>.

²⁶⁷ The Bible points to Ecclesiastes 12:13, Matthew 22:37-39, and John 17:3 as scriptures that reveal the meaning of life.

²⁶⁸ The Bible offers guidance on seeking and comprehending knowledge through various verses, such as Proverbs 2:3-6, James 1:5, and Colossians 2:2-3.

²⁶⁹ The Bible offers to understanding foundational beliefs that shape our perception of the world through various verses, such as Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3, and Romans 1:20.

²⁷⁰ John 14:2-3, 2 Corinthians 4:18, and Colossians 3:1-2 explains to us what lies beyond our immediate surroundings.

²⁷¹ Genesis 2:7, John 1:14, and 1 Corinthians 15:44 are some of the Bible verses that address the interconnection between spirit and matter.

²⁷² Scriptural references defining the boundaries between good and evil include Isaiah 5:20, Romans 12:9, and Hebrews 5:14.

dimension, the focus is on the behavioural and interactive aspects of individuals within their cultural context as they engage with the Bible. It recognises how the receiving culture's way of life affects the interpretation of the Bible, allowing the Word of God to find resonance in the culture. The social norms, values, and practices of the receiving culture play a defining role in interpreting the biblical world, as the biblical concepts, concrete and abstract, are integrated into the cultural framework. Illustratively, within the cultural context of the Kasua people in the Western Province, every four-legged animal is referred to as a pig, and distinctions between animals like horses, cows, and sheep are designated as pig-horse, pig-cow, and pig-sheep, respectively, due to their shared characteristic of having four legs—expressed as “*kopolo*” in their language.²⁷³ Consequently, when translating or interpreting John 1:29, the reference to Jesus might be rendered as the “pig-sheep”²⁷⁴ within their unique linguistic and cultural framework. This showcases how cultural nuances and linguistic distinctions can significantly influence the interpretation and understanding of biblical passages. Doss argues that the cultural dimension of worldview is indispensable because there are no non-cultural Christians. Every Christian adheres to a specific cultural worldview, whether American, Nigerian, South African, Ghanaian, and so on. He contends that “Christianity always wears individual and cultural clothing.”²⁷⁵ The gospel, devoid of a specific culture, assimilates the culture of the environment it enters. This is exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, the central figure of Christianity, who embraced and embodied the Jewish culture during his earthly existence, emphasising the dynamic interaction between Christianity and diverse cultural contexts.

The Asante Twi Bible Reading Community

The Asante people, a significant part of Ghana's population, are the predominant group in the Ashanti region, with an estimated population of 5,432,485.²⁷⁶ They are part of the larger Akan²⁷⁷ socio-cultural grouping, comprising 14,090,233²⁷⁸ people. The Akan people are distributed across various regions in Ghana, including the Western, Western North, Central, Volta, Oti, and Ashanti regions.²⁷⁹ They cover about half of Ghana's area, spanning 238,533 square kilometres.²⁸⁰ Each Akan ethnic group operates autonomously, but they engage in cultural rituals and use the Twi language, promoting interconnection.

²⁷³ R. Greco, “*Pigs and Sheep*.” (2017), accessed December 24, 2024 <https://thepngexperience.wordpress.com/2017/08/06/pigs-and-sheep/#:~:text=So%20when%20Jesus%20is%20referred,pig%2Dsheep%20of%20God.%E2%80%9D>.

²⁷⁴ The Translators Training Course facilitated a transformative experience for the *Kasual* translation team members, offering the opportunity to observe and study sheep. This encounter led to a paradigm shift in their perception of animals and the divine message. Consequently, the team opted to replace the term “pig-sheep” with “sheep-animal” in the New Testament. The calm and collected way that sheep behave when facing death, which is more in line with their cultural understanding, had an impact on this choice. It reflects the dynamic nature of culture, as they embraced the symbolism of sheep within the context of their evolving cultural beliefs.

²⁷⁵ Doss, “Culture, Worldview, Biblical Interpretation, and Mission,” 131.

²⁷⁶ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana Population and Housing Census, Vol 3: General Report Highlights*, (2022), 15, accessed December 15, 2023

https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/dissemination_details.php?disseminatereport=MjYzOTE0MjAuMzc2NQ==&Publications.

²⁷⁷ The term Akan, meaning “first,” suggests the Akans were the original inhabitants of Ghana, influenced by Arab settlers in Sudan and Ghana and European explorers in Guinea. See; K. Nkansa-Kyeremanteng, *The Akans of Ghana: Their Customs, History and Institutions*, 2nd rev. ed. (Santasi, Kumasi: Sebewie De Ventures, 2010), 26; J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1968), 198.

²⁷⁸ The 2021 Population and Housing Census in Ghana reveals that the nation's population stands at 30,832,019. The Akan population constitutes 45.7 percent of the entire Ghanaian population.

²⁷⁹ F. A. Dolphyne, “The Volta-Comoe Languages,” in M. E. Kropp Dakubu (ed), (The Languages of Ghana, London: Kegan Paul, 1988), in Asamoah, “Role of Culture in Bible Interpretation: A Reference to Asante-Twi Bible Reading Community,” 6.

²⁸⁰ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana Population and Housing Census, Vol 3: General Report Highlights*, (2022), 8.

Gedzi describes Asante as proficient in the Asante Twi language, with Asante-Diasporan parents.²⁸¹ They primarily inhabit Ghana's Ashanti Region, with Kumasi as their traditional capital. According to the 2021 census, 52.8% of the Asante population, totalling 2,868,352, can read and write in the language.²⁸²

A Worldview of The Asante People

a. Theological dimension

The Asante people subscribe to the belief in *Onyankopɔn*, the Supreme Being who serves as the creator of the world and holds authority over the spirit forces.²⁸³ *Onyankopɔn* is perceived as a distant and transcendent entity, and all other spirits draw their origin and power from this Supreme Being.²⁸⁴ Though singular, *Onyankopɔn* may be accessed through intermediaries such as deities. "*Onyankopɔn*" or "*Onyame*" is a creator who must Himself be an uncreated being and implies that such a creator should be sought and worshipped. He is referred to as the supreme, ultimate, uncreated self-existence—in whom all things are dependent. Hence attributes such as *Ɔdomankoma* - Creator, the All Grace Giver, or He who alone is full of abundance; *Tweduampɔn* - One leans on Him with complete safety; *Bɔrebɔre* - Architect of Being, Maker of all things.

The Asante also has the superstition that God was closer to man but left for His present abode due to an old woman's *fufu*²⁸⁵ pounding activities, as the pestle was hitting Him day in and day out. According to Asante, God decided to go to His presence state to be far from human disturbances.²⁸⁶ This implies that he is remote and transcendent rather than approachable.

Onyinah tells that the Akan (Asante) spirit-world is a significant place for *nananom asamanfo*, or ancestors, who are revered as individuals who have completed their earthly journey and are now elder siblings in the other world.²⁸⁷ These ancestors, like "saints", have lived exemplary lives and contribute to the prestige of their family, clan, or tribe. They are guardians of traditions and customs, actively participating in family affairs. The spirit world holds profound significance for the Ashanti, with a ritual called the pouring of libation, which establishes a vital connection between the living and ancestors. The pouring of libation embodies the Akan belief that ancestors, in close communion with the Supreme Being, act as mediators between humans and *Onyankopɔn*. This practice highlights the Akan culture's rich spiritual tapestry and its connection to ancestors.

b. Philosophical dimension

The Asante ethnic group in Ghana relies on myths as spiritual guides, imbued with symbols that carry profound meaning across various life stages. These symbols play a central role in significant cultural occasions such as naming ceremonies, female initiation, and marriage.²⁸⁸ Traditional *kente* and *adinkra* clothing prominently feature these symbols, offering insights into the philosophical and psychological aspects of Asante life.²⁸⁹ At its core, Asante civilization is deeply rooted in

²⁸¹ V. S. Gedzi, "The Asante of Ghana," *International Journal of African Society Cultures and Traditions*, 2(3), (2014): 21-22.

²⁸² Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana Population and Housing Census, Vol 3: General Report Highlights*, (2022), 36.

²⁸³ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana," 31.

²⁸⁴ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana," 32.

²⁸⁵ *Fufu* is a meal of mashed plantains and cassava in a wooden mortar with a long wooden pestle.

²⁸⁶ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana," 33.

²⁸⁷ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana," 45.

²⁸⁸ R. Larunga, *Myths and Legends from Ghana for African-American Cultures* (Mogadore: Telecraft Books, 1992); M. Ngangar and R. Prime, *Essential African Mythology: Stories that Changed the World* (San Francisco: Thorsons, An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), vii.

²⁸⁹ The symbol known as "*Owuo atwedee*" gives rise to the proverb "*Owuo atwedee baakofoo mforo*," signifying that "Death's ladder is not climbed by just one person." This symbol encapsulates the certainty and universality of death. Additional proverbs that encapsulate the Asante philosophy include: "*Nyame nkuu wo a wonwui*," translating to "If God has not killed you, you are

myths, serving four essential functions: mystical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical.²⁹⁰ As per the perspectives of Campbell and Courlander, mystically, myths guide individuals in comprehending the mysteries of the universe, while cosmologically, they delve into enigmas such as death. Sociologically, myths uphold societal rules and anchor principles within an ethnic context. Pedagogically, myths serve as educational tools, imparting wisdom to youth about navigating life from birth to death.²⁹¹ All these facets collectively embody the profound philosophical dimension of the Asante culture.

c. Cultural dimension

Hiebert suggests that the essence of a culture resides in the shared beliefs, feelings, and values within a community.²⁹² The Asante culture, in particular, encompasses a rich tapestry of beliefs, sentiments, and values, with time holding notable significance. Nnaji-for delves into the concept of time in Africa, labelling it “African time,” wherein events take precedence over the rigid constraints of European linear time.²⁹³ Supporting this viewpoint, the author highlights factors such as relational attitudes, cultural diversity, resource limitations, and the absence of certain amenities as contributing to this perception. Despite advocating for a balance between time and event considerations and acknowledging the diverse temporal orientations of cultural groups, the notion of African time persists on the continent, including among the Akans (Asante) in Ghana, who actively assert control over time rather than seeing it as a controlling force.²⁹⁴

Discussions

The Correlation between Worldview and Bible Interpretation in the Asante Community

In exploring the potential correlation between worldview and Bible interpretation, it is essential to juxtapose these two concepts. By examining them side by side, we can gain insight into how one’s worldview influences their understanding and application of biblical interpretation in a new environment like the Asante Community.

not dead yet”; “*Feree ne animguasee dee, fanyinam owuo*,” conveying that “Given the choice between shame and disgrace, death is a better option”; “*Odo nyera fie kwan*,” meaning “Love does not lose its way home; those led by love always end up in the right place”; and “*Abode Santann*,” symbolising the “totality of the universe or the vast expanse of creation.” A profound expression: “*Abode santann yi firi tete, firi Odomankoma; Odomankoma boo adee; oboo awia, osrane ne nsoromma, oboo nsuo ne mframa; oboo nkwa, oboo nipa, na oboo owuo. Ote saa daa*” elucidates the timeless panorama of creation originating from God. It conveys that God created everything—from celestial bodies like the sun, moon, and stars to natural elements such as water and wind. He is the creator of life, humanity, and even death, remaining immutable throughout time. A. Amankwah, *Personal Interview*, (2024). He holds the position of Abusuapanin (family head) for Manso Abodom Traditional Area in the Amansie West District of the Ashanti Region. Additionally, their queen mother holds the esteemed position of being one of the stool wives to the Asante king. He was interviewed on phone on the meaning of the Asante symbols; K. A. Agyapong, *Personal Interview*, (2024). He is an Asante, a Pentecostal scholar, and a minister of the gospel affiliated with The Church of Pentecost, presently serving at Acherensua. He was interviewed on phone on the meaning of the Asante symbols; M. Sackitey, *Personal Interview*, (2024). He is affiliated with the Department of Akan-Nzema Education within the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages Education at the University of Education, Winneba. He was interviewed on phone on the meaning of the Asante symbols.

²⁹⁰ Nana Adu-Pipim Boaduo, “Philosophical Discourse by the Asante of Ghana: Mythological Symbolic Analysis,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4 no. 3 (2011): 78.

²⁹¹ J. Campbell, *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*, Edited by B.S. Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 4, 136, 163; H. Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1996), 137-139.

²⁹² P. G. Hiebert, *Cultural Differences and the Communication of the Gospel*, (n.d.), 375, accessed November 30, 2023 https://www.perspectivesonmission.com/resources/Session08_Hiebert_CulturalDiffComGospel.pdf.

²⁹³ Osita Nnaji-for, “Justification of the concept of time in Africa,” *OGIRISI a New Journal of African Studies*, 12 no.1(2016): 253.

²⁹⁴ Nnaji-for, “Justification of the concept of time in Africa,” 253.

a. Theological Dimension

The correlation between the theological dimension of the Asante people's worldview and the theological dimension of Bible interpretation lies in their shared exploration of the divine and their perceptions of the supernatural realm.

The Asante people's theological dimension of worldview revolves around their belief in *Onyankopɔn*, the Supreme Being who created the world and governs the spirit forces.²⁹⁵ *Onyankopɔn* is regarded as transcendent and remote, yet still holds significance in the spiritual lives of the Asante people. Similarly, the theological dimension of Bible interpretation involves the study of God and understanding His nature, existence, and relationship with humanity.²⁹⁶ In addition is the Asante people's theological belief in the monotheistic nature of God which aligns with the biblical understanding that God is one and can be approached through intermediaries. Both dimensions encompass beliefs about the divine and seek to comprehend the metaphysical aspects of life.

Moreover, the Asante people's practice of pouring libation to honour ancestors and establish a connection with the Supreme Being mirrors the concept of mediation and communion with God found in many interpretations of the Bible. The pouring of libation signifies the role of ancestors as mediators between humans and *Onyankopɔn*, similar to the belief in saints acting as intercessors in Christian theology. Hence, leveraging the indigenous people's beliefs can aid biblical interpreters in making scripture more meaningful and relevant to them.

Additionally, both dimensions highlight the influence of cultural and societal factors on spiritual beliefs and interpretations. Just as the Asante people's worldview is shaped by their cultural practices and traditions, the theological dimension of Bible interpretation is influenced by the cultural context in which it is studied and applied.

b. Philosophical Dimension

In accordance with Thagard, philosophy strives to tackle universal inquiries regarding the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and values, so this dimension has to do with the belief or attitude that people perceive and use for dealing with life in general.²⁹⁷ For example, the Asante attribute specific types of work, like "carrying toilets," with distinct cultural meanings and perceptions. According to their belief, as articulated by Matthias, encapsulated in the expression "*animguase nfata ɔkani ba*," an Akan (Asante) individual should not endure disgrace; it is deemed preferable for them to face death than to endure the shame of disgrace.²⁹⁸ Even if engaging in such work is the sole means of sustenance, they adamantly avoid it, deeming it belittling and detrimental to their dignity and identity. This viewpoint resonates with the interpretation of blessings in Deuteronomy 28:13, "And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them," underscoring their commitment as leaders to refrain from what they perceive as "lowly" work, thus upholding honour and preserving their elevated status.

They uphold the conviction that every individual embarks on the inevitable journey of mortality, symbolised as climbing the ladder of death—a belief harmonised with the Asante Twi Bible's rendition of Hebrews 9:27. Central to their faith is the understanding that no harm befalls them without divine permission, as they find refuge under the protective gaze of their heavenly Father, aligning with the interpretation of Colossians 3:3 in the Asante Twi Bible. Their theological

²⁹⁵ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana," 31.

²⁹⁶ Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 3-30.

²⁹⁷ Thagard, "What Are Minds?", *Brain-Mind: From Neurons to Consciousness and Creativity*, accessed May 30, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190678715.003.0001>.

²⁹⁸ Sackitey Sackitey, *Personal Interview*, (2024).

foundation extends to the acknowledgment that God, the unchanging creator, fashioned everything—from celestial bodies like the sun, moon, and stars to fundamental elements like water and wind. This encompasses the creation of life, humanity, and even the concept of death, a testament to the timeless and immutable nature of the divine.

c. Cultural Dimension

The incorporation of culture into the worldview is essential for theological reflection, providing access to a dimension of humanity that must be considered.²⁹⁹ Worldviews, often implicit but discernible through people’s beliefs and practices, can be better understood by examining cultural particularities, as they serve as tools for unveiling deep assumptions within a worldview.³⁰⁰

An illustrative instance of this cultural influence is observed among the Akans (Asante) in Ghana, who prioritise event time over European linear time. For them, time is not a force that dictates their actions; instead, they actively control it. Applying this cultural perspective to the biblical account of Jesus arriving at the tomb of Lazarus on the third day in John 11, it reveals a nuanced interpretation. In the Akan cultural context, Jesus was not delayed; he arrived precisely for the purpose he intended in Bethany this time and successfully raised Lazarus from the dead. However, from a European (and Jewish) perspective, Jesus might be perceived as tardy to the event. This discrepancy in the concept of time, rooted in cultural activities, exemplifies the notion that time is a matter of cultural preference.³⁰¹

Conclusion

Exploring the connection between worldview and Bible interpretation has illuminated the complex factors that mould human perceptions and interactions with the world. It is clear that an individual’s worldview, a fusion of theological, philosophical, and cultural elements, significantly influences their beliefs, values, and subsequent approaches to biblical interpretation.

The Asante community serves as a notable example, embodying a comprehensive worldview that seamlessly incorporates various layers of interpretation. Their cultural lens profoundly shapes how they approach and understand the Bible, highlighting the critical importance of considering cultural nuances for an accurate comprehension of biblical texts. The interplay between theological, philosophical, and cultural dimensions enriches biblical interpretation, providing diverse perspectives and revealing the nuanced nature of human outlooks.

This study underscores the dynamic relationship between culture and the interpretation of biblical texts. It serves as a reminder to scholars, practitioners, and researchers that interpreting religious scriptures demands an appreciation for the cultural subtleties and worldviews of the communities involved. A thoughtful and comprehensive approach is essential for a thorough understanding of the Bible’s message, fostering a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human interpretation and reaffirming the contextual essence of religious texts.

Recommendation For Scholars And Practitioners

By integrating the theological, philosophical, and cultural dimensions of different worldviews, scholars and practitioners can develop a richer, more nuanced approach to Bible interpretation. This approach not only respects and acknowledges the diversity of cultural perspectives but also enhances the relevance and impact of biblical teachings in various cultural contexts. I propose the following recommendations for scholars and practitioners to attain this goal:

²⁹⁹ Doss, “Culture, Worldview, Biblical Interpretation, and Mission,” 131.

³⁰⁰ Doss, “Culture, Worldview, Biblical Interpretation, and Mission,” 131-132.

³⁰¹ Doss, “Culture, Worldview, Biblical Interpretation, and Mission,” 131.

1. Contextualise theological concepts: Scholars should explore how the theological dimensions of different cultures, such as the Asante people's belief in *Onyankopɔn*, can enhance their understanding of biblical theology. Practitioners should emphasise the shared aspects of theological belief and metaphysical exploration to create a deeper connection with local communities.
2. Integrate mediatory practices: Recognise and respect indigenous practices, like the Asante's pouring of libation, which parallels the concept of mediation in Christianity. This understanding can foster a more inclusive approach to interpreting biblical texts that acknowledges and incorporates local customs and spiritual practices.
3. Be aware of cultural sensitivity in theology: Both scholars and practitioners need to be aware of how cultural contexts influence theological beliefs. This awareness can assist in developing interpretations and applications of the Bible that reflect the cultural backgrounds of various communities.
4. Recognise cultural philosophies: Scholars should delve into the philosophical underpinnings of various cultures, such as the Asante's view on dignity and honour, to understand how these beliefs shape their interpretation of scripture. Practitioners can use this knowledge to communicate biblical principles in a way that aligns with these cultural values.
5. Respect for cultural identities: It is crucial to respect and uphold the dignity and cultural identities of the people. When discussing biblical texts, highlight the alignment between cultural beliefs and scriptural teachings, like the Asante's interpretation of divine protection and creation, to validate and affirm their worldview.
6. Bridge cultural and biblical ethics: Scholars should explore and highlight the ethical parallels between cultural practices and biblical teachings. Practitioners can then use these parallels to teach and apply biblical principles in a culturally relevant manner, ensuring that ethical teachings are both respectful and impactful.
7. Embrace cultural contexts: Scholars need to study how cultural contexts shape worldviews and, consequently, Bible interpretation. For instance, understanding the Akan concept of event time can provide fresh insights into biblical narratives. Practitioners should use these insights to offer culturally relevant interpretations that resonate with the community's lived experiences.
8. Utilise cultural particularities: Recognise the implicit worldviews revealed through cultural practices. Scholars should examine these practices to uncover deeper assumptions within a worldview. Practitioners can incorporate these understandings into their teaching and ministry, making biblical lessons more relatable and meaningful.
9. Cultural adaptation in interpretation: Scholars and practitioners alike should adapt biblical interpretation to fit the audience's cultural context. For example, interpreting Jesus' arrival at Lazarus' tomb through the lens of Akan event time can provide a more culturally sensitive and relevant understanding of the text.

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K. A. Agyapong, *Personal Interview*, (2024). He is an Asante, a Pentecostal scholar, and a minister of the gospel affiliated with The Church of Pentecost, presently serving at Acherensua. He was interviewed on phone on the meaning of the Asante symbols.

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Indigenous African Methods of Biblical Interpretation: Contextualising Scripture within African Cultural and Spiritual Frameworks

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Abstract

This paper investigates the various methods of biblical interpretation employed within the African context, focusing on indigenous African approaches that integrate traditional cultural and spiritual perspectives. By examining the unique ways Africans engage with the Bible and interpret its teachings, this study sheds light on the diversity of theological thought and hermeneutical practices. The paper employs descriptive research, a methodological approach that describes the characteristics of a phenomenon or population without influencing it. It analyses different African interpretative traditions, such as feminist hermeneutics, liberation theology, post-colonial scripture readings, etc. Special attention is given to how African scholars, theologians, and religious leaders have adapted Indigenous African hermeneutical methods to suit their cultural and spiritual contexts and the development of new interpretive frameworks grounded in African epistemologies and worldviews. The paper contributes to understanding how the Bible is read, understood, and applied within Africa through textual analysis, ethnographic research, and theological reflection. It also examines the implications of indigenous African biblical interpretation for contemporary theological discourse, intercultural and the decolonisation of biblical hermeneutics.

Keywords: Indigenous African Methods, Biblical Interpretation, Contextualization, Scripture, African Culture, Spiritual Frameworks, Western hermeneutical methods.

Introduction

The interpretation of biblical texts has been a central aspect of Christian theology and practice since the faith's inception. Traditionally, Western hermeneutical approaches have dominated biblical scholarship, often marginalising or overlooking the interpretative traditions of non-Western cultures. However, with the increasing recognition of global Christianity and the importance of contextual theology, there is a growing need to explore how different cultural contexts shape the understanding and application of Scripture.

In Africa, the encounter between Christianity and indigenous cultures has resulted in diverse interpretive practices that blend biblical narratives with traditional beliefs, rituals, and values. This synthesis has given rise to unique biblical interpretation methods in African cultural and spiritual frameworks. These indigenous methods are not only expressions of faith but also vehicles for addressing social and political issues within Africa.

Despite the significant contributions of African scholars and theologians, indigenous African methods of biblical interpretation remain underrepresented in mainstream biblical scholarship. This marginalisation has led to a lack of understanding and appreciation for how African cultures and spiritualities inform and enrich scripture reading. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific methods and approaches Africans use to interpret the Bible and the theological and practical implications of these interpretations.

The problem this paper seeks to address twofold: the insufficient documentation and analysis of indigenous African interpretive methods and the need to explore how these methods

can inform and transform contemporary theological discourse. By investigating these issues, the study aims to bridge the gap between Western and African hermeneutical traditions and promote a more holistic and contextually sensitive approach to biblical interpretation.

Overview of Biblical Interpretation in the African Contexts

Christianity's presence in Africa dates back to the early centuries of the Common Era, significantly earlier than commonly assumed. Early Christianity grew in North Africa, particularly in regions like Egypt and Carthage, producing notable theologians such as Augustine of Hippo and Tertullian. These early African Christians contributed significantly to developing Christian doctrine and biblical interpretation. According to Thomas C. Oden, "Africa played a decisive role in forming Christian culture. Decisive intellectual achievements of Christianity were explored and understood first in Africa before they were recognised in Europe, and a millennium before they found their way to North America."³⁰² North Africa was a vibrant centre of early Christianity. Alexandria, one of the most important cities in the early Christian world, was home to the famous Catechetical School, which was crucial in developing Christian thought.³⁰³ Scholars like Clement of Alexandria and Origen engaged in theological and philosophical discussions, interpreting the Bible in ways that would influence Christian thought for centuries.³⁰⁴ The presence of Christianity in regions such as Ethiopia is evidenced by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian bodies in the world. Robert Bartlett argues that Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia by the eunuch mentioned in Acts 8:26-39 which made "Christianity spread across North Africa from its very inception. This Ethiopian official was, no doubt, instrumental in the spread of the Gospel to Ethiopia and to all of North Africa."³⁰⁵ This assertion was later solidified in the 4th century by Frumentius, a missionary who became the first bishop of Aksum.³⁰⁶ The Ethiopian Church developed a tradition of biblical interpretation that blended Christian teachings with local customs and languages.

The spread of Christianity to sub-Saharan Africa is closely tied to the era of European colonialism, which began in the late 15th century and intensified in the 19th century. Missionary societies from Europe, such as the Anglican and Catholic missionary orders, played pivotal roles in establishing Christianity across the continent.³⁰⁷ Victor Umaru opines that missionaries brought Western theological perspectives and interpretive methods, often clashing with indigenous beliefs and practices. Missionaries typically converted Africans to Christianity by teaching them to read the Bible in European or newly translated local languages. While these efforts were often rooted in a colonial mindset that viewed African cultures as inferior or "pagan," they also facilitated the introduction of biblical texts to African populations.³⁰⁸

African Christians did not passively receive the Western forms of Christianity presented by missionaries. Instead, they engaged in contextualisation, adapting biblical interpretation in their

³⁰² Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped The Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 9.

³⁰³ Oden, *How Africa Shaped The Christian Mind*, 17-18.

³⁰⁴ Oden, *How Africa Shaped The Christian Mind*, 44, 55.

³⁰⁵ Robert Bartlett, *Africans in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (Meadville: Christian Faith Publishing, Inc., 2020), 12.

³⁰⁶ Eivind Heldaas Seland, "Early Christianity in East Africa and Red Sea/Indian Ocean Commerce," *Africa Archaeological Review*, 31 (2014):637-647.

³⁰⁷ Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová, "Christian Missions In Africa And Their Role In The Transformation Of African Societies," *ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES*, 16, 2 (2007): 249-260.

³⁰⁸ Victor Umaru, "Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics in Retrospect and Prospect: a Reflection on the Gradual Shift of World Christianity to Africa," In *Re-Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics in the Diasporised Contemporary World: Trends, Trajectories and Methodologies* (A Celebration of Olubiyi Adeniyi Adewale @ 60), Samuel Oluwatosin Okanlawon, ed. (Ota: Bbearers Publications, 2023), 177-199.

cultural and spiritual frameworks. This process involved integrating Christian teachings with African worldviews, systems and communal practices.³⁰⁹ Andrew M. Mbuvi further adds that:

The missionary could not police the African ideological-cultural perspective from which converts would read the Bible, especially in the vernacular translation. Their familiarity with the local religio-cultural “terrain” granted the colonised converts unexpected avenues of resistance. No colonial effort at suppressing the African religious reality could stop it from informing these early African readers of the Bible and shaping their interaction with the biblical text.³¹⁰

For example, many Africans interpret biblical stories and symbols through the lens of their cultural narratives and traditions. This approach allowed them to see parallels between their experiences and the biblical text, making the scriptures more relevant and accessible. African converts often used proverbs, folklore, and oral traditions to explain and elaborate on biblical teachings, creating an interpretation of their cultural heritage and being faithful to Christian doctrine.

The rise of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a significant development in the history of Christianity in Africa.³¹¹ These churches emerged as a response to the limitations and cultural insensitivity of missionary Christianity. AICs sought to create a form of authentically African Christianity, blending biblical teachings with indigenous religious practices and social structures by “taking the African situation seriously.”³¹² AICs emphasised direct spiritual experiences, communal worship, and charismatic leadership. They developed unique “prophetic hermeneutic” biblical interpretation methods that reflected their theological and cultural priorities.³¹³ According to Mbuvi, African Initiated Churches (AICs) leaders tapped into pre-Christian prophetic traditions and biblical prophets to serve the needs and interests of Africans. The colonial experience revealed the power of the “white man” and the divine power attributed to the Bible. AIC leaders believed utilising both traditions would yield a potent combination, as the Bible’s powerful God could be persuaded to serve Africans’ needs and interests.³¹⁴ For instance, many AICs strongly emphasised the Old Testament, finding powerful analogies to their struggles and aspirations in its stories of liberation, covenant, and divine intervention.

Establishing theological seminaries and universities in Africa has been crucial in developing indigenous biblical scholarship. African theologians have increasingly engaged in critical and contextualised readings of the Bible, contributing to a growing body of scholarship that reflects African perspectives and experiences. Prominent African theologians such as John S. Mbiti, Desmond Tutu, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Charles Nyamiti, John S. Pobee, and many others have shaped contemporary African theology. They have argued for the importance of reading the Bible in ways that affirm African cultural identities and address pressing social issues such as poverty, injustice, and gender inequality. A complex interplay of acceptance, adaptation, and resistance characterises the historical background of Christianity in Africa. While European missionaries played a significant role in the spread of Christianity, African Christians actively engaged with and transformed the biblical interpretations they encountered.

³⁰⁹ Andrew M. Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies* (New York: T&T CLARK, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2023), 79-80.

³¹⁰ Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies*, 80.

³¹¹ Obed Kealotswe, “The Nature and Character of the African Independence Churches (AICs) in the 21st Century: Their Theological and Social Agenda,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 40,2 (2014): 227-242.

³¹² J. S. Mbiti, “Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa,” *IRM* 59, no. 236 (1970): 430-40.

³¹³ José Antunes da Silva, “African Independent Churches: Origin and Development,” *Anth* 88, no. 4/6 (1993): 393-402.

³¹⁴ Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies*, 90.

Methodology

The paper employed descriptive research, a methodological approach that aims to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon or population without influencing it. It is particularly suitable for studying indigenous African methods of biblical interpretation, as it allows for objective observation of cultural and spiritual tones without external influence. According to Ayandokun, descriptive research "... is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, point of view or attitude that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing, its major purpose is to tell what is."³¹⁵ This method comprehensively describes indigenous African interpretative methods, documenting specific cultural and spiritual practices, contextual factors influencing interpretation, and variations across Africa.

Descriptive research helps understand the context within which biblical interpretations are made and the cultural and spiritual frameworks that shape the meaning and application of biblical texts in African settings. There are recorded detailed accounts of the approaches many African civilisations took to read the Bible, including the symbolic meanings, customs, and traditional knowledge that guide these interpretations. To explain how these variables affect how bible texts are interpreted, it is helpful to analyse the cultural and spiritual backgrounds. This involves looking at aspects of African worldviews that are central to language, oral traditions, mythology, and values. The similarities and contrasts between indigenous African biblical interpretation techniques will be found via comparative descriptions.

Using descriptive research offers several benefits, including providing in-depth insights into indigenous methods of interpretation, preserving authenticity on description rather than intervention, and serving as a foundation for further analytical or comparative studies. This agrees with Janvier's opinion that "the descriptive thesis writer describes a situation and then gives subsections for improvement of the problems."³¹⁶ Therefore, descriptive research becomes suitable for studying indigenous African methods of biblical interpretation and how African cultural and spiritual contexts shape biblical interpretation.

African Methods of Biblical Interpretation

African methods of biblical interpretation have evolved significantly from the continent's cultural diversity, socio-political contexts, and theological concerns. There are some current trends in African biblical interpretation in areas such as:

Contextual and Inculturation Hermeneutics

Contextual and inculturation hermeneutics are two approaches to interpreting the Bible in African contexts. Contextualisation involves interpreting the Bible in a way relevant to contemporary African life, considering African societies' unique socio-political, economic, and cultural realities. This approach addresses political instability, corruption, human rights violations, poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality by drawing parallels between biblical narratives and contemporary struggles.³¹⁷ Inculturation involves integrating African cultural elements into the interpretation of the Bible, ensuring that the gospel message agrees with Indigenous cultural practices, respects and values African traditions, and seeking to express the Christian faith meaningfully within the African cultural context.³¹⁸ African cultures are with symbols, rituals, and

³¹⁵Ester O. Ayandokun, *A Guide to Effective Study, Research and Documentation* (Lagos: Gloryline Christian Pub., 2012), 83.

³¹⁶George E. Janvier, *How to Write a Theological Research Thesis* (Plateau: African Christian Publisher, 2005), 7.

³¹⁷ Mbengu D. Nyiawung, "Contextualising biblical exegesis: What is the African biblical hermeneutic approach?" *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 69,1 (2013): 1-9.

³¹⁸ Justin S. Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics," *JTSA* 91 (1995), 3-14.

artistic expressions used in worship and biblical teachings. Inculturation seeks to find points of contact between these traditions and biblical teachings, such as the respect for the community-oriented nature of African societies. Contextual and inculturation hermeneutics make the Christian faith more relevant and more personal engagement with Scripture. They empower African Christians to interpret the Bible for themselves for a more authentic and vibrant expression of faith rooted in the lived experiences of African people.

Liberation Hermeneutics

Liberation hermeneutics is an interpretive approach that draws from the experiences of oppression and struggle, particularly evident in contexts like apartheid South Africa and post-colonial Africa. Therefore, according to Murvi, "...for the African Bible interpreter, there was a need to wrest the Bible from its colonial moorings and set it as a source of justice, liberation and freedom."³¹⁹ This method focuses on themes of justice, freedom, and social transformation, making the Bible a tool for addressing contemporary socio-political issues and advocating for societal change. Itumeleng Mosala asserts that "oppressed and exploited people must liberate the gospel so that the gospel may liberate them."³²⁰ Critical features of liberation hermeneutics include the experiences of oppression and struggle, such as the Bible's use to justify and resist the oppressive and the challenges faced by post-colonial African countries, such as economic exploitation, political corruption, and social injustice. Gerald West states, "Ordinary readers of the Bible have always hovered on the edges of academic Biblical Studies, but within biblical liberation hermeneutics, they have found a more central and integral place."³²¹ Justice, freedom, and social transformation are central to liberation hermeneutics; God's desire for all people to live in freedom and dignity is emphasised.

Liberation hermeneutics fights corruption, promotes human rights, alleviates poverty, and strengthens marginalised people's voices. It advocates for the full involvement of women, children, ethnic minorities, and other marginalised people in society and the church as God's preference for the poor and marginalised. Liberation hermeneutics aligns the Bible with current African conflicts through practical application and theological foundation for action and hope. It offers a biblical foundation for action and optimism.³²²

Feminist and Womanist Hermeneutics

Feminist and womanist hermeneutics are critical approaches in African biblical interpretation that focus on the experiences of African women on issues such as patriarchy, gender inequality, and the roles of women in biblical texts and the history of African Christianity. One of the significant voices in this aspect is Mercy. A. Oduyoye, and according to her, "...the real disease in human relationship is rooted in the perverse patriarchalization of life. The cure I propose is a good dose of woman-inspired wisdom."³²³ Her approaches aim to uncover and elevate women's often-overlooked contributions and perspectives, providing a more inclusive and equitable understanding of Scripture and Christian tradition. Feminist and womanist hermeneutics address contemporary issues, such as gender-based violence and promote justice and support for victims. They promote the education and empowerment of women, encouraging their full participation in

³¹⁹ Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies*, 86.

³²⁰ Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 172.

³²¹ Gerald West, "Locating 'Contextual Bible Study' within Biblical Liberation Hermeneutics and Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics," *HTS* 70, 1 (2014): 1.

³²² Gerald West, "Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa," in *The Bible And He Hermeneutics Of Liberation*, Alejandro F. Botta And Pablo R. Andiñach, eds. (Atlanta: Society Of Biblical Literature, 2009), 26-31.

³²³ Mercy A. Oduyoye, "Feminist Theology in an African Perspective," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 166-81, 177.

all aspects of church and societal life. They promote inclusive language in theology and liturgy, on both men's and women's equal dignity and value. They enrich biblical interpretation by bringing new insights and perspectives, leading to a comprehensive understanding of Scripture that benefits the faith community.

African feminist and womanist scholars offer a transformative approach to biblical interpretation, promoting the significant roles of women in both the Bible and African Christianity and contemporary gender issues with a transformative approach. These perspectives include women's roles in biblical narratives and their historical contributions to gender justice. These perspectives provide theological and practical responses to pressing issues against women.

Theological and educational training is implemented by integrating African feminist and womanist perspectives into theological education, conducting workshops and seminars, and encouraging inclusive biblical interpretation and women's voices in theology. Advocacy and social action are organised through gender justice campaigns on equal rights, education for girls, and protection against gender-based violence. Also, support programs for women impacted by prejudice and violence based on gender are being developed. These viewpoints are essential because they support gender equality by opposing patriarchal norms, empower women by recognising their values and contributions, and guarantee a comprehensive interpretation of the Bible. These viewpoints present the church as an active force for justice and social transformation by addressing social concerns. Because of this, African feminist and womanist viewpoints provide critical new perspectives on understanding the Bible and the crucial roles that women play in African Christianity and the Bible. Their methodology advances an equitable interpretation of Scripture, tackling modern gender concerns for women's empowerment.

Post-colonial Criticism

Post-colonial criticism is an approach that examines the impact of colonialism on African biblical interpretation, aiming to deconstruct colonial readings and reclaim indigenous African perspectives in biblical scholarship. Critical features of post-colonial criticism include examining the history of colonialism, the cultural impositions imposed by Western missionaries and authorities, deconstructing colonial readings, identifying biases, reclaiming indigenous African perspectives, and encouraging contextual readings. It "scrutinises and exposes colonial domination and power as embodied in biblical texts and interpretations, and as searching for alternative hermeneutics while thus overturning and dismantling colonial perspectives."³²⁴

Post-colonial criticism focuses on three main applications: reinterpreting biblical texts, criticising Western theological dominance, and promoting indigenous theologies. It involves re-reading stories and teachings to affirm African identities and experiences, focusing on liberation, justice, and empowerment for Africans. It also resists the dominance of Western theological interpretations and examines Western missionary work's legacy, identifying its contributions and its complicity in colonial oppression. Although Gerald West puts it another way, "post-colonial interpretation is not a technique, a 'method' to be applied to the biblical text. For those of us who inhabit a post-colony, post-colonial interpretation is a way of life before it is an interpretive tool. Post-colonial interpretation is a way of being (African)."³²⁵ Post-colonial criticism promotes indigenous theologies, including African spiritualities and religious traditions, and often employs community-based hermeneutics. This approach makes the Bible more relevant to African contexts

³²⁴ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible. Bible and Postcolonialism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 16.

³²⁵ Gerald West, "African Biblical Scholarship as Post-colonial, Tri-Polar, and a Site- of-Struggle," in *Present and Future of Biblical Studies: Celebrating 25 Years of Brill's Biblical Interpretation*, Tat-siong Benny Liew, ed. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 240–273.

by interpreting it through the lens of African experiences and cultural realities. This helps African Christians see their own stories reflected in the biblical narrative.

Post-colonial criticism empowers African Christians by promoting readings that advocate for justice, equality, and the liberation of oppressed peoples. It enriches global Christianity by contributing to the diversity of theological voices and perspectives, challenging the dominance of Western theology and the importance of multiple, contextual theologies. It serves as a historical corrective to historical injustices perpetuated by colonial interpretations, acknowledging and seeking to rectify the marginalisation of African perspectives in biblical scholarship. Therefore, post-colonial criticism is crucial in promoting a more inclusive and empowering understanding of the Bible for Africans.

Narrative and Orality Approaches

Narrative and orality approaches in African biblical interpretation focus on interpreting the Bible through methods that align with the oral traditions prevalent in many African cultures.³²⁶ These approaches appreciate the storytelling aspect of the Bible, making it more accessible and relatable to congregations that value oral communication. Critical features of narrative and orality approaches include alignment with African oral traditions, communal learning and collective memory.³²⁷ Oral storytelling in the Bible is based on stories naturally aligned with African storytelling techniques, such as the Creation, the Exodus, David and Goliath, and the Parables of Jesus. Storytelling aids in memory retention, and biblical teachings are passed down effectively, especially in cultures where literacy rates may be low. These approaches to biblical teachings are understood and appreciated by bridging the gap between written Scripture and oral culture. Applications of narrative and orality approaches include using oral techniques to convey biblical stories, incorporating African oral elements, community-based interpretations, and engaging respected elders and traditional storytellers.

Through storytelling, people remember and internalise the teachings as they go with oral traditions.³²⁸ Recognising and valuing indigenous storytelling methods empowers local cultures and affirms the validity of their traditions, cultural pride and continuity. The narrative and orality approaches play a crucial role in enhancing the relevance and accessibility of the Bible in African contexts. The utilisation of African oral traditions in biblical interpretation enhances the relevance and impact of Scripture by connecting it with the oral heritage of many African cultures. This approach uses storytelling and proverbs to communicate biblical truths familiarly and engagingly to African audiences. The approach includes narrative interpretation, oral performances, parallels with biblical wisdom, and contextual insights. The applications of African oral traditions include teaching and preaching sermons incorporating storytelling elements, comparative studies between African proverbs and biblical proverbs, and using African proverbs as illustrative examples in sermons and Bible studies.

African oral traditions in biblical interpretation enhance the relevance and impact of Scripture by connecting it with the oral heritage of many African cultures. In incorporating storytelling and proverbs, the Bible becomes a living document that speaks to all aspects of life, making it a valuable tool for spiritual growth and understanding. The communication of Scripture in African cultures is consistent with traditional learning and storytelling methods. Storytelling and proverbs make biblical narratives more vivid and relatable to an average African.

³²⁶ Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies*, 173.

³²⁷ D.F. Ruggles and H. Silverman, "From tangible to intangible heritage," In *Intangible Heritage Embodied*, D.F. Ruggles and H. Silverman, eds. (London: Springer, 2009), 1–14.

³²⁸ Cherry-Ann Smart, "African oral tradition, cultural retentions and the transmission of knowledge in the West Indies," *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*, Vol. 45,1 (2019): 16–25.

Interfaith Conversation

This method of biblical interpretation acknowledges the religious diversity in many African regions, including Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions. One of the promoters of this view is David T. Adamo. He states that:

It is essentially a post-colonial approach to what AIR and its essential characteristics is: God and humanity, sacrifices, afterlife and ancestors. The rapid growth of many African religions and the revival of AIR in post-colonial Africa have made inter-religious dialogue an urgent necessity. Unlike the colonial encounter with AIR, which was characterised by hostility and the condemnation of AIR, the post-colonial encounter should be characterised by mutual respect, understanding, tolerance, and some level of freedom, liberation and genuineness. In this way, suspicion will be reduced, because AIR is not about to be extinct despite the adherents' confession of Christianity.³²⁹

This approach promotes mutual understanding and respect between religious traditions on common values for “a peaceful co-existence amongst world community of various religious faith.”³³⁰ Critical features of interfaith conversation include creating shared spaces, promoting mutual understanding and respect, developing educational initiatives, common themes and values, and familiar narratives. Applications of interfaith conversation, as outlined by Gort, include the dialogue of histories, the dialogue of theologies, the dialogue of spiritualities, and the dialogue of life. These activities help prevent and resolve conflicts by promoting understanding and respect between religious faiths for peaceful co-existence.³³¹

Interfaith dialogue strengthens social cohesiveness by cooperating on shared societal challenges, offering fresh viewpoints and ideas, and promoting cultural identity by honouring and validating the cultural identities of all participating religious groups. Sensitivity to differences, striking a balance between dedication and openness, and resolving power disparities amongst religious groups are among the difficulties and factors to consider. According to Wijzen:

It is striking that many theological studies of intercultural and interreligious interaction speak in terms of exchange, a mutual learning process and ‘co-pilgrims in the world church’, but they pay little or no attention to power and domination. Intercultural religious communication alone cannot resolve the conflicts. Interreligious dialogue, then, cannot confine itself to the problem of pluralism but must always consider the problem of poverty as well.³³²

To effectively engage in interfaith dialogue, participants must approach dialogue with openness, humility, and a willingness to listen and learn. Balancing commitment to their faith with openness to the perspectives of others is crucial, as it involves finding common ground without compromising core beliefs. Addressing power imbalances between religious groups is also essential for genuine dialogue. Therefore, interfaith dialogue in African biblical interpretation is valuable for promoting peace, harmony, social cohesion, enriching theological understanding, and supporting cultural identity.

Ecological Hermeneutics

Ecological hermeneutics is an interpretive approach that examines the Bible from the perspective of creation care and sustainability, addressing growing environmental concerns. It aligns biblical teachings with traditional African views on the sacredness of nature and the importance of living

³²⁹ David T. Adamo, “Christianity and the African traditional religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, 1 (2009): 1.

³³⁰ D.T. Adamo, “Salvation According to Christianity and Buddhism,” *The Journal of Religious Studies*, 17, 2 (1989): 82–88.

³³¹ J.D. Gort, “The Search for Interreligious Convivance, ongoing challenge and charge,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29, 3 (2008): 758–760.

³³² F. Wijzen, *Seeds of Conflict in a haven of peace: From religious studies to interreligious studies in Africa*, Editions (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 188.

in harmony with the environment.³³³ It emphasises creation care and environmental justice, drawing on biblical texts to promote respect, care, and protection of the environment. It is applied in various ways, such as reinterpreting biblical texts promoting environmental stewardship through encouraging sustainable ecological practices.

Ecological contextualisation is crucial for Africa in creation care and environmental justice. This involves incorporating ecological themes into theological education and church teaching, preaching sermons on creation care. This approach addresses urgent environmental challenges Africa faces, such as deforestation, desertification, and climate change impacts. By linking faith with ecological action, this approach inspires taking practical steps towards environmental stewardship, collective responsibility and empowering positive changes.

Youth and Digital Hermeneutics

The digital community is a growing trend in Africa, and people use digital technology and social media to engage with one another. According to June, “If masons, architects and artists were needed to build physical spaces for worship in the past, we need coders and futurists to build this unprecedented style of church in the metaverse.”³³⁴ If one is going to argue or disagree with this reality, COVID-19 will serve as an example of this fact in the digital community. Young people, or digital communities, have been instrumental in helping the church make the shift from offline to online ministry in the wake of COVID-19. In encouraging an intergenerational perspective and enabling members to capitalise on the capabilities of various generations, this development enhances the church’s holistic ministry as a “body.”³³⁵

Online communities are also created through social media groups like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (Twitter), where young Christians share insights, discuss Scripture, and support one another in their faith journeys. Virtual fellowships are also provided, especially for those without access to physical church gatherings. Digital content is produced through video sermons, podcasts, and audio Bible readings tailored to contemporary African contexts, making the Bible more relatable and accessible. Young African Christians use blogs and vlogs to share personal reflections on Scripture, discuss theological issues, and address social and cultural concerns from a biblical perspective. The applications of youth and digital hermeneutics include innovative Bible study methods, building online faith communities, and gamification techniques. Digital platforms make biblical interpretation accessible to a broader audience, including those geographically isolated or unable to attend physical church services. Cultural relevance is achieved by producing content that speaks directly to contemporary African realities and concerns, helping young people see the Bible as a living document that addresses their daily lives and struggles.³³⁶

Youth are empowered to take active roles in their faith through content creation and online leadership for a sense of ownership and responsibility for their spiritual growth. By leveraging modern communication tools, digital hermeneutics that biblical interpretation keeps pace with technological advancements and the communication preferences of the younger generation.³³⁷

Engaging younger generations in biblical interpretation requires embracing modern technology and digital platforms to reach tech-savvy youth. This approach includes using social

³³³ Kivatsi J. Kavusa, “Towards a hermeneutics of sustainability in Africa: Engaging indigenous knowledge in dialogue with Christianity,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42, 1 (2021): 1-10.

³³⁴ G. Jun, “Virtual reality church as a new mission frontier in the metaverse: Exploring theological controversies and missional potential of virtual reality church,” *Transformation*, 37, 4 (2020): 297-303.

³³⁵ A. Cloete, *Ecclesiology for a digital church: Theological reflections on a new normal* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 29.

³³⁶ H.A. Campbell, “Introduction: Studying digital ecclesiology: How churches are being informed by digital media and cultures,” *Ecclesial Practices* 7, 1 (2020):1-10.

³³⁷ K.M. Ndereba, “Digital ecclesiology and Africa’s digital natives: prospects and challenges,” *Acta Theologica*, 43, 2 (2023):98-111.

media platforms to share bite-sized biblical teachings, inspiring quotes, and discussions. Online communities are created to promote a sense of belonging and connection among youth. Biblical perspectives are integrated into digital content formats that agree with youth, such as podcasts, YouTube videos, blog posts, and infographics.

Daily devotionals, in-person Q&A sessions, online Bible studies and resources, digital campaigns, workshops, and events are all examples of social media outreach. Through these events, young people investigate faith and spirituality on their terms and at their speed. Biblical lessons are more accessible for young people and more convenient when digitally engaged. The modern-day problems of youth and internet involvement show how Scripture is still relevant to the urgent issues and difficulties that young people confront today. Digital platforms meet young people where they are, making biblical teachings easier and more approachable. Online communities and digital platforms help young believers connect and develop communities, giving them a feeling of belonging and support in their spiritual journey.³³⁸

Contextualisation Within African Cultural and Spiritual Frameworks

Contextualising Scripture within African cultural and spiritual frameworks involves interpreting the Bible within African worldviews, traditions, and experiences. This process shows that the biblical message is relevant and meaningful to Africans. According to Bishop Emmanuel Morris, “Contextualisation of the Gospel to the African people is always in conflict with the African cultures and traditions. They see Christianity as a white man’s religion, hence the need for proper contextualisation of the gospel message that will pass through their culture for understanding and acceptability.”³³⁹ John Arierhi Ottuh is optimistic that “Contextualisation of biblical interpretation in Africa will help in the evangelisation of Africa in the sense that the message will be preached in the understanding of the people.”³⁴⁰ There are some critical aspects of this approach, which include but are not limited to the following:

First, African worldviews should be integrated into biblical interpretation by contextualising Scripture aligning with African cultures’ values and perspectives. This approach is that biblical teachings are relevant and meaningful within the African context, enhancing their impact on individuals and their faith.³⁴¹ This worldview has to be applied to biblical interpretation of the communal aspects of Scripture to promote social harmony and intense bonds. It should consist of a holistic interpretation which involves understanding how spiritual teachings apply to every aspect of life, including health, relationships, and social justice. It should be considered relevant to spiritual growth, well-being, and social ethics.

Applications of integrating African worldviews include community-oriented biblical interpretation, which involves organising Bible study groups that emphasise communal reading and interpretation of Scripture. This goes with cultural narratives and proverbs that align with biblical teachings to help bridge the gap between Scripture and everyday life with holistic approaches to theology, sermons, initiatives, and conflict resolution. A holistic interpretation of Scripture must reflect the interconnected nature of African spirituality, where life’s spiritual, physical, and social dimensions are inseparable. Therefore, contextualising Scripture in line with African worldviews empowers Africans to confront their unique challenges using biblical principles, promoting self-reliance and resilience by grounding social and developmental

³³⁸ H.A. Campbell, ed., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice In New Media Worlds* (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2013), 149.

³³⁹ Bishop Emmanuel Morris, “Contextualization Theology for Evangelism and Mission of Propagating the Gospel of Christ in African Context,” *International Journal of Political Science (IJPS)* Volume 5, Issue 2, (2019): 30-41.

³⁴⁰ John Arierhi Ottuh, “Contextualization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa,” *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014): 28-44.

³⁴¹ Mbiti, “Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa,” 435–40.

initiatives in faith-based teachings. As Morris rightly suggests, “Contextualization does not suggest that people’s opinions should form part of Christian doctrines but that the existing sound doctrines of Christianity based on scriptures should shape people’s cultures and worldview.”³⁴²

Second, incorporating African cultural symbols and practices into biblical interpretation will blend Africa’s cultural heritage with scriptural teachings, making the Bible more relatable and meaningful. This approach includes drawing parallels between African symbols and biblical imagery, for example, comparing the nurturing role of the Baobab tree to the parable of the mustard seed in the Bible to provide an understanding. Traditional rituals and festivals, such as the Yam Festival, explain biblical concepts of thanksgiving, stewardship, and God’s provision. These festivals serve as a platform to teach about the biblical festivals of the Old Testament and their significance. Symbolic teaching and preaching use African symbols as visual aids during sermons to help congregants connect with and remember biblical teachings. Stephen B. Bevan suggests that such efforts should involve reinterpreting a given phenomenon, whether the Bible, church structure, ritual, or symbol, in a new context where the meaning and impact of the response are equivalent to those felt by the first Christian community.³⁴³

Integrated worship practices should be blended with Christian worship practices, such as incorporating traditional drumming and dancing in church services to celebrate biblical themes of joy and praise. Festival celebrations are to be organised to teach and celebrate biblical truths, such as harvest festivals. This approach enhances cultural relevance and understanding and creates a spiritual experience for a stronger sense of identity among believers. Integrating Christianity into African life and culture affirms the value and dignity of African traditions within the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the caution of Morris should never be relegated,

Every contextualisation approach should take an evangelical form of presenting the gospel to the people under sound biblical principles, that can meet the will and purpose of God for the people. The essence of contextualisation is to address the spiritual, moral, economic, political and social needs of the people with the gospel. Contextualisers should focus on the values and virtues of the gospel for transformation of cultures and worldviews in the right direction that will bring glory to God and development to the people in a wholistic manner.³⁴⁴

Third, addressing contemporary African issues in biblical interpretation is crucial for making the Bible relevant and impactful. This approach should focus on justice, liberation, and well-being, reflecting many African communities’ urgent needs and challenges. Liberation theology and well-being are critical features of this approach. Liberation theology focuses on justice, freedom, and social transformation, particularly in contexts marked by oppression, poverty, and inequality. Health and well-being, on the other hand, involves applying biblical teachings to modern health crises like STDs and others. These initiatives help address both physical and emotional needs within societies. The significance of addressing contemporary African issues is its relevance to daily life, empowerment, transformation, and holistic ministry. By engaging with socio-political and economic realities, the Bible speaks directly to African believers’ struggles, challenges, and aspirations for a transformative impact on society.

In contextualising Scripture within African cultural and spiritual frameworks, interpreters should ensure that the biblical message is understood, relevant, and transformative for African souls. According to David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, “Ancient or modern testifies that

³⁴² Morris, “Contextualization Theology for Evangelism and Mission of Propagating the Gospel of Christ in African Context,” 30.

³⁴³ Stephen B. Bevans, *Model of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 2002), 62 kindle edition.

³⁴⁴ Morris, “Contextualization Theology for Evangelism and Mission of Propagating the Gospel of Christ in African Context,” 40.

some sort of contextualisation is necessary if we are effectively to go cross-cultural barriers with the gospel to attempt the kind of contextualisation that pleases God, conforms to his word, communicates to the world, and commends itself to the body of Christ.”³⁴⁵ This approach promotes a connection between faith and everyday life, making Christianity a lived experience fully integrated with African identity and values.

The Intersection of Culture, Spirituality, and Biblical Interpretation

The interpretation of the Bible within African contexts is intertwined with culture and spirituality. This intersection shapes how Africans engage with Scripture, imbuing the interpretation process with cultural and spiritual depth. Understanding this relationship is essential for appreciating the distinctiveness of indigenous African methods of biblical interpretation.

Culture influences how individuals understand and interpret the Bible. In African contexts, cultural norms, traditions, and practices serve as lenses through which the scriptures are interpreted. For example, African proverbs, myths, and rituals often elucidate biblical teachings and cultural parallels. Similarly, societal values such as communalism, hospitality, and solidarity inform interpretations of biblical themes such as justice and stewardship. In grounding biblical interpretation in a cultural context, Africans believe that the scriptures remain relevant and meaningful within their lived experiences.

Spirituality infuses the process of biblical interpretation with reverence, discernment, and insight. Engaging with the Bible is not merely an intellectual exercise but a spiritual encounter with the divine for African believers. Prayer, meditation, and worship are integral to the interpretive process, allowing individuals to discern God’s guidance and wisdom in Scripture. Moreover, spiritual experiences, such as visions, dreams, and prophetic revelations, significantly shape interpretations and understanding of biblical texts—these spiritual dimensions of Scripture’s significance for connection and intimacy with God.

The intersection of culture and spirituality in biblical interpretation raises questions about syncretism and contextualisation. Syncretism refers to the blending of religious beliefs and practices from different traditions, while contextualisation involves adapting the message of the Bible to fit specific cultural contexts. The challenge lies in preserving cultural authenticity and upholding biblical integrity in Africa. While some caution against syncretism, others advocate for contextualisation to make the gospel more accessible and relevant to African audiences. Morris argues that the “Contextualisation concept is necessary to overcome barriers of cultural differences in propagating the gospel. Contextualisation, when properly done, can stop the practice of syncretism, since the gospel message will replace the worldviews in religion and culture generally.”³⁴⁶ Finding a balance between cultural sensitivity and theological fidelity is essential for ensuring that biblical interpretation remains faithful to the message of Scripture and the cultural heritage of African souls.

At its core, Africa’s intersection of culture, spirituality, and biblical interpretation is a liberating and empowering endeavour. Indigenous African methods of interpretation seek to affirm and celebrate African peoples’ dignity, agency, and resilience. By centring cultural and spiritual perspectives, biblical interpretation becomes a tool for social transformation, justice, and liberation. Africans find in Scripture a message of hope, liberation, and empowerment that agrees sincerely with their lived realities. Through interpretation, they reclaim their identity, challenge

³⁴⁵David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization Meanings, Method And Models* (California: William Carey Library Pasadena, 2000), 37-38.

³⁴⁶ Morris, “Contextualization Theology for Evangelism and Mission of Propagating the Gospel of Christ in African Context,” 30.

systems of oppression, and envision a future guided by God's vision of shalom— wholeness, justice, and peace.

Theological Implications

First, the relationship between Scripture and culture in African biblical hermeneutics is a central concern, as is the dynamic interplay between the Word of God and the lived realities of Africans. Charles H. Kraft, in his model “The God-above-but-through-Culture Position,” states that “...the Christian God should not be perceived either as against, merely in, or simply above culture. It sees God as outside culture but working in terms of or through culture to accomplish his purposes.”³⁴⁷ African theologians struggle with the question of how Scripture intersects with the diverse cultural contexts of Africa, seeking to articulate a theological framework that honours both the authority of Scripture and the cultural identity of African peoples. Theological implications of the relationship between Scripture and culture in African theology include inculturation, which emphasises the process of embodied Scripture within the cultural context of African societies, acknowledging the importance of cultural diversity within the body of Christ. Bujo and Muya say, “The main aim of inculturation is double, evangelising the culture on one hand and inculturation of the gospel on the other.”³⁴⁸ Cultural hermeneutics, which prioritises the cultural lenses through which Scripture is interpreted, recognises that cultural factors shape the interpretation of Scripture. However, as Morris states, “The Scripture is meant to shape tradition and not allow the tradition to exist contrary to biblical principles. In evangelical view of contextualisation, the Scripture is not to dialogue with traditions, but to influence it.”³⁴⁹

African Scriptural interpretations challenge repressive customs and conventions while upholding principles that advance fairness, peace, and human dignity. Indigenous hermeneutics strongly focuses on cultural authenticity, acknowledging that Christianity in Africa is a unique and dynamic manifestation of the gospel anchored in African cultural circumstances rather than a copy of Western Christianity. Africans support the validity of indigenous African interpretation techniques by embracing cultural authenticity. They do this by using their worldviews, languages, and cultural traditions to read Scripture in ways that make sense to their societies.

Second, indigenous interpretation shapes theological discourse in African contexts, contributing unique perspectives and insights that enrich the global Christian tradition. The theological implications of indigenous interpretation form the transformative impact on theological discourse and promote cultural authenticity, inclusivity, and liberation within the church.

These critical Indigenous interpretations affirm diversity for interfaith conversation and ecumenical engagement, challenging oppressive structures of thought and practice and empowering Africans to participate in theological discourse actively. Morris asserts that “It is true that the gospel should not be seen as an enemy to paganism, but as a means to shape paganism from darkness to light and from the power to Satan to the power of God. Therefore, the Christian culture should be an instrument to lighten the non-Christian culture.”³⁵⁰ This helps theology stay relevant and meaningful to African Christians' lived experiences by incorporating worldviews, languages, and cultural traditions into theological discourse through indigenous interpretation

³⁴⁷Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*(New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 2005), 88.

³⁴⁸Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya, *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers Paulines*(Publications Africa 2006), 28.

³⁴⁹ Morris, “Contextualization Theology for Evangelism and Mission of Propagating the Gospel of Christ in African Context,” 35.

³⁵⁰ Morris, “Contextualization Theology for Evangelism and Mission of Propagating the Gospel of Christ in African Context,” 33.

techniques. African Christians are empowered to interact with theology in ways consistent with their cultural identity and history because of this emphasis on cultural authenticity, providing a feeling of agency and ownership.

Indigenous interpretation also promotes diversity and inclusion, recognising the plurality of voices and perspectives within global Christianity. By valuing indigenous methods of interpretation, theologians create space for marginalised voices, including women, youth, and ethnic minorities, to contribute to theological dialogue and reflection. This diversity enables theological discourse with diverse insights and experiences for a more holistic and inclusive understanding of the Christian faith. According to Ottuh:

The duty of African scholars, is not to Africanize the Bible because it cannot be rewriting but can draw illustrations from African rich heritage. In this light, drawing illustrations from African experiences and heritages will help to explain or convey the bible message in such a way that can make the African Christians to easily understand the text of the Bible. The continuous usage of African heritage from generation to generation by biblical scholars and church leaders will further immortalise Africa's cultural heritage and make Christianity more familiar to Africans from generation to generation.³⁵¹

Therefore, indigenous interpretation has theological implications and a transformative impact on theological dialogue and reflection.

Third, indigenous interpretation offers a valuable framework for addressing contemporary African theological and social issues. It offers a framework for theological contemplation and activity based on Africans' experiences and cultural realities. Indigenous interpretations include theological ramifications prioritising human rights and social justice, healing and reconciliation, sustainability and environmental stewardship, gender equality and women's empowerment, and cultural revitalisation. Indigenous interpretation promotes the freedom, dignity, and empowerment of the marginalised while opposing repressive systems of injustice and inequity. Theologians challenge structural inequalities, including poverty, racism, misogyny, and colonialism, by utilising indigenous techniques of interpretation. They do this by providing theological insights and views that support social transformation and emancipation. This focus encourages Christians to struggle for a more just and equitable society by defending the rights and dignity of every individual.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the methods of biblical interpretation in the African context, focusing mainly on indigenous African approaches. It has examined the historical background of Christianity in Africa and the emergence of indigenous African methods of interpretation. The paper identified vital features and contributions of indigenous African interpretation by analysing oral traditions and storytelling, ritual practices, symbolic reading, metaphorical interpretation, communal reading, and other Indigenous methods. The methods of biblical interpretation in the African context are diverse, dynamic, and culturally significant. Indigenous African approaches offer unique insights and perspectives that enrich theological discourse and promote social transformation. In reclaiming Africans' cultural agency and autonomy in the interpretation of Scripture, Indigenous interpretation empowers believers to engage with theology in ways that honour their cultural identity and heritage without compromising their faith. As African researchers continue to explore and celebrate the richness of indigenous African interpretation, they are inspired to cultivate an inclusive, liberating theology for all.

³⁵¹ Ottuh, "Contextualization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa," 37-38.

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Contrastive Analysis of the Lexical Item *ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα* (*Akathartos Pneuma*) in the Lukan Narratives and Implications for Bible Translation in African Languages

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Abstract

Despite some differences in concepts and processes, the major focus in translating the Bible into African languages is the accurate rendition of the message from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). However, some linguistically accurate terms in TL raise questions concerning interpretations within the speech community that the translated Bible is intended for. This paper argues for a relevant translation in African languages which takes into account the triadic role of the translator as a linguist, an interpreter of God's Word, and God's hermeneute within the target community. The paper employs the tools of Contrastive Analysis to investigate the semantic range of the term *ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα* (*akathartos pneuma*) in SL and in French, which is the second language (L2) of many translators in West Africa, and dives into an analysis of the term in Yémba taken as case study for TL. The findings reveal that the accurate rendition of *akathartos pneuma* in L2 is '*mauvais esprit*' ('bad spirit') or '*esprit impur*' ('unclean spirit'), whereas there is an extension of meaning in TL to include religious and cultic connotations contrary to the biblical worldview. The Yémba translators maintained '*esi*' ('spirit') to fill the translation gaps and engage this complex worldview. These findings behoove Bible translators in Africa to take into account the interpretation of the biblical texts in the context of the target community, to arrive at a rendition that will match the intended meaning of the biblical writers. This research brings renewed emphasis on the interplay between African hermeneutics, Linguistics and Bible translation in Africa.

Keywords: Bible Translation, Hermeneutics, Mother Tongue, Worldview

Introduction

Bible translation began in the third century BCE when Greek, which was the lingua franca of the time, became the Mother Tongue (MT) of many Jews of the diaspora. Dick France contends that at first, there were various translations; and that the first standardized version, the Septuagint was produced in the second century BC.³⁵² In the second century AD, the Septuagint will serve as source text (ST) for the Latin Bible, *Vetus Latina* which already comprised the New Testament.³⁵³ The early translations of the complete Bible in African languages were done between the second and fourth centuries AD. The Egyptian or Coptic Bible was translated in the second century; and in Ethiopia, the Bible was translated into Amharic in the fourth century.³⁵⁴ Thanks to these translations, Christianity became the indigenous religion of many Africans.³⁵⁵ Even today, there

³⁵² Dick France, "The Bible in English: An Overview," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, eds., Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 177.

³⁵³ Henri Van Hoof, "Traduction Biblique et Genèse Linguistique," *Babel* Vol. 36, No. 1 (1990): 38, 38-43.

³⁵⁴ Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, "History and Theory of Scripture Translations," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19 (2008):172,169-184.

³⁵⁵ Bengt Sunkler and Christopher Seed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,2000), 10-13.

are on-going studies on the Ethiopian Tewahedo Bible and in the Coptic Bible: either with regard to the discussions on canonization or in the area of Bible translation theories.³⁵⁶

In modern missions, Bible translation was adopted as a means of evangelization of Africans. Joseph Merrick, the first missionary who came to Cameroon from Jamaica translated portions of Scriptures into Isubu language: a language spoken in the South-West Region of the country.³⁵⁷ E.A. Hermanson reports that Bible societies began Bible translation into South African languages in the early twentieth century.³⁵⁸ Missionaries have often been accused of *glottophagy* that is, the act of assimilating other languages in the process of standardization. Some critics have mentioned what Oumar Lingani calls *génocide culturel* or ‘cultural genocide’, alluding to the alienation of people’s cultural values by suppressing their languages.³⁵⁹ It is however important to note that Bible translation has been instrumental in contextualization and in the development of Christian theology in Africa. Just like Lamin Sanneh puts it, “Christianity is encountered only and always in a translated, and, therefore, in a comprehensible form, with interpretation its handmaid.”³⁶⁰ Many African scholars admit that Bible translation has made possible the appropriation of the Gospel message by Africans.³⁶¹

Despite these commendable exploits, translating the Scriptures in Africa is a complex task which requires constant improvement on methodologies. The problem addressed in this study is that of linguistically accurate renditions in the TL, which pose real challenges as concerns their interpretations by the people that the translated Scriptures are intended for. This analysis uses the method of contrastive analysis to investigate the semantic range of the term *ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα* (*akathartos pneuma*) in the SL and in French; which is the second language (L2) of many translators in West Africa, and dives into analysis of the term in the TL; which is Yémba, to discuss implications for Bible translation in African language. The main thesis of the study is that relevant translation in African language takes into account the three-fold role of the translator as a linguist, an interpreter of God’s Word, and God’s hermeneute within the receptor culture.

Context of Study

The Yémba people belong to the Sub-Saharan affinity sub-group, Bantu people cluster, and Bamileke group of the Cameroon grassfields. Their primary Church affiliation is Non-Evangelical Protestantism followed by Roman Catholicism. They are concentrated in the Ménoua Division, but the ethnic group expands to the South-West Region of Cameroon, where there are five Yémba chiefdoms: Leteh, Mmock Ngi, Mmock Mbi, Naw-Ngong, and Fotoh. The word ‘Yémba’ is both an ethnonym and a glossonym. The people identify as members of the Yémba ethnic group, whose language is Yémba.

³⁵⁶ See for example: Bruk Asale, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church Canon of the Scriptures: neither Open nor Closed," *The Bible Translator* Vol. 7, No. 2 (2016): 202-222, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677016651486>; Nebeyou Alemu Terefe, "The Millenium Amharic Bible Translation and Its Incipient Sign System," MA thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2022; and Torallas Tovar and Anne Boughors, "Sahidic Coptic Versions of the Gospel of Mark," *Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures* (Annual Report 2022-2023): 67-70, <https://www.isac.uchicago.edu>

³⁵⁷ Peter Nyumloh, *The Ministries of the Cameroon Baptist Convention* (Bamenda: Nahndzeh Quality Press, 2001), 1-2.

³⁵⁸ E.A. Hermanson, "A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa," *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 2(2002):7-8,6-18.

³⁵⁹ Oumar Lingani, "Analyse Contrastive Des Systèmes Numéraux Bisa Et Français," DEA dissertation, Department of Linguistics, University of Ouagadougou (Ouagadougou, 2010), 15.

³⁶⁰ Lamin Sanneh, "Bible Translation and Human Dignity," *Anvil* Vol. 27, No. 3 (2010): 25 (pp. 23-35). https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

³⁶¹ Uchema Oyali, "Bible Translation and Language Elaboration: The Igbo Experience," PhD thesis, Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (Bayreuth, 2018), 56-57.

Yémba belongs to the Niger-Kordofanian language family; Bantu branch of the Bantoid sub-family, from the Congo-Benue family.³⁶² It is the sub-group of Central-Bamileke spoken in the Eastern Grassfields of Cameroon. It is the Mother Tongue of most natives of the Ménoua Division.³⁶³ Nancy Haynes and Harro Gretchen are the pioneer missionaries, sent by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), in the 1980s to begin the translation of the Yémba New Testament. For over twenty years, they were assisted in the translation work by indigenes including Gnintedem Jean-Claude, Tsomejio Albert Auguste, and Anandong Micheline; and a translation team called the Comité Inter-Eglises pour la Traduction de la Bible en Langue Yémba - Inter-Church Committee for Bible Translation in Yémba Language, which comprised volunteers from Protestant, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic Churches. The Yémba New Testament was completed in 2017 by the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL).

Literature Review

One major preoccupation among philosophers, linguists, translators, anthropologists and theologians across history has been criteria for translating from one language to another. In the late twentieth century, Paul Ricoeur shared his dilemma in what he called *la sempiternelle question* – the age old question – of whether people should translate meaning or words. He admitted that it was difficult to give a clear cut answer, because of the complex relationships between thought and language, and between the spirit – the writer’s original intent – and the letter – the written text.³⁶⁴ Four dominant approaches are at the center of current debates in translation studies: Contrastive Analysis, Dynamic-Equivalence, Relevance Theory, and African philosophies of Bible translation.

The Contrastive Analysis approach

Contrastive Analysis (CA) started between the 1940s and 1950s as an independent discipline in applied linguistics called Contrastive Linguistics or Comparative Linguistics, to handle challenges related to second language learning.³⁶⁵ Today, CA is a preferred method in second language education and translation studies. Lassaad Kalai used it to study the causes of difficulties faced by Tunisian Arabic-speaking students in learning French as second language.³⁶⁶

In the same vein, Ali Khansir did a contrastive description of the learners’ first language and second language, to trace the causes of errors in the second language, and suggest better strategies for language learning.³⁶⁷ In African languages, Ahmed Sosal did a contrastive analysis of Ffulde, the lingua franca of many Sudanese, and English, which is an official language of Sudan alongside Arabic.³⁶⁸ This method has also been applied to the standardization of African languages. This is the process whereby a particular variant of the same language (dialect) is

³⁶² Michel Dieu and Patrick Renaud, *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM)*. (Yaoundé : DGRST/Institut des Sciences Humaines, 1983).

³⁶³ Jean Romain Kouesso relates that “Yémba is a Cameroonian language which in 1992 had about 300,000 native speakers principally in Ménoua Division (West Region) and certain localities of Lebialem Division in the South West Region.” Jean Romain Kouesso, “The Yémba Language (Cameroun): 90 Years of Tone Orthography,” *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions* Vol. 4, No. 3 (August 2016), 1.

³⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “Le Paradigme de la Traduction,” *Esprit – Revue Internationale* (1999): 18, 8-19.

³⁶⁵ Alicia Yllera, “Linguistique Contrastive, Linguistique Comparée ou Linguistique Tout Court?” *Presencia y Renovación de la Lingüística Francesa* (2001): 437, 435-446.

³⁶⁶ Lassaad Kalai, “La Démarche Contrastive: Une Opportunité pour Prévoir et Expliquer les Réalisations Linguistiques Défectueuses des Apprenants Tunisiens,” *Contextes Didactiques, Linguistiques et Culturels* Vol. 1, no. 2 (September 2023): 284, 282-297.

³⁶⁷ Ali Akbar Khansir. “Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Second Language Learning.” *Journal of ELT Research* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2019): 40, 35-43.

³⁶⁸ Ahmed Sosal. “Contrastive Analysis: Ffulde and English.” University of Khartoum, Faculty of Arts, Department of Linguistics. Khartoum, 2012. <https://www.academia.edu>. 29 May, 2024.

selected for the sake of uniformity in literacy. One example is Barry John Funnell's contrastive analysis of the standard varieties of Sena, a language spoken in Malawi and Mozambique.³⁶⁹

In translation studies, CA usually uses an interdisciplinary approach by drawing concepts from Linguistics, cognitive sciences and Anthropology to suggest ideas for improving translation. In this light, Ángeles Gómez-Castejón argues for the importance of engaging cognitive aspect of language to establish equivalence relations between SL and TL.³⁷⁰ Fanny Prevost Garcia uses the same approach with specific reference to two past tenses which are used in everyday conversations in French: the *passé composé* and *imparfait*.³⁷¹ On her part, Lucie Gournay pays attention to problems faced by translators when it comes to translating the direct speech containing dialogic structures like "Always runnin, I said", from English into French. As a solution, she suggests a comparison of the narrative styles and the grammatical and syntactic analysis of the lexical item in SL and TL.³⁷² It is apparent that CA pays attention to words and their meaning, grammatical and sentence structures and the thought in different languages.

Dynamic-Equivalence and Relevance Theory

The Theory of Dynamic-Equivalence (DE) and the Relevance Theory (RT) have occupied ample space in scholarly discussions for several decades. Eugene Nida is credited for propounding this theory in Bible translation, in his book *Toward a Science of Translating*. Nida seeks to address translation problems resulting from formal equivalence, which capitalizes on the form and content of the message as an end in itself.³⁷³ Nida suggests an approach that "aims at complete naturalness of expression and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture..."³⁷⁴ Nida's theory of DE underlines the importance engaging the patterns of both SL and TL in translating the message, for the sake of clarity, accuracy and naturalness. It seeks to render the message with the same expressive factor of the source language that is, to create in the receptors of TL the same feelings like in SL.³⁷⁵

There is a relationship between DE and CA, especially as regards the cognitive aspect of translation. In fact, Nida acknowledges that beyond the rendition of a message from SL to TL, translating also involves transmitting information from an author to the target readership. Talking about DE, Donald A. Carson rejoices that missionaries have become sensitive to specificities of the receptors' languages.³⁷⁶ He however suggests a careful use of the theory, as some missiologists may be tempted to take it to simply be another term for contextualization.³⁷⁷ Kenneth Barker remarks that, "Dynamic equivalence as a translation principle is used in varying degrees by all

³⁶⁹ Barry John Funnell. "A Contrastive Analysis of Two Standardised Varieties of Sena, University of South Africa, Pretoria (2004). <http://www.hdl.handle.net/10500/1830>.

³⁷⁰ Ángeles Gómez-Castejón, "Contrastive Analysis and Translation Study from a Corpus Linguistics Perspective," *International Journal of English Studies* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2012): 114, 11-132, <http://revistas.um.es/ijes>

³⁷¹ Fanny Prevost Garcia, "Analyse Contrastive de Deux Manuels de Français Langue Étrangère Autour de la Distinction du Passé Composé et de L'Imparfait pour un Public D'Adultes Captifs." Faculty of Translation and Interpretation, University of Barcelona. Barcelona: June 2015.

³⁷² Lucie Gournay. "Traduction des Énoncés Incisés du Discours Direct: L'Apport de la Linguistique Contrastive." Issue *Linguistique Contrastive et Traductologie Anglais/Français: Quels Enjeux?* In *Études de Linguistique Appliquée - Revue de Didactologie des Langues-Cultures et de Lexicologie* (October – December 2013): 397-413.

³⁷³ Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 159.

³⁷⁴ Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, 160.

³⁷⁵ Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), 25.

³⁷⁶ Donald A. Carson. "The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* vol. 3 (1985): 201, 200-213.

³⁷⁷ Donald A. Carson. "The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation," 202-203.

versions of the Bible,³⁷⁸ and cites a few examples in the NIV, NASB and KJV and NKJV. Another framework in Bible translation, contemporary to DA is the Relevance Theory (RT).

There is unanimity among scholars that Erns-August Gutt is the first proponent of RT in Bible translation. Two terms are keys to Gutt's RT: explicature and implicature. Explicature is a concept derived from Pragmatics, which refers to the logical inference of meaning based on the words used in an utterance and their arrangement in the sentence.³⁷⁹ Gutt explains that explicatures are derived from the form of the text and the range of ideas conveyed by lexical choices concerning indicators like pronouns, time indicators, indicators of place, and other indicators that are intended to resolve ambiguity.³⁸⁰

Implicature is another borrowing from Pragmatics, which deals with the process of communication between a speaker and a listener. For communication to be relevant, the listener must assume that the speaker intends to actually communicate something, beyond the words which are put into sentences to form utterances. This conversation between Dooby and Mary taken from George Yule's book, *Pragmatics* offers an eloquent illustration:

- a. Dooby: Did you invite Bella and Cathy?
- b. Mary: I invited Bella..³⁸¹

For the above conversation to be relevant, Mary must assume that Dooby means that, 'Bella and Cathy are normally worth inviting', such that there no need for any further explanation. Gutt notes that unlike explicatures, implicatures are derived through deliberate efforts to process the text in context.³⁸² The short conversation mentioned above can be represented like in the diagram 1 below:

Diagram 1: A representation of Dooby's and Mary's conversation:

Utterances	Explicatures	Implicatures
1. 'Did you invite Bella and Cathy?'	2. 'Did'+ 'invite' = past action 3. 'You' = Mary (subject of the action) 4. 'Bella' = object of the action 5. 'Cathy' = object of the action 6. 'and' = Bella and Cathy are both objects of the same action	1. 'Dooby means that Bella and Cathy are people who should normally be invited'.

³⁷⁸ Kenneth. L. Barker, "Bible Translation Philosophies with Specific Reference to the New International Version," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, eds., Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss and Steven M. Voth. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 55.

³⁷⁹ Yan Huang, *Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) : 189-190.

³⁸⁰ Ernst-August Gutt. "Translation and Relevance," PhD Dissertation. University of London (London, 1989), 67.

³⁸¹ George Yule, *Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36.

³⁸² Ernst-August Gutt. "Translation and Relevance," 67.

2. 'I invited Bella.'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'I' (subject) = Mary 2. 'Invited' = past action 3. 'Bella' = object of the action 	2. 'Dooby means that Bella and Cathy are both worth being invited'.
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The diagram above shows the role of inferences in RT. It indicates that explicatures are identified through grammatical, semantic and syntactic analysis, while implicatures are better explained through a pragmatic analysis.

Ernst R. Wendland complains that the concept of relevance itself is difficult to assess objectively when applied to the task of translating.³⁸³ This impression is probably due to the fact that, as Gutt himself admits, the principle of relevance is subconscious and automatic.³⁸⁴ The second complaint that Wendland raises is that the theoretical framework propounded by Gutt fails to provide guidelines for relevant decisions as regards translating from a SL to a TL, and testing the accuracy of the translation.³⁸⁵ However, Stephen Pattemore advocates for the application of RT to modern translations. He maintains that this approach enables the translator to interact with the two contexts of the text: the original context and the contemporary context, and build on implicatures to resolve challenges related to the task of translating.³⁸⁶

One commonality between RT and DE seems to be their focus on the receptor. The former deals more with the receptor's interpretation of the message, while the latter pays more attention to the receptor's text. Today, African scholars propound context-sensitive methodologies for Bible translation in African languages.

African philosophies of MT Bible translation

African frameworks for Mother Tongue (MT) Bible translation came under spotlights from the years 2000s. The leading figures are Bible scholars, linguists and translators.

Aloo O. Mojola contends that there is need for interpreting the Old Testament texts taking into account both the African background and the Old Testament background for accurate rendition of the message in MT.³⁸⁷ He recommends good mastery of biblical languages, good grasp of the background of Scripture, and good knowledge of the receptor languages and cultures are complementary in the improvement of Bible translation in African languages.³⁸⁸

Ernst Wendland puts forward theology as supplementary to the linguistic prowess involved in translating the Bible into African languages. According to him, "the activity of Bible translation unavoidably involves the translators in a significant and sustained act of theologizing."³⁸⁹ He cites the example of *kachisi*; 'ancestral shrine' in the Chichewa language of southern Africa, which was adopted to designate the Jewish temple. Wendland acknowledges that there are challenges related

³⁸³ Wendland, ER. "A Review of "Relevance Theory" in Relation to Bible Translation in South-Central Africa – Part 1" *JNSL* Vol. 22 (1996): 91-106.

³⁸⁴ Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistic and United Bible Societies, 1992), 25.

³⁸⁵ Wendland, E. R. A Review of "Relevance Theory" in Relation to Bible Translation in South-Central Africa - Part 2." *JNSL* Vol. 23 (1997): 199.

³⁸⁶ Stephen Pattemore. A Drift on a Sea of Implicature: Relevance Theory and the Pragmatics of Translation.. <https://doi.org/10.28977/jbtr.2008.4.22.180>

³⁸⁷ Aloo Mojola, "The Old Testament or Hebrew Bible in Africa: Challenges and Prospects for Interpretation and Translation," *Verbum et Ecclesia* Vol. 35, No. 3 (2014): 6, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve/v35i3/1307>

³⁸⁸ Aloo Mojola, "The Old Testament of Hebrew Bible in Africa," 13.

³⁸⁹ Ernst R. Wendland, "Theologizing in Africa: With Special Reference to Bible Translation in Chichewa." *Conspectus* 35 (April 2023): 10, <https://doi.org/10.54725.conspectus.2023.11>.

to this lexical choice, given that the Jerusalem temple was the center of worship in Israel; unlike the numerous traditional *kachisi* in the Achewa land. He however explains that the task of clarifying the biblical concept for church members is incumbent to African Church ministers.³⁹⁰

Mojola seems to focus attention on the leading role of Africans in MT Bible translation, and suggest African hermeneutics as a useful tool to achieve this goal. Wendland is more tilted towards the adoption of cultural equivalents, and underlines the importance for African ministers to help their audience fill the translation gaps, to recover the biblical meaning through theologizing. Giovanni Rizzi remarks that this second approach to Bible translation raises theological concerns, as it may transform the image of the biblical archetype, especially when this archetype does not exist in the receptor culture. Rizzi suggests a literal rendition like in the case of ‘vine’ and ‘vineyard’, which do not exist in the Congo, with explanatory notes to elucidate the concept.³⁹¹ This looks like a careful way of dealing with the challenge of cultural and linguistic barriers. However, Rizzi’s strategy leaves intact the concern of engaging the African worldview.

Mother Tongue hermeneutics seeks to address both the semantic and the theological problem in Bible translation. Richard Osei Akoto defines MT hermeneutics as “a field focused on interpreting and reinterpreting biblical texts in languages that speakers consider their native languages, the languages they were born into.”³⁹² Kwornu-Adjaottor proposes a methodology that integrates exegesis, discussion of translation issues in TL, history of interpretation, and identification of dynamic equivalents in MT.³⁹³ He employs this methodology to demonstrate that there is a lexical extension for the Greek term for ‘parable’ in Gã language of Ghana: *abe* (‘proverb’) and another term for ‘parable’. However, in the Gã culture, parables could be used to mean the exact opposite of what is said: which is not Christ’s intention in the synoptic gospels. Ghanaian translators chose *abe* based on this understanding.³⁹⁴ African philosophies of Bible translation tackle issues that are almost similar the one which is raised in this study.

It is common among translation societies to opt either for the Dynamic-Equivalence or for the Relevance Theory, for a diversity of reasons. However, it may be difficult to align strictly with a particular school excluding the other, since translation is both a science – built on a set of operational principles – and an art – requiring a level of creativity. Besides, the Bible contains various literary forms, where principles put forward either by DE or RT; or both, may apply. The most important thing is the appropriate methodology for a relevant translation of the divine message.

Methodology

One key concept in Contrastive Analysis is *comparison*. As observed in the theoretical framework above, the analyst examines linguistic and cognitive elements which are observable in the speakers’ productions, identifies the cause(s) of errors, and suggests strategies for accurate translation from SL to TL. This study will attempt to establish the translatability of the lexical item *ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα* (*akathartos pneuma*) following a four-step analysis. Step 1 will consist of a grammatical, syntactic and semantic analysis of the lexical item in SL which is Greek. Step 2 will

³⁹⁰ Ernst R. Wendland, "Theologizing in Africa: With Special Reference to Bible Translation in Chichewa," 13.

³⁹¹ Giovanni Rizzi, "African and Rwandan translations of the Bible," *Miedzy Oryginalne, a Przekladem* Vol. 53, No. 3 (2021): 91-92, 85-102. <https://doi.org/10.12797/moap.27-202.53.05>

³⁹² Richard Osei Akoto. "Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics Within the Context of African Biblical Hermeneutics: Its Origin, Trends and Challenges." *Journal of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)* Vol. 6, Issue 3 (May 2023): 21, 19-34. <https://doi.org/10.38/motbit.2024631>

³⁹³ J.E.T Kwornu-Adjaottor. "Doing Biblical Studies Using the Mother-Tongue Approach." *Journal of Applied Thought* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012): 55-80.

³⁹⁴ J.E.T Kuwornu-Adjaottor. "Solace Yankson and Millicent Aidoo." "The Translation of PAPABONH (Parable) as *Abe* in the Synoptic Gospels of the Ga New Testament of the Bible. *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2019): 26-27, 23-28.

deal with the semantic and pragmatic analysis of the lexical item in SL, in the second language of the translator (L2), which is French, and in TL, which is Yémba. Step 3 will deal with a comparative analysis of the translation options to identify relevant renditions and gaps. Step 4 will elucidate the approach used to fill the gaps in the Yémba translation, which this researcher believes should guide Bible translation in African languages.

Translatability of ἀκάθαρτος Πνεῦμα

Brief Grammatical, Syntactic and Semantic Analysis in SL

This first step deals with a grammatical, syntactic and semantic analysis of the lexical item, to establish its context of usage. This is needful because as Wei Wang rightly saw it, “In real communications speakers and receivers are often confronted with texts instead of isolated sentences or clauses.”³⁹⁵

In the Lukan Narratives, the phrase ‘πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ’ appears in Luke 8:29. ‘Πνεύματι’ is a noun in the dative, neuter, singular: from the root ‘πνεῦμα’ meaning ‘a spirit’, ‘the Spirit’ hence ‘spirit.’ ‘Τῷ’ is a definite article in the dative, neuter, singular: from the root ‘ὁ’ meaning ‘the’; and ‘ἀκαθάρτῳ’ is an adjective in the dative, neuter, singular: from the root ‘ἀκάθαρτος’ meaning ‘unclean’, ‘impure’, ‘demonic’, ‘evil’. Therefore, one can infer the literally meaning of this phrase to be ‘the unclean spirit.’³⁹⁶ An unclean spirit is a New Testament synonym, a more descriptive Jewish term, for a demon. The terms ‘unclean spirit’ and ‘demon’ seem to be interchangeable in the Scriptures. Some translations refer to them as ‘impure spirits’.

The second occurrence is ‘ἀκαθάρτοις πνεύμασιν’ – the plural form – , and it is found in Luke 4:36. The phrase ‘πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον’; ‘unclean spirit’ refers to an evil spirit which is ritually unclean and which causes persons to be ritually unclean, impure, vicious or evil. It could also mean an unclean person or someone who is specifically demonic.³⁹⁷ Previously in verse 33, it is seen as “the spirit of an unclean demon.” The phrases “a spirit of an unclean demon”; ‘πνεῦμα δαιμονίου ἀκαθάρτου’ in 4:33, ‘demon’ in 4:35, and ‘unclean spirit’ in 4:36 and 8:29 are the equivalent of “evil spirit” in 7:21.³⁹⁸

From all the above, we can have the semantic analysis of the lexical item presented in Chart 2 below:

Lexical items	Inferences
1. ‘unclean spirit’	1. animate 2. invisible 3. non-human 4. can indwell humans 5. causes harm

In the context of the first audience, the term is evocative of a category of being which is inherently evil. The metaphysical connotation seems quite clear in this context. It can be argued speculatively that the first audience of Luke could produce systematic opposites like: ‘Spirit of God’/’demon’; ‘Holy Spirit’/’evil spirit’.

³⁹⁵ Wei Wang and Weihong Zhou. “On Relative Translatability of Language with Special Reference to Contrastive Analysis between Chinese and English.” Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 9, No. 2 (March 2018): 303, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0902.11>

³⁹⁶ Bibleworks-[c:\program files (x86)\bibleworks9\init\bw900.swc]. Accessed on May 23, 2024.

³⁹⁷ Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of Luke 1-11* (Dallas, USA : SIL International, 2007), 173.

³⁹⁸ Blight, 360-361.revisit the writing guide

Semantic and pragmatic analysis in L2

In L2 which is French, one has an almost similar structure like in SL, with added information from the theological worldview that the translator has been exposed to, as represented in Chart 3 below:

Lexical items	Inferences
2. <i>'esprit impur'</i> ('unclean spirit')	6. <i>animé</i> (animate) 7. <i>invisible</i> (invisible) 8. <i>non-humain</i> (non-human) 9. <i>contrôle les humains</i> (controls humans) 10. <i>contrôle néfaste</i> (harmful control) 11. <i>démon</i> (demon)

It is noteworthy that the French-speaking translator does not approach biblical texts in a theological vacuum. In the process of translating, he or she interprets the text based on previous knowledge of the Christian worldview. As such, he or she can automatically infer similar pairs like: *'esprit impur'* ('unclean spirit')/*'mauvais esprit'* (evil spirit'); *'esprit impur'* ('unclean spirit')/*'pas Esprit de Dieu'* (not God's Spirit), and *'esprit impur'* ('unclean spirit')/*'démon'* ('demon') hence infer from all these associations that this spirit is absolutely bad.

We can therefore have the following pragmatic analysis in Chart 4 below:

Lexical item	Explicature	Implicature
<i>'esprit impur'</i> ('unclean spirit')	1. spirit = a contrary spirit NOT from God 2. unclean = harmful to humans and possibly other living things	1. 'The speaker means that this spirit is inherently evil'.

The analysis now turns to the Yémba language to identify gaps that transpired in the first translation proposed by some translators, who initially suggested a direct transfer *'esi tepon'* or 'bad spirit', to remain faithful to the biblical texts.

Semantic and pragmatic analysis in TL (Yémba)

A semantic analysis of the term in Yémba can be represented as seen in Chart 5 that follows:

Lexical item	Inferences
3. <i>'esi tepon'</i> (lit. 'bad spirit')	12. animate 13. invisible 14. non-human 15. can control humans 16. can be benevolent 17. can be malevolent 18. can be appeased

The chart above reflects some key beliefs from the Yémba culture, where adherents of African Religion (AFREL) claim that some spirits are benevolent while others are malevolent, and that all these spirits can be appeased. Also, unlike in SL and L2, there is no such a category as 'demon' in Yémba. The pragmatic analysis can be represented as shown in Chart 6 below:

Lexical item	Explicature	Implicature
' <i>esi tepon</i> ' (lit. 'bad spirit')	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'spirit' = NOT God's Spirit 2. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. bad = the kind of spirit that causes harm b. bad = not doing good to people 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The speaker means that this spirit is the one that does evil. 2. The speaker means that there are good spirits and bad spirits.

The chart above indicates that Yémba readers of the Lukan narratives will most likely interpret the term '*ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα*'; 'evil spirit'/'unclean spirit' based on the presuppositions of their former religion. There are a few translation gaps that call for a discussion.

Discussion

By comparing the translation options in French and Yémba, one notes an extension of the meaning of the lexical item '*πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ*' in the Yémba community. A direct transfer '*esi tepon*'; 'bad spirit' in Yémba language gives room to the dichotomy 'bad spirit vs good spirit' which was not intended by the biblical writer. The term evokes in the mind of the Yémba speaker a mystical connotation; opening room for such interpretations as: 'The *spirit* which indwelled the person referred to in this Bible was the *bad one*'; alluding to some forms of spiritual possession supposedly by 'good' spirits. Or: 'The *bad spirit* indwelled the person because he angered or offended the spirit world.' Obviously, these cultural interpretations do not match Luke's theological intent.

To fill these gaps, linguists from the Yémba background noted that diviners are possessed by demons called '*mesi*' – plural form of '*esi*'. They equally remarked that these diviners have exactly the same manifestations like the demonized people in the Bible. They therefore suggested that the term '*esi tepon*'; 'bad spirit' should be replaced by '*esi*'; 'spirit'. The Yémba translators applied some principles propounded by MT hermeneutics, although at the time, they were not aware of such a conceptualization.

Recommendations

Based on the all the above, three important recommendations are worthy of considerations when it comes to translating the Bible in African language. Translation societies should not only capitalize on linguistic knowledge, but engage the theological worldview of the people. Africans usually interpret the message of the Bible from their theological worldview, and this should be taken into consideration in lexical choices.

Secondly, translators need to understand hermeneutics as a two-handed process: interpretation of the biblical texts and interpretation of the cultural and religious knowledge of the people that the Bible is intended for. This is important because the task of translating the biblical message also involves translating cultures.

Finally, Africans should play a leading role in Mother Tongue Bible translation in their different communities. They can navigate between the world of the Bible and their own worlds, to render the biblical message with the highest level of accuracy.

Conclusion

The experience of the Yémba people in the West Region of Cameroon indicates that Bible translation in African languages takes more than aligning with a particular school of thought, instead of another. It requires an integrative approach which necessitates deliberate efforts to blend

exegesis, language, and the hermeneutic of the culture. This is an indication that the task of translating involves not only theologizing as argued persuasively by African scholars, but also contextualization, and team work in which the indigenous populations should play a pivotal role. This study reiterates the place of Mother Tongue hermeneutics in Bible translation into African languages.

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The Tithing Controversy and the Biblical Hermeneutical Approaches Used by Some Christian Leaders in Ghana

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Abstract

The controversy on tithing has become rampant among Christians in Africa, with opposing and challenging views. The compulsion and imperative for Christians to pay tithe are among the many issues surrounding tithing. Although all perspectives are argued from the same Bible, it can be noted that different hermeneutical approaches are used, resulting in various positions. This paper reviewed and analysed literature from five Ghanaian Christian leaders to ascertain their perspective, biblical hermeneutics and position on the tithing. It appears Pentecostals in Ghana hold to the compulsion view, while the Mainline and biblical scholars hold to the principle of tithing without compulsion. This paper shows that the Bible is the main source for tithing, but various Christian leaders have diverse perspectives on tithing. Each perspective interprets the Bible differently, and the background and denomination of the authors influence the interpretations. Some suggested recommendations give alternative ways to approach the subject of tithing in African Christianity.

Keywords: Tithe, Bible Interpretation, Hermeneutics, Pentecostalism, Mainline.

Introduction

Among the many controversies in African Christianity is the issue of tithing.³⁹⁹ The Hebrew words *mas̄er* and the Greek *dekate*, rendered ‘tithe’ in the English Bible, mean “a tenth part” or simply, “a tenth.”⁴⁰⁰ Tithe is defined as “a tenth of one’s income, particularly as offered to God”, and as “giving one-tenth of the believer’s income to support church operations.”⁴⁰¹ The primary source of tithe for Christians is the Bible, chiefly the Old Testament. The misunderstandings on tithing are prevalent in contemporary Christianity because tithing was not emphatically commanded in the New Testament. How is tithing argued from the Bible by Christian leaders in Ghana? In this paper, books on tithing by five Ghanaian Christian leaders representing major denominations in Ghana are reviewed, compared and analysed. Attention is given to how they use the Bible to argue for or against compulsory tithing. Furthermore, this paper analyses how the denominations of the authors influence their hermeneutics and position on tithing.

The main controversy today in African Christianity is that many churches teach tithing as a compulsion which when obeyed will bring tremendous material blessing but when not completely obeyed will incur the wrath of God (cf. Malachi 3) and bring dire consequences. For example, Pastor Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG – one of the largest neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, Africa and the world – told his church leaders that anyone

³⁹⁹ ‘Nigerians Debate Giving 10% of Their Income to the Church’, *BBC News*, 19 April 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43286733>.

⁴⁰⁰ F.M. Amevenku, “Tithing – Obligatory?” *Trinity Theological Seminary Journal* 8, no. 16 (2016): 22.

⁴⁰¹ Ervin Budiselić, “The Role and the Place of Tithing in the Context of Christian Giving,” *KAIROS - Evangelical Journal of Theology* 8.2 (2014): 145.

who refuses to pay tithe will go to hell.⁴⁰² Pastors in Africa are divided on the subject of compulsory tithing as some, including Pentecostal pastors, reject the imperativeness and threats associated with tithing.⁴⁰³ Other minor controversies include whether Christians should pay tithe on gross or net salary, which type of tithe since about three types mentioned and practised in the Old Testament, who qualifies to receive the tithe and what the tithe must be used for, whether tithe should be paid on monies such as loans, housekeeping money, business capital, investments and allowances (primarily for kids and young people dependent on their parents). Also, it has been noted that the revenue from tithe has helped the Pentecostal churches to expand in Africa and beyond.⁴⁰⁴ In many African churches, as noted by Afe Adogame, “It is believed that if one does not tithe faithfully, he or she will lose lots of God’s blessing, because failure to tithe is stealing directly from God and this will bring a curse upon a member and his/her business.”⁴⁰⁵ The payment of tithing is highly upheld by Ghanaian Christians” such that some choose to pay tithe and evade legal taxes.⁴⁰⁶ This shows how important this subject matter is in African Christianity.

Methodology

This paper uses literature analysis comparatively. Four books on tithing by Bishop Heward-Mills,⁴⁰⁷ Pastor Mensa Otabil,⁴⁰⁸ Michael K. Adjaloo⁴⁰⁹, Frederick Amevenku and Isaac Boateng.⁴¹⁰ Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, founder of the Lighthouse Chapel International, is a charismatic preacher known globally for his evangelistic campaigns, healing ministry and church growth with one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Ghana. Pastor Mensa Otabil is also a well-known Neo-Pentecostal Pastor in Ghana and the founder of the International Central Gospel Church. He is well known for his teachings, therefore, his position on tithing is worth considering. Michael K. Adjaloo is self-described as “one of the founding elders of the Pentecost International Worship Centre, Asokwa in Kumasi”⁴¹¹ of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana and a professor by profession. Although Adjaloo is not a theologian, his publication on tithing is necessary because his argument is upheld by the Church of Pentecost, the largest classical Pentecostal church in Ghana, with a summary published on the church's website.⁴¹² Amevenku is a professor” of biblical studies at the Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana and an ordained minister of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana. Isaac Boateng is a theologian and an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Ghana. The authors come from major Christian denominations in Ghana comprising Classical Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic and Mainline which means their position on tithing represents prominent perspectives on tithing among Christians in Ghana.

⁴⁰² Wale Odunsi, “Anyone Not Paying Tithe Is Not Going to Heaven - Adeboye,” Daily Post Nigeria, 12 April 2018, <https://dailypost.ng/2018/04/12/anyone-not-paying-tithe-not-going-heaven-adeboye/>.

⁴⁰³ Abimbola A. Adedokun, *Performing Power in Nigeria: Identity, Politics, and Pentecostalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 165.

⁴⁰⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa* (Oxford: Fortress Press, 2015), 172.

⁴⁰⁵ Afe Adogame, “African Initiated Churches in the Diaspora,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba and Jacob K. Olupona (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 320.

⁴⁰⁶ Anna-Riikka Kauppinen, “God’s Delivery State Taxes, Tithes, and a Rightful Return in Urban Ghana,” *Social Analysis* 64, no. 2 (2020): 39, <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2020.640203>.

⁴⁰⁷ Dag Heward-Mills, *Why Non-Tithing Christians Are Poor and How Tithing Christians Can Become Rich* (n.p.: Parchment House, 2015).

⁴⁰⁸ Mensa Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit: Timeless Principles for Christian Stewardship* (Accra: Kairos, 2019).

⁴⁰⁹ Michael K. Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation* (Kumasi: Restoration Publication, 2020).

⁴¹⁰ Frederick Mawusi Amevenku and Isaac Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church* (Tema: Kabkork Publication, 2018).

⁴¹¹ See the back cover of his book *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*.

⁴¹² Joseph Attah, “God Blesses The Faithful Tither – Elder Dr. Adjaloo,” *THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST* (blog), 28 January 2023, <https://thecophq.org/god-blesses-the-faithful-tither-elder-dr-adjaloo/>.

It must be noted that the five authors consulted in this paper are all regarded as ‘theologians’ to a degree. While Amevenku and Boateng are professional theologians, I argue within the framework of the four theological voices proposed by Helen Cameron et al⁴¹³ that Pentecostal pastors serve as authorities, develop theologies and are widely read as demonstrated in their perspectives on tithing. Therefore, there is no discrimination or inequality in comparing the theological and biblical arguments of Pentecostal pastors with professional theologians.

Prominent Ghanaian Voices in the Tithing Controversy

Bishop Heward-Mills

Heward-Mills’ book looks directly at the implications of tithing and not tithing for Christians. Heward-Mills chiefly dwells on Malachi's account to explain what the text meant for those who tithe and those who do not. It begins with why those who do not tithe are bound to become poor.⁴¹⁴ Non-tithers will become poor because they do not sow and, therefore, will not have a harvest or attract blessings from God. Non-tithers are cursed and constantly prone to attacks on what they have, and what they have sown will not yield any harvest, according to Heward-Mills. These points are mostly taken from the Malachi account on tithing. Heward-Mills further explained the curses: frustration, average in everything, notable evils, mysterious misfortunes, constant failure with stagnation, and bad options.⁴¹⁵ Heward-Mills argued that those who refuse to tithe are thieves, depriving God’s house of resources, therefore, they incur God’s wrath.⁴¹⁶ According to Heward-Mills, those who do not pay tithe have a spiritual problem because they are disloyal, rebellious, immature, greedy, lack reverence for the word of God, care less about the welfare of their leaders and are ungrateful, among other vices,⁴¹⁷ and are bound to become financially useless like the servant who buried the single talent given to him by his master. Heward-Mills noted that many people make excuses for not paying tithe, including the percentage, low income, financial conditions and restraints. Heward-Mills further explained what tithing is and the reasons God established it, which include a sign of gratitude, a remembrance of God’s deliverance, a means to support the Levites and the needy, as a test of the believer's obedience, and a means to prosper His people in unusual ways, among other reasons.⁴¹⁸ Heward-Mills noted the benefits of tithing, such as opening the heavens and provoking God’s blessings. One of such profound blessings is that those who contribute to the house of God will be blessed with their own homes. Aside from these, tithing is an act of honour, remembrance, worship, respect, obedience, faith, appreciation of full-time ministers, belief in eternity, activation of blessing and avoidance of curses, and a demonstration of your acknowledgement of God as your source of blessings.

Heward-Mills then did a quick survey of tithes in the Bible and those who pioneered and supported them, such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, Jesus, and other biblical figures. Heward-Mills then explored reasons why Jewish people, although small and heavily persecuted, are among the wealthiest people on earth. Heward-Mills noted that the Jewish people are very generous because their religious foundations promote charity, which includes tithing. In this regard, tithing Christians are grafted into wealth creation, and tithing activates the laws of sowing and reaping. Heward-Mills finally argued that tithing does not work for everyone, and for those for whom tithing seems to fail, there are many reasons which include not acknowledging God’s provision, not giving their tithe first, not tithing accurately, presenting unacceptable offerings, lack

⁴¹³ Helen Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 54–56.

⁴¹⁴ Heward-Mills, *Why Non-Tithing Christians Are Poor*, Chapter 1.

⁴¹⁵ Heward-Mills, *Why Non-Tithing Christians Are Poor*, Chapter 2.

⁴¹⁶ Heward-Mills, *Why Non-Tithing Christians Are Poor*, Chapter 3.

⁴¹⁷ Heward-Mills, *Why Non-Tithing Christians Are Poor*, Chapter 4.

⁴¹⁸ Heward-Mills, *Why Non-Tithing Christians Are Poor*, Chapter 9.

of patience, negative confessions, wrong desires, holding grudges, bad marital relations, and those with hidden sins. In summary, Heward-Mills argues that tithing is compulsory for every Christian. If obeyed, it will attract incredible blessings and, if not obeyed or done accurately, will amount to curses.

Pastor Mensa Otabil

Rev Mensa Otabil's book attempts to give a systematic biblical overview, analysis, interpretation and implication on giving in the whole Bible. Otabil explained that, although he practised these forms of giving even as an adult, he lacked the knowledge of it, which drove him to do an in-depth study on biblical giving. Otabil noted that, according to biblical chronology, Abraham was the first to give a specific offering known as the tithe to the first recorded priest in the Bible. Otabil then looked at the second instance of tithe in the vow made by Jacob to God arguing that although the tithe of Jacob was conditional, "it would appear that the vow was not going to be fulfilled by a singular act of giving but a continuous one."⁴¹⁹ Otabil argued that God was given first place in the tithe of Abraham and Jacob and under the law. Otabil noted that multiple tithes were required—for the Levites, the Festival tithe the charity tithe meant to be given to the poor and needy every three years. Otabil argued that the tithe given to the priest was the "primary use of the tithe."⁴²⁰ The Levites paid a tithe on the tithe they had received – tithe-on-tithe.⁴²¹ Otabil also noted the post-exilic reforms of tithing meant a return to tithing under the law.

Otabil then analysed the concept of tithing in the New Testament narratives deducing the position of Jesus Christ on tithing. Otabil's argument was based on the assertion made by Jesus Christ that his coming was not a move of abolishment but rather a fulfilment of the Mosaic law. Otabil noted how Jesus addressed the issue of tithing as practised by the Pharisees, suggesting its inferiority to virtues such as justice and mercy but not a nullification of tithing.⁴²² In this regard, Otabil inferred, "Yes, of course, we need to love our neighbours, but obeying Jesus by loving our neighbours doesn't excuse us from tithing."⁴²³ Otabil takes the argument to a higher pedestal by analysing some writings of Irenaeus, one of the church fathers, and the conversation between 'the Rich Young Ruler' and Jesus to establish that certainly Christians must exceed the Jewish tithe in that "Jesus does not demand a percentage from us – He demands our all."⁴²⁴ Otabil further argued that considering that Jesus gave his life and all for our sake, the size of our giving reflects our evaluation of what we think Christ has done for us.⁴²⁵ Thus, the bigger you give, the better you understand what Christ has done for you. In his New Testament exposition on tithing, Otabil further refers to the book of Hebrews, where tithe was mentioned and argues for the re-establishment of the priesthood of Melchizedek.

To establish the continuity and compulsion on tithing under the new covenant, Otabil argued that Barnabas, one of the early Christians noted for laying the profit he made from selling his land at the Apostles' feet, was a Levite, and this act by a Levite is a transfer of authority from the Levites to the Apostles. According to Otabil, this makes the Apostles the official new authority to receive offerings and creates continuity for the payment of offerings and tithes to church leaders. Otabil, therefore, argued that "Grace does not exclude us from honouring God with our Tithes... Abraham tithed to the priesthood of Melchizedek; in the New Testament era, we also tithe

⁴¹⁹ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 74.

⁴²⁰ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 121.

⁴²¹ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 126.

⁴²² Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 158.

⁴²³ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 158.

⁴²⁴ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 163.

⁴²⁵ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 176.

to the priesthood of Melchizedek, now fulfilled and headed by Christ our High priest.”⁴²⁶ In conclusion, Otabil argued that tithing is a timeless principle that Jesus Christ did not invalidate, therefore, Christians are expected to continue paying their tithe. The legal ten percent should be a baseline as Christians under the new covenant in Christ are expected to give more than those who were under the Law.

Elder Michael Adjaloo

Adjaloo has observed the rampant debate surrounding tithing – being an outmoded principle, little mention by Jesus and the Apostles, confusion on where to pay it, how it must be used, the frequency of paying tithe, and who qualifies to pay tithe – and the various positions on tithing among contemporary Christians. Adjaloo concluded that these issues result from abuses, misinterpretations, and recording, among other challenges. According to Adjaloo, the increasing number of Christians refusing to tithe and desiring its discontinuity is an ‘attack’.⁴²⁷ He aimed to settle the debate on tithing.⁴²⁸ Adjaloo also takes a systematic trace of texts on tithing in the Bible to establish its continuity in contemporary Christianity. Adjaloo noted the events of tithing in the book of Genesis – including Joseph⁴²⁹ – and its introduction as a law for the Israelites specifically for Levites because they were not given material inheritance due to their commitment to temple duties. Adjaloo noted that the tithing law was so strict that Israelites living far away were to convert their tithe into money and send it to the storehouse. According to Adjaloo, the tithe was later expanded to help the poor, noting the three types of tithes. Adjaloo noted that tithing continued after the exiles and the leaders and prophets enforced the people not to neglect it. Adjaloo observed that most teachings on tithing today are taken from the prophecy of Malachi. Adjaloo argued that the prophet Malachi spoke of tithing and the coming messianic age parallelly in the same context. Adjaloo then affirmed that the parallel creates a “connection between tithing in the Old Testament and the New”⁴³⁰ asserting that the payment of tithing continues for Christians today.

He further justifies this claim by examining how Jesus dealt with the Law during his earthly ministry arguing that since Jesus lived in a time when tithing was practised and participated in Jewish rituals, he paid tithes. Again, since the apostles and early Christians were Jewish people who went to the Temple and synagogues, Adjaloo believes they practised and paid their tithe. On the minimal mention and teaching on tithing in the New Testament, Adjaloo gave some reason. Adjaloo asserted that the regular giving in the early church meetings was perhaps enough for the church and did not see the need to teach about tithing. According to Adjaloo, the Apostles did not see the need to impose tithing on the Gentile converts and, therefore, focused more on voluntary giving. Adjaloo asserted that tithing was not a pressing issue at that time, and it did not attract any address from the Apostles. These, according to Adjaloo, do not invalidate the concept of tithing. Adjaloo asserts that tithing in the Old Testament was a pilot project to equip the Levites to serve God as a way to keep the presence of God among His people and becomes even more relevant in contemporary Christianity.⁴³¹ With this background, Adjaloo makes a case for his central thesis, which he calls ‘grace giving’ or ‘grace tithing.’ Grace tithing can be more than ten percent. Adjaloo argued that church leaders and full-time ministers are the priests to receive the tithe, and the storehouse is the church or place of worship. To advance God’s kingdom, tithing becomes a tool to fight the enemy, according to Adjaloo. Adjaloo then shared records of how some churches in

⁴²⁶ Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 196.

⁴²⁷ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 6–7.

⁴²⁸ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 7.

⁴²⁹ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 10.

⁴³⁰ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 21–22.

⁴³¹ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 76.

Ghana used their tithes. This was followed by the blessing one gets from tithing, some principles of accessing blessing through tithing, and a collection of testimonies from Christians and even non-Christians who pay their tithes. In summary, Adjaloo concluded, like Otabil, on the timelessness of tithing and how it expresses love and our trust in God to care for us.

Rev Frederick Amevenku and Rev Isaac Boateng

Amevenku and Boateng also approached the concept of tithing systematically. Texts on tithing were explained to unearth the background and context. Amevenku and Boateng stressed their approach involving textual analysis, stating that “to ignore context in interpretation is to violate the essence of the text.”⁴³² The authors acknowledged the prevailing debates and abuses, particularly from pastors and church leaders who have burdened members with the payment of tithes. The authors made three deductions from their biblical analysis of tithing; no automatic continuity of tithing today; the lack of teaching on tithes in the New Testament, not an abolishment; tithing without compulsion, as a starting point towards sacrificial giving preached in the New Testament.⁴³³ The authors noted that tithing predated Abraham. Referring to extrabiblical sources, they noted that it was a common practice among communities such as Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, Greece, Carthage Assyria, and the Ancient Near East⁴³⁴ where Abraham lived. This has led to the argument that Abraham may have adopted the practice. Amevenku and Boateng aimed to clarify some contemporary claims on tithing. They refute claims by some Christians that the sacrifice of Cain and Abel depicted tithing because the text does not make any such claim. The authors analysed Abraham's tithing, noting it as a one-time thing and not a prerequisite for blessings. The authors concluded that “Abram obeyed pagan custom because he was living under pagan rulers.”⁴³⁵ On Jacob's tithes, the authors noted that it was conditional with no proof it was fulfilled.

Amevenku and Boateng acknowledged the types of tithes mentioned in the OT as it was made into a law. However, they indicated that since charity tithes were meant for the poor, it suggests that the poor were exempted from this kind of tithes.⁴³⁶ Considering these tithes, Amevenku and Boateng concluded that the Israelites were obliged to pay 23.33 percent in tithes averaging about 20 percent since no tithes were to be paid in the seventh year.⁴³⁷ Furthermore, the authors noted that tithing continued post-exilic period, such that a storage facility for the surplus was needed which brought about the concept of a ‘storehouse.’⁴³⁸ As argued by the authors, during the post-exilic period, the Israelites began to be inconsistent in following the Laws of Moses and defaulted in giving to the Levites, which caused the Levites to abandon their Levitical duties and work to sustain themselves. Such inconsistency led to an oath involving the invocation of curses, as noted in Nehemiah 10: 28-39. This, among other issues, set the background for the profound statements on tithing and robbing God and the implications of blessings and misfortunes pronounced by the Prophet Malachi, according to Amevenku and Boateng.⁴³⁹

On the tithing in the New Testament, Amevenku and Boateng asserted that Jesus lived as a Jew under the Law and, therefore, he may have paid tithes, provided he had an income. However, the mention of tithes by Jesus did not advocate for its imperativeness for the church. The exegesis of Amevenku and Boateng on all text in the New Testament that made mention of tithing, including

⁴³² Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 14.

⁴³³ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 15–16.

⁴³⁴ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 22.

⁴³⁵ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 39.

⁴³⁶ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 49.

⁴³⁷ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 51.

⁴³⁸ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 56.

⁴³⁹ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 62–65.

Hebrew 7, concluded that “No NT text directly teaches tithing, nor least legalistic, curse-threatened, compulsory tithing. The reference to tithing in each of the three passages discussed was tangential to the argument in each case.”⁴⁴⁰ On the fulfilment or abolishment of tithe in Christ, Amevenku and Boateng analysed components of tithing under the law and how they are fulfilled in Christ. The authors argued that Christ fulfilled the priesthood of the Levitical order, becoming the High priest forever, which initiated all believers into the priesthood. Unlike the OT priests who needed tithes, because they did not have any inheritance, believers under the new covenant have an inheritance in Christ and the kingdom of God. Also, while the temple was designated for the collection and storage of tithes under the old covenant, in the new covenant, the body of the believer is the temple of God. Furthermore, while tithes were also used for festivals such as the Passover, Christ has become our Passover, and Christians no longer observe the other festivals. Amevenku and Boateng also noted that the New Testament authors and the early church focused more on generous giving. They deduced from Paul's writings that giving should be voluntary, sacrificial, generous, and cheerful.⁴⁴¹ Amevenku and Boateng suggested that the lack of a direct command in the NT should not deter believers from giving a tithe if it is related to thanksgiving and the providence of God. However, any legalist-binding demand with a threat should be rejected.

Discussion

Analysis and Comparison of Arguments

All the authors agree on several things concerning tithing. All agree on the primary source for the discourse, the Old Testament and its minimal appearance in the New Testament. The nature of tithing in the various eras – pre-Mosaic, Mosaic, pre- and post-exilic Israel, the time of Jesus, and the early church – was noted. They also agree on the lack of direct command in the New Testament to enforce tithing in contemporary Christianity. The authors referred to tithing outside the Bible or a similar practice of tithing by non-Christians. In conclusion, all authors agree that the principle of tithing is not out of place to be practised by Christians today. It was the imperativeness of tithing and their hermeneutical approaches that separated the authors – Amevenku and Boateng from Heward-Mills, Otabil and Adjaloo.

Heward-Mills' position preceded his argument, making his position for the compulsory payment of tithe obvious. Heward-Mills interprets the verses on tithing as it is written. He expounds on what the blessing and curse mean for contemporary Christians. He uses as many scriptures as possible, some of which have nothing to do with tithing. His argument is straightforward; these biblical figures paid their tithe, and God blessed them, therefore, all Christians must pay a tithe to receive a blessing from God and avoid curses. Heward-Mills does not bother to justify the timelessness of tithe, as Otabil and Adjaloo did. Heward-Mills presents tithing as a command with blessings if done well and curses if ignored.

Otabil attempts to give a 'deeper' explanation of events in the Bible concerning tithing that ordinary readers may not understand. For example, Otabil indicated that Jacob's tithe was not a one-time thing but progressive. Again, Otabil argued that the donation of Barnabas, a Levite, to the Apostles, was the transfer of spiritual authority from the Levites to the Apostles. These “deeper” interpretations by Otabil are debatable because they are not clearly indicated in the Bible. Otabil insistence on continuity provokes some challenges within his argument. For example, tithing is an expression of the love of God, but a bigger donation will attract a bigger blessing. Also, Otabil asserted that the size of your gift is also a measure of your understanding of what God has done for you, which means if you give ten percent as required then you are ungrateful.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 75.

⁴⁴¹ Amevenku and Boateng, *Tithing in the Christian Church*, 95.

⁴⁴² Otabil, *Tithes, Offerings and First Fruit*, 176.

Furthermore, Otobil claimed that Christians, heirs of Abraham, are freed from the command of Mosaic tithing, and the freedom allows Christians to tithe like Abraham, whose tithe was free will. Still, Christians are to tithe regularly, as commanded in the Mosaic law, although Abraham gave a one-time tithe. Otobil did no extensive exposition on the discourse in Malachi which is central in the tithing debate.

Adjaloo's approach is similar to Otobil's. He issues an early disclaimer regarding Abraham's tithe admitting his lack of competence in theological matters and the tendency to over-spiritualisation.⁴⁴³ Adjaloo also made some definitive statements without enough backing. Adjaloo stated definitively that Jacob gave a whole tithe to God which was not recorded.⁴⁴⁴ His claim that Joseph instituted tithing through taxation in Egypt is far-fetched. Again, Adjaloo argued that since Malachi spoke of the coming of the Messiah and tithing in the same passage, it suggests that tithing was meant to be timeless and adhered to by all believers. He further argued that the statement of Jesus in Matthew 23:23 decisively settled the argument on tithing. Assertions by Adjaloo concerning NT authors and the Apostles in the early church are speculative. The assertion that the Apostles had so much to do they had no time to teach about tithing is debatable because there were teachings on giving. To assume that the early Christians were Jewish people and therefore continued to pay tithe suggests that they continued in other laws too. This generalisation is challenging because the Apostles consistently warned the Jewish Christians about the Law and its imposition on other non-Jewish Christians. Adjaloo's assertion that God instituted tithe to maintain his presence among his people⁴⁴⁵ also reduces the presence of God to money in contemporary Christianity. Adjaloo argued that the three forms of tithing have been integrated into one under the new covenant without stating how and when it was done.⁴⁴⁶ Adjaloo's approach uses texts to "create a logical picture."⁴⁴⁷ Adjaloo takes phrases from Malachi, focusing on only the blessings, arguing that the blessings of tithing are still effective. While Heward-Mills was clear on the curses incurred for not tithing, Adjaloo is very subtle acknowledging that refusing to tithe will incur God's displeasure, but minimal attention should be given to the curses while the blessings should be amplified.⁴⁴⁸ This interpretation is selective. Other challenges in Adjaloo's argument include not giving the tithe to the poor, even though it was one of the purposes of the tithe. Adjaloo argued that tithe must be paid even if it will push the giver into debt and borrowing.⁴⁴⁹ This is a serious concern.

Amevenku and Boateng tackle tithing texts coherently and systematically compared to the other authors in the sense that they critically consider the texts, did not skip some texts or give partial interpretation. They emphasised the context, setting, and circumstances surrounding the biblical texts on tithing. They hardly speculated and where there is no clarity, they referred to other scholarly works. Sources suggest that tithing did not originate, nor was it only confined to Judaism but present in early cultures some predating Abraham.⁴⁵⁰ Abraham's tithing is traced to practices in the Near East Ancient Mesopotamia,⁴⁵¹ which suggests that tithe was not a direct divine revelation from God to Abraham. The approach used by Amevenku and Boateng did not seek to uncover hidden meanings but what early authors may have intended. Their approach handles the tension between the Old and New Testament tithing, which led to the conclusion of not making

⁴⁴³ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 9.

⁴⁴⁴ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 10.

⁴⁴⁵ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 76.

⁴⁴⁶ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 83.

⁴⁴⁷ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 68.

⁴⁴⁸ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 147, 183.

⁴⁴⁹ Adjaloo, *Tithing Under the Grace Dispensation*, 161.

⁴⁵⁰ Mark A. Snoeberger, "The Pre-Mosaic Tithe; Issues and Implications," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (2000): 71–72.

⁴⁵¹ Snoeberger, "The Pre-Mosaic Tithe; Issues and Implications," 71.

tithing imperative for contemporary Christians. Amevenku and Boateng refute tithing claims deduced from other sacrifices made by biblical figures unless tithing was explicitly mentioned. Jacob's tithe was questioned because of the conditioned surroundings, which appeared to be a deal with God. Amevenku and Boateng noted, among other things, the death penalty for not tithing, the exemption of the poor from paying charity tithe and the total percentage of tithing, which exceeded ten percent. Amevenku and Boateng provided an extensive exposition of the Malachi account compared to the other authors, noting the circumstances and context.

Tithing in the New Testament and statements by Jesus on tithing were also analysed and concluded that Jesus did not intend to impose tithing under the new covenant. Amevenku and Boateng refute any theological assertions that made the Apostles the new recipient of the tithe. They instead argued based on scripture on how elements of OT tithing – priesthood, Temple, etc. – are present in the NT but are fulfilled in Christ and diffused in such a way that challenges the imperative continuity of tithing noting the inconsistency in the hermeneutics of those for compulsory tithing. Amevenku and Boateng advocated for a non-legalist 'principle' of tithing rather than a legalistic imperative with blessings and curses. The challenge here is whether it is necessary for the principle of tithing to be understood before one can give sacrificially. New Testament authors such as Paul encouraged sacrificial giving without mentioning tithing as a basis. Another challenge is whether the principle can be effectively dichotomized from its legalism. Much of what is known about tithing in Christianity is heavily embedded in the Mosaic Law. Therefore, the mention of tithe will always summon legalism and transaction.

Biblical Hermeneutics and Denomination

Scripture is the primary source used by the authors. The authors display an array of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics common in African Christianity. The biblical interpretation used by Pentecostals and the Mainline pastors differs significantly. Heward-Mills, Otabil, and Adjaloo used some of the hermeneutical approaches common in African Pentecostalism while Amevenku and Boateng used formal approaches as Mainline pastors and biblical scholars. One aspect that reflected their hermeneutics was tithing from OT to NT. Heward-Mills assumes the continuation of tithing from the OT to the NT directly. Otabil and Adjaloo considered elements in the OT and NT for the continuity of tithing. Adjaloo and Otabil employed some typological, moral, and allegorical interpretations in their argument when they attempted to create a nexus between the Old and New Testaments. Amevenku and Boateng differentiated between moral law and ceremonial laws noting that tithing was ceremonial and not a moral law like the Ten Commandments, which is eternal.

Heward-Mills' approach is common in African Pentecostal Bible reading, also known as the 'biblicist-literalist' approach common in Pentecostal hermeneutics.⁴⁵² This literalist interpretation of the Bible is attributed to the illiteracy of readers. However, literate and trained pastors in some Pentecostal churches choose to ignore the context, setting, and nature of the text as seen in the case of Heward-Mills' hermeneutics. It has been noted that even the theological schools of Pentecostal leaders do not have quality faculties.⁴⁵³ This can also be responsible for a lack of quality Bible interpretations. Thus, some Pentecostal pastors, including those with advanced formal and theological education and founders of Bible schools, choose to interpret the Bible the way they deem fit for their beliefs and understanding.

⁴⁵² Marius Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Distinctive Contribution to Hermeneutics* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 30.

⁴⁵³ Peter White, "The Future of Pentecostal Scholarship: The Role of the Church and Academia," in *Pentecostal Theological Education in the Majority World, Volume 1: The Graduate and Post-Graduate Level*, ed. Dave Johnson and Rick Wadholm (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2023), 141.

Otabil and Adjaloo attempted to provide a scholarly and logical argument. They acknowledge other scholarly writings. This supports Nel's assertion that there has been some development in Pentecostal hermeneutics since the 1930s that considers formal and scholarly approaches.⁴⁵⁴ The use of testimonies to support the payment of tithing by both Adjaloo and Heward-Mills shows the role of experience in African Pentecostal hermeneutics. As noted by Allan Anderson, "Pentecostals have a high regard for the biblical text as an authoritative guide to life and beliefs. Most often for Pentecostals, however, the Bible is interpreted in the light of human experience."⁴⁵⁵ There are still some hermeneutical biases; Otabil does not comment on the Malachi account and Adjaloo elevates the blessings and downplays the curses of tithing. This kind of selective interpretation of scripture is also commonly used by Pentecostals, as noted by Asamoah-Gyadu.⁴⁵⁶ Furthermore, the authoritative claims without sources show how some Pentecostals make biblical assertions based on their conviction and understanding. This is common among Pentecostal preachers who usually attempt to go behind biblical texts to uncover hidden, deeper spiritual meanings that were unavailable to early Christians.⁴⁵⁷ In this regard, African Pentecostal hermeneutics is often accused of being overly spiritual.⁴⁵⁸ This authoritative claim, on the other hand, challenges the communal authority noted by Nel. Thus, according to Nel, "the community testifies to the experiences attributed to the Spirit and then engages Scripture to validate or repudiate the experience or issue."⁴⁵⁹ Communal authority and communal interpretation may be effective in some classical Pentecostal churches. In neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians, individual leaders determine the interpretation, and members must accept it without opposition. The imperativeness of tithing as argued by the Pentecostal authors always puts the 'tither' at fault when they do not receive the expected blessings and advocates are unable to give reason for unfulfilled promises for those who pay tithes and are not materially blessed.⁴⁶⁰

The hermeneutical approach of Amevenku and Boateng is formal and scholarly reflecting their Mainline and scholarly backgrounds. Exegetical and hermeneutical approaches that consider the authors' background, setting, intention, and intended original audience were prioritised. It has been observed that African churches established by Western Christian denominations such as the Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical churches are fond of using the Bible in the same manner as their Western founders.⁴⁶¹ The Mainline churches are flexible in the Bible and other credible sources juxtaposed to the Pentecostals in Africa where the Bible is the only source.⁴⁶² However, formal scholarly hermeneutical principles are described as Western and Eurocentric, which does not take the African context seriously.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁴ Marius Nel, *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 29-42.

⁴⁵⁵ Allan Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 183.

⁴⁵⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 166.

⁴⁵⁷ Harlyn Graydon Purdy, *A Distinct Twenty-First Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 112-13.

⁴⁵⁸ Cephas Omenyo and Wonderful Adjei Arthur, "The Bible Says! Neo-Prophetic Hermeneutics in Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 19, no. 1 (2013): 52, <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2013.0038>.

⁴⁵⁹ Marius Nel, "Attempting To Define A Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Scriptura* 114 (2015): 13, <https://doi.org/10.7833/114-0-1044>.

⁴⁶⁰ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?" Christianity Today International, 2009, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/november/main.html>.

⁴⁶¹ Paul Gifford, "The Bible in Africa: A Novel Usage in Africa's New Churches," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, no. 2 (2008): 205.

⁴⁶² Lovemore Togarasei, "Bible and Theology in Africa," in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 404.

⁴⁶³ David T. Adamo, "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics," *OTE* 28, no. 1 (2015): 38.

Recommendations

Considering the above review, some recommendations on the tithing controversy are necessary. First, African biblical hermeneutics should be employed since the Bible is the main source of tithing for Christians in Africa. In all the literature, prominence is still given to formal (Western) biblical hermeneutical approaches. African biblical approach scholarly known by various names such as “Biblical inculturation hermeneutics, African contextual hermeneutics, contextual Bible study, African contextual biblical hermeneutics”⁴⁶⁴ aims at interpreting the Bible from an African perspective. While it has been argued that African Pentecostals interpret the Bible with their context in mind, the Pentecostal authors did not use the African context in their tithing hermeneutics. Even so, Amevenku and Boateng, with their theological background in biblical studies, mother-tongue Bible interpretation and contextual Bible interpretation⁴⁶⁵ could have incorporated some African hermeneutics. For example, scholars have traced the influence of pre-Christian worldviews and practices to the rise of prosperity theologies in African Christianity.⁴⁶⁶ Furthermore, Asamoah-Gyadu has noted the resonance between tithing and thanksgiving offerings in African traditional religious thought.⁴⁶⁷ A contextual and African hermeneutical approach is highly recommended for further inquiry into tithing in African Christianity. Secondly, African Christians can learn from early Christians in the Bible how controversial issues were settled. An example is the issue of circumcision that erupted at the Council in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15) and the approach used by the Apostles which included openness to various perspectives, scriptural interpretations and testimonies culminating in a resolution that was pleasing to God.

Thirdly, a personal divine directive is less controversial than a biblical argument. Thus, if African Pentecostals promote tithing based on personal conviction or ‘instructed’ by God, their insistence on tithing will be less controversial compared to their biblical argument for tithing. In that sense, even if more than ten percent is ‘instructed by the Spirit,’ it will be less controversial, though subjective. Finally, seeing how tithing is a major source of funding for African churches, it is possible to move away from a legal biblical system of giving (tithing) and focus on a developed system of giving devised by individual churches. Thus, a church can reflect and design its way of generating revenue without invoking some biblical legalism.

Conclusion

The tithing debate is rampant in African Christianity with diverse perspectives and hermeneutical approaches. As noted from the discussion, biblical hermeneutical approaches used by African preachers are influenced by their theological formation and Christian denomination. Biblical argument aimed at imperative tithing poses some hermeneutical challenges. The attempt to keep the principle of tithing even by those who argue against it compulsion also leaves room for contemplation. It is understandable because it has become the primary means by which most churches in Africa generate revenue. African Christians use the Bible to deal with existential problems in Africa. Tithing is advocated as an opportunity to overcome poverty and economic hardship as it promises material blessings and well-being. This is consistent with the teachings of the so-called ‘prosperity theology.’⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, it seems any attempt to scrap tithing totally from

⁴⁶⁴ Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi, “Assessing the Mode of Biblical Interpretation in the Light of African Biblical Hermeneutics: The Case of the Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation in Ghana,” *Religions* 15, no. 2 (2024): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020203>.

⁴⁶⁵ Frederick Mawusi Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context* (Vernon Press, 2021).

⁴⁶⁶ Emmanuel K. Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” *Pentvars Business Journal* 4, no. 2 (2010): 66.

⁴⁶⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Regnum Books International, 2013), 101.

⁴⁶⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 166.

African Christianity will be close to impossible. In that case, the use of African biblical hermeneutics is welcomed. Also, churches can develop a system of collecting a percentage of the income of its members, as it is done with membership, welfare and departmental dues. This should be done with a reasonable agreement with members void of fear, threats and questionable Bible interpretation and is not a burden to Christians. Either argued as a mere principle or a divine imperative, encouraging tithing will always lead to religious legalism as much of its knowledge is embedded in the Mosaic Law and the Old Testament.

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A Critical Analysis of Matthew 18:18 from the Perspective of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics

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Abstract

People understand texts in their mother tongues better than texts in any other language. The understanding with which people read biblical texts informs their actions. In other words, the understanding readers acquire after reading the biblical text informs their religious actions and inactions. However, if a text lacks clarity, it could be misconstrued by readers, and this could negatively affect their way of life. Matthew 18:18 has been rendered in Asante-Twi,⁴⁶⁹ a dialect of the Akan people of Ghana, in a manner that appears to be theologically problematic. Many readers, as a result, make sense of the text in a way that does not reflect the intended meaning of the Greek text. The paper seeks to suggest a translation that brings clarity to the text for readers of Asante-Twi; and help readers to put their prayer in a theologically-balanced perspective.

Keywords: Matthew 18:18, Prayer, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, Asante-Twi

Introduction

Matthew 18:18 is set in the context of resolving a misunderstanding between the body of Christ. Specifically, it comes after the Lord's directive of how a supposed Christian believer who refuses the counsel of the church should be seen by the church. Whether or not to expel such a brother is an issue of debate.

In spite of this, the text usually features in the prayer lives of Christians, especially in times of warfare against supposed satanic forces. Within such prayer moments, Christians bind and loose many things. Usually, such communicants base what they are allowed to bind and loose on their understanding of Matthew 18:18. However, not everything they bind gets bound; in the same vein, not everything they loose loosed.

In this paper, the Greek text is examined for contextual understanding of the concept of binding and loosing in resolving matters in the body of Christ. This understanding is extended to reflect the nature of warfare prayer of Christians. A translation that seeks to correct a theologically misleading impression is suggested to maintain the sanctity of the text as it was meant to be.

Literature Review

Opinions are varied on Matthew 18:18 perhaps because the text, as independent as it could be perceived, is part of a context on resolving a misunderstanding among members of the body of Christ. How the text is rendered by different interpreters adds to this difference and even strengthens the divided opinions. The different positions of scholars suggest that there is some ambiguity somewhere. This difference also suggests that the grammar and syntax of the text must be observed critically.

⁴⁶⁹ This is a vernacular Bible that was published by Bible Society of Ghana in 2012.

Scholarly Perspectives on Matthew 18:18

Emmanuel Foster Asamoah and Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam have done a critical study of Matthew 18:15-18 with special emphasis on some Akan texts. They posit that each of the verses in the text meaningfully stands autonomously though their autonomous meanings complement one another.⁴⁷⁰ In other words, Matthew 18:18 is such that it can be seen and understood on its own, though making it part of the context it appears in would not distort its meaning.

It is worthy of note that the interest of Asamoah and Kpalam had to do with addressing peace-making in Ghana. The concern of this paper – presenting the Greek text in a way that maintains the original intention of the text and conforms with sound theology – was not addressed, perhaps because their focus was on the peace elements in the pericope of their work. This work interprets the Greek text in a manner that feeds into the use of the text in warfare, and the ramification of same. Mark Ryan has said that believers base their warfare against Satan on Matthew 18:18.⁴⁷¹

R. T. France stresses the fact that binding and loosing in Matthew 18:18 relates to non-humans since the object of binding and loosing is in the neuter case.⁴⁷² This submission suggests that though human beings are involved in the text, the activity of binding and loosing relates to the sinful nature of the sinner, not the sinner himself or herself. The emphasis of binding and loosing is on the neuter object.

Alan Hugh McNeile corroborates the view of R. T. France on neuter object. He adds that the binding and loosing should not be viewed as ‘excommunication and forgiveness’⁴⁷³ of an individual. In accordance with the context of the text, McNeile limits the users of the power to engage in binding and loosing members of the body of Christ.⁴⁷⁴ It is worthy of note that not all people in the church have this power to bind and to loose; the power is for those who truly belong to Christ, even if physical weaknesses prevent them from being physically present in the gathering of the saints.

In the view of Robert H. Mounce, the text makes room for expulsion, as the church may deem right.⁴⁷⁵ This view targets an individual as the object of binding and loosing, unlike the views of France and McNeile. The stance of Mounce further makes room for the church to decide who remains in the church and who leaves. He submits that God ratifies whatever decision the church makes on such matters.⁴⁷⁶

However, Leon Morris is of the opinion that the church does not have such power to make its resolutions bind God.⁴⁷⁷ He further stresses the fact that the church ought to depend on the leading of God in order to arrive at a decision that has been predetermined by God. William Barclay supports the view of Morris.⁴⁷⁸

It is worthy of note that Morris brings out the verb form of the Greek text for which reason he draws his conclusion. He interprets *ἔσται δεδεμένα* as ‘shall have been bound’ and *ἔσται*

⁴⁷⁰ E. F. Asamoah & E. T. Kpalam, “A Critical Study of Matthew 18:15-18 in New Testament Greek and Selected Akan Mother-Tongue Translations: Implication for Peace-Making in Ghana” *ESI Preprints* (2023): 385, <https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p378>.

⁴⁷¹ Mark Ryan, “Matthew 18:18 and Binding Satan in Prayer,” *Christian Research Journal* 39, no. 01 (2016): 1, <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>.

⁴⁷² R. T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 275.

⁴⁷³ Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), 267.

⁴⁷⁴ McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 267.

⁴⁷⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *New International Biblical Commentary: Matthew* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 176-176.

⁴⁷⁶ Mounce, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 176.

⁴⁷⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 469.

⁴⁷⁸ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1975), 2:189.

λελυμένα as ‘shall have been loosed.’⁴⁷⁹ This rendition of the Greek text sheds so much light on the theology of Jesus Christ. It is a reminder to Christians, especially users of Matthew 18:18, to certify God’s established ruling on a matter before any action is carried out.

Selected English Translations of Matthew 18:18

The problem that this paper seeks to deal with in the Asante-Twi version of the Bible is reflected also in some translations of the English Bible. Perhaps, these translations of Matthew 18:18 in these versions, especially those that were done before the Asante-Twi version of the Bible, might have led to the losing of sight of the details of the verb form of the Greek text. Some of these translations are juxtaposed with the Asante-Twi version of the Bible here to bring out the varied interpretations different translators have given to the text and the impact of same on the religious practice of the users of these translations. Two of such English versions and the Twi version read as follows.

*Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*⁴⁸⁰

*Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*⁴⁸¹

*Nokore mese mo se, biribiara a mobekykyere no asase soɔ no, wɔbekykyere no soro; na biribiara a mobesane no asase soɔ no, wɔbesane no soro.*⁴⁸²

It must be noted that the 2012 version of the Asante-Twi Bible, as quoted above, reflects in the NIV 2011 and NKJV 1982 English translations above: they translate a portion of the Greek text as ‘... will be bound...’ and ‘will be loosed.’⁴⁸³ Accordingly, the Asante-Twi version of the Bible shares in the problematic translations in these texts. This testifies of the widespread inconsistency in the translation of Matthew 18:18 and the attendant varied opinions about the use of the text in Christian practices, especially in the area of conflict resolution and warfare prayer.

Basically, a problem arises in some of the translations of the grammar in the text, and the Asante-Twi version of the Bible suffers a similar fate. The problem originates from the form of the verb in the second part of each pair of propositions in the text. The first proposition has to do with what is bound in heaven and what is bound on earth. The second proposition has to do with what is loosed in heaven and what is loosed on earth.

The translation that the writer considers problematic suggests that whatever human beings agree on as a resolution on a particular matter will be upheld in heaven. This stance suggests that even if two different groups contradict the resolution of each other, those resolutions will be upheld in heaven. In other words, this stance holds that God endorses what human beings resolve to do and gives them His backing. It must be noted that not only is this stance chaotic; it is also theologically unsound, for it leads to a kind of confusion for which God is to blame.

How the chain of events should be and/or who initiates an action for the other to confirm is contradicted by the different positions. This crisis calls for a critical examination of the Greek text for a translation that is consistent with the thought of Jesus Christ, as reported by Matthew, a disciple and an apostle of Jesus Christ, in Matthew 18:18.

⁴⁷⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 469.

⁴⁸⁰ New International Version, 2011.

⁴⁸¹ New King James Version, 1982.

⁴⁸² Asante Twi, 2012.

⁴⁸³ It must be noted that some versions of the English Bible translate this part of the Greek text as ‘will have been bound’ and ‘will have been loosed’ respectively. This suggests that there is a difference in the views of Bible translators of the English Bible, and that they treat the grammatical structure of the Greek text of Matthew 18:18 differently.

Methodology

Matthew 18:18 has been interpreted and used in different ways based on the background of the scholars involved. Sometimes too, the interest of these scholars influences their interpretation. However, this study employs mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics to bring out the meaning of the Greek text to bear on the translation of the Asante-Twi version of the Bible. It must be reiterated that the mother tongue of an individual is critical to their learning lives. This includes the religious lives of these individuals.

According to J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, mother tongue biblical hermeneutics, also referred to as mother-tongue biblical studies, is ‘the scholarly engagement of the indigenous language translations of the Bible in order to understand what they say and mean to the readers.’⁴⁸⁴ In other words, biblical scholars study the Bible critically and present an accurate or a near-accurate vernacular version of it to people of a particular local setting.

Key proponents of mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics are J. D. K. Ekem and J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor. It is worthy of note that Kuwornu-Adjaottor quotes Ekem as having said that many vernacular Bibles suffer some translation deficiency and need to be addressed.⁴⁸⁵ The veracity of this submission opens a floodgate of wrong religious practices among the patrons of such translations. Accordingly, it is expedient that such translations are revised to impact positively on the religious practices of Bible users.

Bernard Amadu Asewie asserts that people understand their mission when they are communicated to in their mother tongue.⁴⁸⁶ In other words clarity is needed for a person to carry out a particular assignment, and this clarity is better attained when one is addressed in the mother tongue. It is from this angle that the writer asserts that the mother tongue rendition of the Greek text should be done properly, for it has the capacity to influence the reader or audience in their religious practices.

The writer holds that the rendering of the biblical text in Asante-Twi, a Ghanaian dialect of the Akan language, to maintain the meaning of the Greek is essential to the religious lives of the users of this text. Accordingly, the Greek text is critically analysed and juxtaposed with some translations, especially the 2012 version of Asante-Twi Bible. A suggested translation that seeks to maintain the sanctity of the Greek text is suggested accordingly.

The Greek Text

*Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅσα ἐὰν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ ὅσα ἐὰν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν οὐρανῷ.*⁴⁸⁷

The rendition of the Greek text of Matthew is such that much detail is contained in it. The actions in the text are not as simple as it may appear. Special attention is paid to the tense forms of the text to bring out what was actually intended by Jesus Christ in the words in Matthew 18:18. The action of binding is recorded in the Greek text as *ἔσται δεδεμένα* and that of loosing is recorded as *ἔσται λελυμένα*. It is the understanding of these expressions that have given rise to different translations. Accordingly, the analysis focusses on these expressions.

⁴⁸⁴ J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana,” *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 4, no. 3 (2012): 577.

⁴⁸⁵ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics,” 576.

⁴⁸⁶ Bernard Amadu Asewie, “Towards a Model for Contextualising Christianity in the Nchumuru Culture in Ghana: The Impact of Mother Tongue Scriptures from 1989-2011” (MTh., South African Theological Seminary 2013), 123, <https://sats.ac.za/theses/bernard-asewie-mth-thesis-final/>.

⁴⁸⁷ Barbara Aland et al., *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader’s Edition* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 55.

The Meaning of ἔσται δεδεμένα and ἔσται λελυμένα

The infinitive forms of the act of binding and the act of loosing are *δέω* and *λύω* respectively.⁴⁸⁸ These forms of the verbs simply mean ‘to bind’ and ‘to loose’ respectively, and cannot tell the tense of the action of binding and loosing, to warrant any translation on account of ambiguity. However, the verb form used in the text is not in the infinitive; it is a combination of the future indicative form *ἔσται*, on one hand, whose voice is middle; and *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα*, on the other hand, perfect forms whose voices are either middle or passive. The details in the verb forms come with a particular meaning that cannot be ambiguous.

First, the verb form, *ἔσται*, has been used to reflect a future sense of its infinitive form. This word, which is a form of the verb, *εἰμί*, suggests the state in which something should be found in future. The voice of this verb is indicative. This suggests the certainty of the meaning of what is being described. In other words, the form of the verb eliminates every form of uncertainty; what is being talked about ought to be in a particular form.

Again, *ἔσται* is in the singular form, as used in the text. This is reflective of the fact that the discussion is about one thing at a time. In this case, each case of binding in the lives of Christians is being addressed in the text, regardless of where it occurs. This emphasises how heaven recognises every resolution in the lives of human beings and expects it to be in a particular form; nothing is too insignificant to be given attention by God.

The voice of *ἔσται* as a verb is also important in fully comprehending the text. Here, the voice is middle. This indicates that what is being talked about does not have any role to play. The thing is neither actively involved in what is going on or passively suffering from the action going on. In other words, the state in which the thing can be is what is being talked about in the text. In this case, the state of the resolution of Christians is what the text talks about.

The verb forms *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα* contribute greatly to understanding the text contextually and align it with sound theology. Primarily, these words are used in the perfect tense. Accordingly, they speak to the completeness of the realisation of the verbs. In this case, *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα* seek to complete the work of *ἔσται*. This further suggests the state of the resolution of Christians. Specifically, the resolution of Christians must conform to what has been completed. Here, what has been completed is found in *οὐρανῷ*.

Another area of importance to the meaning of the expression *ἔσται δεδεμένα* and *ἔσται λελυμένα* is the number in *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα*. Here, *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα* are in the plural case, unlike *ἔσται*, which is in the singular case. The impact of this structure on the meaning of the text is that there are many complete resolutions in heaven, and that whatever Christians on earth resolve to do must be in line with the numerous complete resolutions in heaven.

Unlike *ἔσται*, which is middle in terms of voice, *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα* have been used to reflect a middle or passive voice in the text; not an active voice. The middle voice of these verbs indicates that these verbs are neither acting nor acted upon by the subject, and the passive voice suggests that what is referred to is acted upon. In this case, whether *δεδεμένα* and *λελυμένα* are seen as middle or passive, they have no active role to play in the text. This suggests that the state of the resolutions that govern Christianity has been decided already.

Findings and Discussions

A critical look at the Matthean text under discussion, Matthew 18:18, leads to the reading of the text in Asante-Twi as:

⁴⁸⁸ Hebrew/Greek Interlinear Bible (43-b231009), HagiosTech.com.

Nokore mese mo se, biribiara a mobekykyere no asaase soɔ no beye deɛ woakykyere no soro dada; na biribiara a mobesane no asaase soɔ no beye deɛ wɔasane no soro dada.

The translation above is in line with the Greek text to a very high degree. It equally agrees with the submission of Alfred Marshall, who translates *ἔσται δεδεμένα* as ‘shall be having been bound’ and *ἔσται λελυμένα* as ‘shall be having been loosed.’⁴⁸⁹ This brings out a number of facts.

First, it is evident that God has the template of resolutions. This is to say that heaven has a record of what has been bound and what has been loosed. This further brings out the idea that nothing can be added to the list of items that have been bound in heaven and the list of things that have been loosed in heaven. Invariably, this understanding reflects how God treats prayer; the list of what can be bound on earth is in heaven already, and Christians must seek to know this and pray along these lines.

The second point of interest is that it is only what has been bound in heaven that can be bound on earth. The immediate context of the text has to do with conflict resolution. The form of the resolution can relate to binding something, and this binding can only receive the support of God if it is in line with what has been resolved in heaven. Any resolution that contradicts what is in heaven automatically is born not of the Spirit of God. So is the case of warfare prayer; Christians can only bind what is bound in heaven. In other words, what is not bound in heaven cannot be bound on earth.

Equally important is the fact that it is only what has been loosed in heaven that can be loosed on earth. Resolutions can be such that someone or something is loosed. The Greek text is interested in loosing what has been loosed in heaven. In other words, if people attempt to loose what has not been loosed in heaven, they will not be successful at it. Conflict resolutions and warfare prayer must be aligned with this understanding.

To some extent, since the activeness of both *ἔσται* and *δεδεμένα* has been defined already, it can be said that the nature and content of Christian warfare has been defined in heaven. Accordingly, such warfare must be in consonance with the resolutions in heaven. In other words, any resolution that is not in line with what is in heaven will suffer loss – whether it is conflict resolution or spiritual warfare.

It must be observed that not everything people say in prayer receives God’s approval. Accordingly, there are prayers that God acts upon and there are prayers that God neither acknowledges nor acts upon. This is the position of Matthew 18:18, and this position is equally registered in the Lord’s Prayer, as recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. Emphasis is laid on the dominance of the will of God in the affairs of human beings in consonance with the state of affairs in heaven.

Recommendations

Biblical scholars should pay attention to scriptures whose translations have led to questionable religious practices. Some aspects of the Bible have been rendered in some vernacular languages in a manner which leads to wrong practices in Christian circles. These misinterpretations must be looked at critically and reworked to correct theologically problematic doctrines and practices that are purportedly seen to have some basis in the Bible and have received endorsement in some Christian circles.

Ministers of the gospel must be trained rigorously in the art and science of interpretation and to dwell on the mother-tongue version of the Bible in accordance with the language of their

⁴⁸⁹ Alfred Marshall, *NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1986), 58.

congregation. The discussion above suggests that the understanding of the Bible affects the religious practices of Christians. Meanwhile, these understandings emanate from how the Bible has been translated for its users, especially those who depend heavily on the vernacular version of the Bible. Accordingly, the way forward is for ministers of the gospel to be interested in sound Bible translation.

Believers must endeavour to follow the way of the Bible even if they have been doing the wrong thing for a long time, and learn to accept the right thing when it is discovered. Following the way of the Bible, as it were, is meant to lead one into the light. This implies that whenever one discovers that something is erroneous, and they are certain about the authenticity of their new knowledge, they should desire to amend their ways. In this case, believers should align their understanding with theologically sound interpretations of the Bible in relation to Matthew 18:18 and pursue same.

Conclusion

This paper has concerned itself with bringing out the meaning of the Greek text in Matthew 18:18 and making use of mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics to influence the Asante Twi version of the Bible. It has been discovered that binding and loosing are determined by what is bound and loosed in heaven, and that what is not bound or loosed in heaven cannot be bound or loosed on earth respectively. This applies to conflict resolutions and extends to warfare prayer.

The theological position of what Jesus Christ said in Matthew 18:18 is that believers must align their understanding of matters with how heaven understands matters. Anything short of this could be considered as erroneous or even heretic. Accordingly, the suggested translation of Matthew 18:18, which seeks to maintain the sanctity of the original Greek text in Asante- Twi, is:

Nokore mese mo se, biribiara a mobekyekyere no asaase soɔ no beye deɛ woakyekyere no soro dada; na biribiara a mobesane no asaase soɔ no beye deɛ wɔasane no soro dada.

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Applying Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics: An Anlo Perspective On Reinterpreting Judges 4:15-20

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Abstract

Mother-tongue hermeneutics is an interpretive approach designed to translate and contextualize scripture into the native languages of local communities. By considering the language and cultural worldview of these communities, this approach enables readers to connect more deeply with Biblical texts, interpreting key concepts through familiar cultural values and symbols. Seen as a linguistic framework that provides origin, relevance, and functionality, mother-tongue hermeneutics plays a significant role in reshaping Christian theological dialogues in Africa. Through this method, Biblical translation achieves meaningful theological interpretations that foster accessible and relevant discourse for indigenous readers. Advocates of mother-tongue hermeneutics describe it as a discipline dedicated to translating and reinterpreting Biblical texts into languages considered by their speakers as their primary, native tongue. The study concludes that promoting mother-tongue hermeneutics globally could support the spread of Christianity by fostering deeper understanding and engagement among diverse populations.

Keywords: Mother-tongue hermeneutics, theological dialogues, interpretation, reinterpretation, indigenes.

Introduction

A mother tongue is the native language of a people, distinct from vernacular. While a vernacular is the commonly spoken language of a region or community, a mother tongue is deeply rooted in a person's identity.⁴⁹⁰ It is not simply a language one learns well, but rather the first language a person grows up with—connected to heritage, family, and community. It is woven into one's sense of self, shaping who one is and where one comes from.⁴⁹¹ As the language into which one is born and raised, the mother tongue serves as a medium for our most personal thoughts and feelings.⁴⁹² It is the language of one's core identity, often carrying the wisdom, knowledge, insight, science, theology, and philosophy of a culture.⁴⁹³

Because a mother tongue is usually passed down from one's family, it becomes the foundation upon which other languages are learned. It is the language a child instinctively learns first, influenced by their mother or immediate caregivers. This native language is critical for understanding one's own culture and worldview, allowing for authentic expression before translating into other languages.

⁴⁹⁰ JET. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana" *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, vol. 3, 4 (2012), 576.

⁴⁹¹ Justin S. Ukpog, "Developments in Biblical interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical directions." Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube eds. *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden-Boston-Koln; Brill, 2000), 11.

⁴⁹² Ukpog, *Developments in Biblical interpretation in Africa*, 11.

⁴⁹³ Livingstone Yao Torsu *A Reflection on the Effects of Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics on Christianity*, 13-20.

Christianity, Language and Culture

Christianity has consistently recognized the importance of language and culture in conveying its message.⁴⁹⁴ This suggests that both language and culture are essential to communicating the Christian faith effectively. Without these elements, Christianity risks becoming both limited in reach and less meaningful. While some argue that language and culture can exist independently, focusing solely on language as a means of communication without considering its cultural context is questionable. Language functions within a cultural framework, influencing both speaker and listener, and even in the simplest exchanges, culture affects communication,⁴⁹⁵ however subtly. Eugene observes that “languages are fundamentally part of culture, and words cannot be accurately understood apart from the local cultural phenomena they symbolize.”⁴⁹⁶ This highlights language’s indispensable role in a culture, as culture cannot thrive or even exist meaningfully without it. Language is the primary means of expressing and understanding culture, making it undeniable that language is deeply intertwined with cultural expression.⁴⁹⁷

But what, then, is culture? Asante argues that defining culture is complex. Culture encompasses the behavioural patterns people adopt in response to their environment and pass down through generations via art, symbols, and traditions, which shape a group’s identity and values, influencing what is accepted or rejected socially. Culture includes elements such as dress, diet, dance, beliefs, worship, and social norms.⁴⁹⁸ According to Asante, culture represents a way of life—a specific worldview and approach to the universe that helps people adapt to their environment. It encompasses various aspects of life, including agriculture, technology, politics, kinship, family, art, religion, and language.⁴⁹⁹

In essence, society defines and categorizes individuals based on their dress, speech, tastes, beliefs, and manners.⁵⁰⁰ Culture, therefore, plays a vital role in uniting and identifying people, with language acting as the vehicle for this cultural transmission.⁵⁰¹ Since language facilitates every individual and group activity, it is essential to view language through the broader cultural and historical lens of those who speak it. This perspective leads to a further discussion of how language and culture interact within the context of mother-tongue hermeneutics.

Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics

Mother-tongue hermeneutics is an academic endeavour where scholars aim to enhance translation into native languages by incorporating local philosophy and worldview. Ekem describes mother-tongue hermeneutics as a context-sensitive interpretive approach that results in study Bibles and commentaries addressing theological, linguistic, and anthropological issues in people’s native

⁴⁹⁴ Aidan Kwame Ahaligah, *Mother-Tongue Theology: Akan Christian Christological Re-interpretations, Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal*, Volume 1 Issue 2 – July 2020 pp 10-18 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38159/pecanep.2020071>, Accessed 4/4/2024.

⁴⁹⁵ Elmes, D. *The Relationship between Language and Culture*. Retrieved on June 14, 2016 from <http://www2.lib.nifs-k.ac.jp/HPBU/annals/an46/46-11.pdf>.

⁴⁹⁶ Nida, Eugene A. *Contexts in Translating*. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 125.

⁴⁹⁷ Livingstone Yao Torsu, *The Ewe Bible Rendering of Shalom in some selected Texts (Judges 4:17, 1 Samuel 1:17 and 2 Kings 9: 19) of the Hebrew Bible: Implications for Anlo cultural perspective* (University of Cape Coast: Unpublished, 2020), 219.

⁴⁹⁸ Emmanuel Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development: Ethical and Theological Reflections on the Ghanaian Experience*. (Accra: Challenge Enterprise, 2007), 2.

⁴⁹⁹ Emmanuel Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development: Ethical and Theological Reflections on the Ghanaian Experience*. (Accra: Challenge Enterprise, 2007), 3.

⁵⁰⁰ D.S.L. Konotey-Hulu, *Sense and Nonsense in Christianity* (Accra: Ghana; Anest Company Limited Main Press, 2004), 175.

⁵⁰¹ Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development*, 2.

languages.⁵⁰² This work is part of a broader movement that aligns with the concept of intellectual and cultural entrepreneurship.⁵⁰³

Though “hermeneutics” broadly refers to the field of interpretation, including exegesis, it also has a narrower meaning focused on discerning the present-day relevance of ancient texts.⁵⁰⁴ Sanneh emphasizes that translating the Christian gospel into local languages, particularly in Africa, not only fostered a localized expression of the religion but also sparked a cultural renewal, deepened self-understanding, instilled vernacular pride, and led to a religious and social revival, illustrating the mutual exchange in missionary work.⁵⁰⁵

Methodology for Mother-tongue translation and interpretation

To thoroughly explain this method, the researcher finds it appropriate to focus on the extensive work of Kuwornu Adjaottor. His work highlights and systematically organizes the method for mother-tongue interpretation, providing a clear guide for Bible interpreters. According to Kuwornu the methodology requires the researcher to first identify a Biblical text that they believe has been mistranslated into their mother tongue. The researcher should then explain why this translation poses cultural issues. Next, the exegete must outline and justify the methodology they plan to use, along with any key proponents of this approach.

The process involves conducting an in-depth study (or exegesis) of the text using biblical resources such as dictionaries, commentaries, encyclopedias, and word studies to examine scholarly interpretations and their rationale. Following this, the researcher should explore how the concept functions within their language and culture, interviewing native speakers for deeper insight. Local terms should be used in the analysis, with explanations provided in English.

The researcher should then compare the text in their mother tongue with other Ghanaian translations they are familiar with, followed by an analysis of these translations. This includes examining the meanings: how do they align with or differ from the original Hebrew or Greek text? What factors may have led to these differences?

Finally, the exegete is expected to produce a new translation that aligns with their cultural context.⁵⁰⁶ These steps set the framework for translation and interpretation within mother tongue hermeneutics. As teaching and learning extend into non-formal education, there is a need to connect these insights with practical application.

Application of Mother-tongue Hermeneutics

The application of mother tongue hermeneutics goes beyond merely translating biblical texts into local languages; it involves identifying inconsistencies or ambiguities that might arise during translation, which could affect comprehension and the intended meaning.⁵⁰⁷ Rather than relying on strict external principles, this approach promotes reasoning through biblical issues in one’s mother tongue to make scripture practical and accessible. This method provides a culturally and

⁵⁰² John D.K. Ekem, *Priesthood in Context: A Study of Priesthood in Some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation*. (Accra: SonLife Press, 2008), 188.

⁵⁰³ Torsu, *A Reflection on the Effects of Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics on Christianity*, 13-20.

⁵⁰⁴ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Michigan; Zondervan, 2003), 29.

⁵⁰⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 238-240.

⁵⁰⁶ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T., "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and the Development of Indigenous Ghanaian Theologies," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 13, no. 2 (2010): 27–34

⁵⁰⁷ Amevenku, Frederick Mawusi, and Boabeng, Isaac, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon, 2022), 38-45.

contextually grounded interpretation that brings abstract concepts to life in familiar, relatable ways.⁵⁰⁸

In essence, mother tongue hermeneutics is an applied form of theology that interprets the Bible within specific cultural contexts, such as Ghanaian culture.⁵⁰⁹ It does not aim to alter doctrinal meanings but to make them more relevant to people's lives. African Christians, for instance, can draw on their own philosophies and cultural expressions to deepen their religious and social understanding. African philosophy, which centers on meaning, understanding, interpretation, and way of life, is reflected in how Africans communicate and behave. Thus, proverbs, euphemisms, and anecdotes can enhance comprehension by conveying complex ideas in culturally resonant forms.⁵¹⁰

Three principles guide the practice of contextual mother tongue hermeneutics:

1. **Continental/African philosophy**
2. **Cultural relevance**
3. **Contextual application**

This approach aligns with Christianity's global mission to make the word of God accessible to all. Those knowledgeable in their cultural philosophy should be encouraged to participate in biblical interpretation and translation, ensuring that biblical messages reach people without obstacles. This inclusive approach acknowledges that the Bible's teachings are meant for all, not just scholars. For instance, a Ghanaian pastor might interpret Ephesians 6:12 by using local concepts like sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft to represent "principalities and powers," making the text relevant and understandable within the cultural context.⁵¹¹

Example of Application of Mother Tongue Hermeneutical Work

Sisera Flee to Jael's Tent

In this passage, the author describes how Sisera flees from the battlefield, pursued by Barak, and eventually seeks refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Sisera chooses Jael's tent because there is "shalom"—a peace or alliance—between Jabin, King of Hazor, and Heber. This mention of "shalom" implies a close connection between the two households, though the concept of "shalom" extends beyond a simple notion of peace. To fully grasp its meaning, it's important to consider both its general English meaning, "peace," and the Ewe term *nutifafa*, which encompasses broader connotations such as blessing, friendship, success, well-being, wholeness, prosperity, safety, silence, absence of conflict, and unity.

If peace indeed exists between the two households, one might expect these qualities to characterize their relationship. According to Dogbe, in Anlo culture, where *nutifafa* (peace) is present, life should be marked by wholeness and tranquility, allowing people to pursue their activities comfortably. This implies that family bonds are tightly woven, leaving no room for hostility. However, the use of *nutifafa* (peace) in this context presents interpretive challenges, suggesting potential ambiguity and raising questions for this study.

In verse 18, Jael steps outside her tent to meet Sisera, inviting him in with reassuring words: "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; have no fear." Sisera then enters the tent, and she covers him with a rug (Judges 4:18). This interaction suggests that Sisera may be persuaded to enter due

⁵⁰⁸ Churchil-Hill, A.N., and Opuine, A.N., "The Roles of Women in the New Testament and Contemporary Church in Nigeria," *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice* (2021).

⁵⁰⁹ Konotey-Hulu, *Sense and Nonsense in Christianity*, 104.

⁵¹⁰ Boudet, Anna Maria Munoz, et al., *Directions in Development: Human Development on Norms and Agency - Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2013).

⁵¹¹ Churchil-Hill, A.N., and Opuine, A.N., "The Roles of Women in the New Testament and Contemporary Church in Nigeria," *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice* (2021).

to Jael's seemingly kind words. The question arises: why does Jael tell him not to fear? Was Sisera wary of something? The text remains silent, leaving room for interpretation.

This interaction between Sisera and Jael can be connected to Heber's earlier actions in verse 11. Viewed from an Anlo perspective, it might imply underlying tensions, possibly linking to an Ewe adage: "a watchdog bites because of past issues"—indicating that unresolved conflicts can resurface as retaliatory actions. In Anlo culture, hesitation to trust another person, especially one who is supposedly known, often points to ancestral disputes, past disagreements, or unresolved tensions.

Sisera's potential reluctance could reflect an unspoken tension rooted in Heber's separation from his own people, the Kenites. While the reasons for this separation are not clarified, Jael's actions might subtly remind Sisera of unresolved grievances, aligning with another Ewe saying: "the offender may forget, but the victim may never forget." This adage suggests that past offenses remain in memory, even if the perpetrator has seemingly moved on. In this light, Jael's invitation in verse 18 might hint at lingering memories of past conflicts and underlying tensions between their peoples.

If we examine Sisera's hesitation further, we might ask why he is reluctant to enter Jael's tent. Perhaps his thoughts reflect the Anlo proverb, "Ketɔ fe tame manyae," meaning "one cannot read the minds of his enemies." This sentiment resembles the story of Zanu and Yɔxɔmee against Kokoroko in *Ku le Xɔme*,⁵¹² suggesting Sisera's initial mistrust toward Jael. Situating this fear within the context of the narrative, it could be argued that Sisera's caution is due to Heber the Kenite's separation from his fellow Kenites. While the exact reason for this division is not provided, we know the Kenites had associations with various groups, such as the Jebusites, Amalekites, and Ammonites, in Canaan. Perhaps Heber felt discontented when King Jabin became king of Hazor but chose to remain silent, something Sisera might have been aware of and which could have added to his suspicion. Jael might also have known of this tension, which she used to lure Sisera into her tent.

The act of luring, in this sense, implies deliberate persuasion with hidden intentions. This choice of words hints at Jael's concealed agenda. One might expect Sisera to recognize Jael's intentions, but he does not. Jael's behavior could have served as a warning, as an Ewe proverb suggests: "yatsie fia xɔnuɔ fe ame,"⁵¹³ meaning "the blowing rain determines the direction of the doorpost." Yet, Sisera fails to interpret her subtle signals.

Jael's behavior toward Sisera resembles modern-day scams in Ghana. For instance, on March 22, 2019, Jimmy received a call from a fraudster who pretended to know him. The caller claimed to have worked at Tema Oil Refinery and later pursued a Master's degree abroad before returning to Ghana to manage an oil company in Takoradi. The fraudster proposed a business deal, saying he would send goods from abroad to Jimmy for him to oversee. Jimmy responded cautiously, asking the caller to send his full name and picture via WhatsApp. After this, the fraudster disappeared, neither calling again nor sending any message. Had Jimmy agreed to the deal, the scammer might have demanded something from him later. This scenario mirrors the unspoken threat Jael posed to Sisera, underscoring the need for vigilance in an age where scams are common. The parallel between Jael's deception and modern scams serves as a reminder to remain alert in a world rife with hidden agendas.

⁵¹² Akafia, S. Y. *Ku le Xɔme*. Accra; Ghana: Bureau of Ghana Languages. Akrofi, C.A., Botchey G.L. & Takyi B.K.. *An English Akan Ewe Ga Dictionary* (Ghana: Accra: Waterville Presbyterian Press, 1996). 129.

⁵¹³ Obianim, S. J. *Evegbe nɔti nunya Akpa Evelia* (*Ewe Grammar Book 2*) Tata Evelia, *Second Edition*, (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited 1999), 58.

Jael Baites Sisera Judges 4:19-20

In Judges 4:19-20, the story of Jael and Sisera unfolds during a time when Israel was oppressed by King Jabin of Canaan. Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, flees after his forces are defeated in battle by the Israelite army under the command of Deborah, a prophetess and judge, and Barak, Israel's military leader.

As Sisera seeks refuge, he encounters Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who offers him shelter. He asks for water, but she gives him milk and covers him, making him feel secure. In verses 19-20, Sisera instructs Jael to stand guard at the tent's entrance and lie about his presence if anyone asks. However, Jael ultimately kills him while he sleeps, fulfilling the prophecy Deborah made that Sisera would fall "into the hands of a woman." Jael's act not only brings Sisera's defeat but also initiates Israel's victory over Jabin's oppression.

In verse 19, the author recounts how Sisera, seeking refuge, asks Jael for water, but she offers him milk instead and covers him. These actions suggest an act of hospitality, creating an atmosphere of safety and care. Trusting Jael, Sisera asks her to stand guard at the door and lie about his whereabouts to anyone who might be searching for him. This request reveals Sisera's confidence in Jael, which ultimately leads to his downfall. At this moment, Sisera likely does not suspect any harm from her; his concern is with external threats. Ironically, his death is brought about by Jael, the very person he trusted with his life.

In Anlo culture, such a situation would be described as "*ame na kpɔ abe ame evɔ wonye kue*," meaning one cannot judge a person's character based solely on their appearance, as appearances can be deceptive. Another phrase, "*aɖu konu dometɔ le vovo*," which translates to "the smile and display of teeth differ from what is in the stomach," highlights how Jael's outward actions do not reflect her true intentions. She is a "wolf in sheep's clothing," or as expressed in Anlo, "*dzata wonye do alevi wu*." Jael's behavior betrays the trust Sisera placed in her, leading to his tragic death at her hands.

Such events in Anlo are considered extremely dangerous and can lead to disastrous consequences within families. This story highlights the danger of human pretense, an issue still relevant today, especially in contexts where many claim to be believers. Unfortunately, this attitude is becoming more prevalent. It is not uncommon to see people in churches, families, organizations, and workplaces showing affection through gestures or outward acts of kindness, while their true intentions remain hidden. As a result, some individuals get close to others only to extract personal information and later use it to undermine them. In many cases, people use gifts or acts of charity as a means to gather information for ulterior motives. The wealthy may exploit the poor to increase their own wealth, then treat them poorly, ensuring they remain in their disadvantaged state.

Conclusion

This paper explores a practical approach to mother tongue hermeneutics, drawing on continental philosophies, particularly African philosophy, to benefit local communities. It argues that hermeneutical work in the mother tongue should not be confined to academic settings but should engage individuals familiar with the local culture and philosophy, enabling them to interpret biblical messages and provide meaningful insights for their people in their native language. The paper outlines three key steps in this process. It emphasizes that the mother tongue is a person's foundational language, learned from parents before any others, distinguishing it from the vernacular. Furthermore, it highlights the integral connection between language, culture, and Christianity, asserting that Christianity cannot thrive independently of these elements; language and culture are essential vehicles for the faith. The paper also stresses that, while interpreting or translating the Bible using the methodology of mother tongue hermeneutics, strict adherence to

certain steps is necessary for effective communication. The author critiques the potential for such approaches to be seen as a form of cultural colonization, noting that local communities possess their own philosophies, which can be equally valid in interpreting the Bible. The paper advocates for moving beyond academic or external frameworks and encourages local, contextualized interpretations. Ultimately, it calls for the promotion of mother tongue hermeneutics in practical applications, where communities can engage in biblical interpretation and translation based on their own philosophies, cultures, and contexts.

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Formulating African Christian Theology: A Contextualization Approach.

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Abstract

The early Christian theologies have sometimes focused on issues that are not completely relevant to the African context and also not properly presented in the African context. This paper seeks to encourage the articulation of theology that originates from within the African culture and context to correct some of these earlier or Western theologies. It provides ways to search for the meaning of scriptures and applies them to the African way of life. Scripture is interpreted within a context, African Christian theology can be based on such, owing to its originality and relevance. Contextualization is conclusively in this article proposed as a tool for the formulation of a balanced and authentic African Christian theology. Content analysis methodology of anthropological approach of qualitative analysis of secondary sources was adopted for this paper because of its relevance among other methods and time constraints.

Keywords: Western theologies, content analysis, Scriptures, Culture and Context.

Introduction

The need for a balanced and authentic African Christian theology cannot be over-emphasized as a theology in practice today in the African continent, Contextual theology is one remedy that can produce a balanced and authentic African Christian Theology. Theology is a discipline that strives to bring out the different individual's faith in God in clear terms and manner. It "does not operate outside the boundaries of our human experience."⁵¹⁴ Therefore, understanding human experience of God and the world varies from one situation to another, and theology is in focus. Taking the human experiences into account in theological reflections placed in the domain of context. One major influence of the West on Africa has been the effect of colonization and its legacy which has led to the accomplishment of a transformation that has created a world as a social system started on subjugation and kept by vigor and sustained by missionary movements to a large extent.⁵¹⁵

The effect of colonization on African soil especially in Nigeria as seen today cannot be over-emphasized. It was and still is a total system that destitute the colonized of their theologies, and political structures, and endangered their economies to the needs of the colonial masters and leaders even on the missionary front. Colonization also destroyed large areas of the cultural and social life of the colonized which was accomplished largely by slavery. This includes their religious beliefs and systems that are defamed aspects of culture and indigenous religions. John Parrat asserts that:

Many elements of the African religion were effectively secularized and thus trivialized: masks that represented the deep sacrality of the presence of ancestors found their way into European museums,

⁵¹⁴ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, "Contextual Theological Methodological" in Diane B. Stinton (ed.), *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 4.

⁵¹⁵ John Parratt, "Introduction" in John Parratt (Ed.), *An Introduction to the Third World Theologies* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

and dances originally associated with rituals became mere tourist attractions. Deeply held religious beliefs were also diminished as superstition and little attempt was made to analyze the rationale behind the concept of evil and causality. Even the most experienced missionaries often quite misunderstood the belief systems of those to whom they sought to minister.⁵¹⁶

African Theologians have begun rediscovering the real value of their religious tradition and seeking to bring them to dialogue with their Christian faith. Hence, the emergence of African Christian theology. To have a balanced and authentic African Christian theology, the underlying traditional worldview must be taken into consideration. Colonialism no doubt brought Western worldviews that have had a profound impact on Christianity in Africa and consequently the arguments and proponents for a balanced and authentic African Theology that speaks, addresses, and meets the aspirations and yearnings of Africans.

The early missionaries that were instrumental in bringing Christianity to Africa had a false assumption that African tradition, culture, and religion are obsolete and have no meaningful importance.⁵¹⁷ The important point to bear in mind is that theology cannot easily and simply be exported wholly from one context to another without paying attention to the specificity of the host cultures. When one is separated from the local context in which one is situated, then theology makes little or no sense. Africa is said to have the fastest-growing Church in the world today and at the same time to have the fastest-deteriorating Church.⁵¹⁸ This underscores the essence of the subject matter, that is, an authentic and balanced African Christian Theology to again, checkmate the fast-declining rate and promote the atmosphere of the fast-growing church. Africa is a continent with diversity from foundations strongly influenced by her tradition and culture as well as those of her colonial masters and lords. This has given birth to a system where things are done with impunity and can generally be said to be far from becoming what God desires for it at creation when he declares the perfection of his work as *good* (Gen. 1:4, 10).

A balanced and authentic African Christian theology should equip African Christians to develop their own opinion and opinions about the continent of Africa, its work, society, religion, and life in general. It should persuade African Christians to let go of their fears and hold on to the God of Africa who they know as never failed. Trust Him to live in godliness, love, and righteousness. Arguably, Africa will be a better place for everyone to live in because of the global best practice of African theology. This theology would reveal solutions to the issues or problems in Africa and for Africans. We must use our creativity as Africans to solve problems by formulating a balanced and authentic Christian theology that deals with our peculiar issues and provides a model for the African context to thrive on, this is easily sustained because it is from the context. Bearing in mind that the core of theology is to promote evocative rendezvous with all aspects of life and not just with religious aspects of life,⁵¹⁹ and knowing that theology influences our lives which is also influenced by the context (or culture) in which we live; a theology that is passed from one cultural context to another, rather than been developed within that context will be irrelevant and hence, the need for a balanced and authentic or universal African theology cannot be overemphasized.

⁵¹⁶ Paratt, *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, 6.

⁵¹⁷ Doreen Setume, Fidelis Nkomazana and Senzokuhle. "Missionary Colonial Mentality and the Expansion of Christianity in Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1800 to 1900." *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2016), pp. 29-55. Published By: Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA)

⁵¹⁸ Je'adayibe Dogara Gwamma. *Perspectives in African Theology* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2008), 99.

⁵¹⁹ Dion A. Forster, "The Nature of Public Theology," in Sunday Bobai Agang, (Ge. Ed.), *African Public Theology* (Hammond, IN, U.S.A.: Hippo Books, 2020), 17.

This paper adopted the content analysis of the anthropological approach in qualitative analysis of secondary sources which were critically examined to arrive at the content or findings of this paper. These sources include but not limited to published books, articles, journals, and other reference materials.

Concept of Theology

Theology is about life, “theology comes from two Greek words: *Theo* (God) and *logos* (word). Everyone who believes in God does theology which literally can be said to be a word about God or simply thoughts in line with discussions about a *deity*.”⁵²⁰ Theologians have divided the study of theology into various subdivisions to ease the understanding of the subject matter. These include Christian theology that deals with the construction of a coherent system of Christian belief and practice while systematic theology seeks to formulate an orderly, rational, and coherent account of the Christian faith, and beliefs and investigates the development of Christian doctrine over time.

Theology as the study of God is both spiritual and academic. Academics as it involves a deep search for meaning or answers to questions that arise daily and is spiritual as it applies to the life of man. Hence, it goes beyond mere ideas that concern everyday life and issues that affect God’s creatures. Theology is not only the study of God but involves the study of how God interacts with creation. Nihinlola defines theology as “an interpretative analysis of the revelation of God involving church dogmatic tradition and human experience from a particular worldview.”⁵²¹ This explains why theology is done in a particular context, culture, philosophy, and time.

African Christian Theology

Theologians often opine from an angle and in that manner, African Christian theology comes from the African worldview or context. Worldview is the total empathetic or conception of realism as a whole, either physically or non-physically, or as a mixture of both, by a person or by a particular people or philosophy.⁵²² We talk of formulation of a theology that is Christian but African by expression and is universal. This is a theology that takes African history and experience seriously and can operate with vigor and integrity in Africa and beyond.

African Christian theology is to make sense of the African reality in the face of the Christian faith or belief system. It seeks to balance up the Christian faith and African Religion which may negate the many characteristics or forms of missionary Christianity, whose objectives were to discredit and eliminate African religion to impose Christianity.⁵²³ The recognition of the role of African religion in shaping the religious consciousness, beliefs, and practices of African Christians which constitutes an important requirement for a balanced and authentic African Christian theology is of immense importance.

Colonialism as a modern socio-political movement has strong implications for Christian missions in Africa as both Western colonialization and Christianity influenced each other and were seen cooperating at different times but differed in their primary motive, the prevailing Christian and social worldviews of the missionaries shaped the early Christian missions and for this reasons, we must assess the gadgets of both social and religious change, the philosophical methods and strategies used by the missionaries.⁵²⁴ Assessing these tools and bearing in mind that not all things in African culture, belief system, and societies are bad underscores the essence and need for

⁵²⁰ Timothy Palmer. *Christian Theology in the African Context* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2015), 3.

⁵²¹ Emiola Nihinlola, *Theology under the Mango Tree* (Ogbomoso: Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 17.

⁵²² Nihinlola, *Theology under the Mango Tree*, 18.

⁵²³ Orobator, SJ, “Contextual Theological Methodological”, 10.

⁵²⁴ Yusufu Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method* (Hammond, IN, U.S.A.: Hippo Books, 2020), 4-5.

African Christian theology to bring up at the end what is of value in the Christian faith and in line with African tradition or culture and is retained or transformed into an understanding of faith and culture that is uniquely Christian and African.⁵²⁵ Thereby leaving a Christianity that has more local content than being alien or strange and imported or exported and is locally but universally recognized. African theology should take the African situation seriously at the same time seeking to be true to the explicit teaching of the scriptures and upholding the positive values of Africans. Kunhiyop clarifies based on Wilbur O'Donovan that theology must be truly Christian but also truly African in mien⁵²⁶

As Africans and theologians whose lives are shaped by Christian theology, we must recognize that we are required to focus our attention on understanding who God is and how He is at work in our contexts in Africa. Thereby transforming our continent Africa from what we do not want or are known for, to the Africa we want and desire which is the *good* state at creation (Gen 1:31). African Christian theology may not be formulated easily without considering, the effect of colonialization and slave trade meted on Africa by their colonial and slave masters which have largely shaped their minds and or theology. Turaki asserts that:

The Europeans plundered the West Coast for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Arabs, who were busy with the trans-Saharan and East African slave trade, plundered the hinterland (Sudan) for African markets in North Africa, Arabia, and the Middle East. Similarly, although the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade is well understood, little is known about the equally infamous trans-Saharan slave trade and the East African slave trade with Arabia, the Middle East, and India. As a result, the West is held responsible for the damage it has done in Africa, while Islam and the Islamic empires escape similar scrutiny and the nature of the African experience under Islamic forms of colonialism and slavery remains hidden⁵²⁷.

In so doing, Western slavery and the imposition of British colonialism in Nigeria from 1900 to 1960 are important. The significance of Islam and the Caliphate as a major foundation of Northern society must be examined to have a balanced African Christian theology. Consideration must be given to how Western and Islamic colonialism and slavery were crucial in defining the religion, culture, ethnicity, and general social life of the African people. Christianity in the African continent largely has its origins in the missions of mainstream Western churches as such African Christian theology could be seen as a “response to being taken less seriously or for granted by the Western Church”⁵²⁸ and is a dynamic search for self-identity that takes seriously the tradition and cultures of the Africans but also seeks to address the social world of the African Christian. African Christian theology is as old as Christianity in Africa which has existed in both formal and non-formal senses, and African Christian theology aims to place the gospel in an African context viz-a-viz her beliefs, culture, traditions, and worldviews. Essentially, African theological efforts require the use of the following sources of theology: the scriptures, church traditions, human experience, reason, traditional religion, and culture.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁵ Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 6.

⁵²⁶ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop. *African Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), xiv.

⁵²⁷ Yusufu Turaki. *Tainted Legacy: Islam, Colonialism, and Slavery in Northern Nigeria* (Orlando, FL, United States: Isaac Publishing, 2010), 14.

⁵²⁸ Paratt, *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, 7.

⁵²⁹ Nihinlola, *Theology under the Mango Tree*, 19.

Factors to consider in formulating a balanced and authentic African theology:

Ancestors: African Traditional Religion believes that people continue to exist after death, it is an African belief that those who die at a mature age do not cease to be members of their community but play an active role in the lives of their descendants or people and are termed the ancestors. At death, one moves into the presence of the ancestors and so while living here on earth, one is taught how to prepare to meet them. Africans believe that the world is permeated with divinities and spirits that have positive or negative effects on every aspect of life, ancestors are part of the spirit world mostly seen as the elders or fathers of the land who have gone to the spirit world and are living for various purposes which includes protection of their loved ones, blessings and revenge as the case may be. Belief and fear of ancestors or the spirit world have made many African Christians go into syncretism⁵³⁰ and are most times worshiped. The belief in ancestral spirits as having powers to influence our daily lives is one of the most persistent religious beliefs in Africa which has continued to exert influence on the Christian life and practice. This belief or influence of ancestral spirits has a link with incarnation in some African cultures where when an old person dies and a child is born within the same period, the spirit is seen to have incarnated and most times named as such; an example is the name *Jezhi* in Gbagyi language of the middle belt region of Nigeria which means *return* which signifies the return of the death. A balanced and authentic African Christian theology must be formulated taking into cognizance the belief of the Africans about ancestors, incarnation, and the spirit world entirely which the Bible categorized into two: the good spirits (Angels) and the evil spirits (Demons).

Teaching about how the supreme God is in line with the scriptures is a step in the right direction and emphasis must be given to God in all aspects. African traditions hold that spoken words have powers to bring to effect that which is spoken and this is because the ancestors or the spirit of the dead are hanging around to back up what the living do. This is in line with Biblical teachings about curses and spells which are spoken words that the spirits bring to actualize and harm the person such words were spoken against; a typical example is the case of Balaam and Balak in Numbers 23. The Africans believe in sacrifices to break or denounce the effect of curses on humans which is in line with the Biblical teachings of the shedding of the blood of Jesus. To atone and break every known or unknown curse or sin. Such theology can only and easily be balanced by Africans who may have a better understanding of this and many other similar peculiar African concepts.

Witchcraft: This can be associated with magic, which can be likened to miracles in the Biblical perspectives, Randee Ijatuyi-Morphe cited William Dever's definition of magic as "any form of fortune telling, sorcery or witchcraft."⁵³¹ The problems of witchcraft surface within the African religious and social context with its beliefs woven into the community's life and relationship to the world. Superstition plays a role in framing the discourse on witchcraft and that is to say that witchcraft and superstition are inextricably interwoven.

Fear: is a major factor shaping African community belief in superstition with its associated customs and taboos and this fear centers on evil which can be seen as misfortune and misfortune itself can be understood as a presumed connection between fauna and humans whose desecration in their progression of collaboration would aggravate the evil.⁵³² Witchcraft can be seen as the embodiment of evil in African religion such that everything wrong or bad in society and the world

⁵³⁰ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 59.

⁵³¹ Randee Ijatuyi-Morphe'. *Africa's Social and Religious Quest: A Comprehensive Survey and Analysis of the African Situation* (Jos, Nigeria: Logos Quest publishing, 2011), 56.

⁵³² Ijatuyi-Morphe', *Africa's Social and Religious Quest*, 57.

particularly afflictions is seen to come from witchcraft. The possession of this power can be inherited or attained from a known or unknown source as a gift.⁵³³ Formulating a Balanced and universal or authentic African theology must take into cognizance this subject matter of witchcraft which is a major factor in the African context and its understanding thereof can form the basis of African Christian theology.

Mythology: Africans have explanations for their constant struggles and beliefs or way of life. Some evils are believed to have come from the ancestors which also explains some patterns that are witnessed in some families or communities in Africa. Evil behavior has consequences such as childlessness in marriage in the case of disrespectful children or the sudden death of a spouse in the case of adultery. Wrongdoing brings consequences until the proper ritual or atonement is done to appease the *gods* of the land. In formulating a balanced and authentic African theology, these understandings of some key myths are necessary as they provide a bridge for presenting Biblical teaching about wrongdoing or sin and of course the atonement through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. Just as the fall (Gen 3) destroyed our relationship with God and mankind, so is the belief in African tradition that wrongdoing has devastating consequences which most times leads to one being banished as an outcast in severe cases.

Communal Living: Africans live as a community of interdependent people, unlike the Western settings who are mostly seen as individuals or independent of others even in the family line. The community is important especially since man is existentially a being in a relationship in the African context. A typical African village setting lives as a family, doing things together in love, eating together, farming together, and attending festivals or ceremonies together which is in line with Biblical injunctions of being “your brother’s keeper” (Gen 4:1-13, Rom 14: 13-23) which has expressed Christ desire for the oneness of the church (John. 17:21-23). This explains the setting of the church as a mystical communion consisting of people of faith, living and dead who are united in communion with one another in God’s Spirit through Christ. An authentic and balanced African Christian theology can be formulated from this idea which sees the Church as a community of God, which is growing and living within communities. None lives entirely by themselves but in togetherness.

Values, beliefs, and early training: are obtained from the community which begins at the family level, and the deepest or most enduring relationships of life are established at these levels. Your sense of purpose and life is mostly shaped at the community level from such early morning gatherings by fire to warm up the body while valuable discussions and storytelling proceeds, the evening gatherings of tales by the moonlight, or the times of meals where all families come together to feast from one plate or pot. There is bonding and a sense of oneness or belonging which conforms to Biblical teachings of oneness in Christ and being co-heir with Christ as of the same family irrespective of race, color, or ethnicity. Christ is the head of the church and His blood unites us all together, teachings as these make meaning to the Africans based on his understanding of the communal lifestyle. One advantage of communal living in the African setting is discipline. Where individualism is the norm, people tend to live as they want and often resent any disciplinary measures for wrongdoing, discipline upholds the honour of Christ.

⁵³³ Yusufu Turaki. *Foundations of African Traditional Religions and Worldview* (Nairobi, Kenya: International Bible Society Africa, 2001), 157.

Customs and Ceremonies: Traditional rites, rituals, and ceremonies have their foundational beliefs and purposes. Rituals and ceremonies do have their practices, rules, and regulations which are the means to link traditional Africans with the spiritual powers and forces. Customs, rituals, and ceremonies are a means of acquiring spiritual and mystical powers, maintaining harmony or restoration of a breached relationship, and a means of communication between man and the spirit or mystical world. They are a means of receiving acquaintance, services, spiritual, and numinous powers for resounding out their expert roles.⁵³⁴ These ceremonies have formed a bridge with some Biblical beliefs and practices whose role or understanding cannot be over-emphasized in the formulation of a balanced and authentic African Christian theology.

Culture and Traditions: Traditions and philosophy have shaped and challenged African theology. The root meaning of philosophy is the love of wisdom, which cannot be divorced from culture and traditions as they form the basis of teaching and learning. The role of tradition in theology cannot be overemphasized and is not out of place to state that God has been active throughout human and church history hence, we are all prone to approach scriptures in the light of inherited or acquired traditions. A balanced and authentic African Christian theology must not blindly accept tradition but access its correctness or otherwise in the light of scriptures. No system of theology is developed in isolation⁵³⁵ Theologians including those of African descent approach their task with certain presuppositions which include their culture and traditions. Balanced and authentic African Christian theology must take into cognizance the past and present cultures and traditions of Africa because the future depends largely on the past and present. If God's revelation is to be understood through His mighty works in history, then theology is to be formulated with history (which is known through customs and traditions).

African Traditional Religion (ATR): African theology must take its religious worldview seriously. Africans believed in the existence of a supreme being who is the creator of the universe, humanity, who controls the universe, and belief in the spirit world. God is viewed as supreme, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, and caring and can thus be worshiped. Kunhiyop cited John Mbiti and asserts that:

The African Church is composed of people who come from an African religious background. Their culture, history, worldviews, and spiritual aspirations cannot be taken away from them. These impinge upon the daily life experience of the Christian faith. So, the church that exists on the African scene bears the mark of its people's backgrounds. No viable theology can grow without addressing itself to the interreligious phenomenon at work.⁵³⁶

We must understand that these African religious beliefs and backgrounds are not lost when Africans become Christians as such a theology that addresses these peculiarities and or pluralities is needed. These backgrounds must be examined critically, as they affect the everyday life of the African Christian. African Traditional Religion to an extent is more practical than abstract as Christianity seems to be which calls for a balanced theology from a purely conceptual perspective that makes no sense to most Africans, and this may not be unconnected with the fact that some ethnic groups have returned to Idol worship amid the security challenges, insurgency, and banditry in Nigeria for instance. A balanced and authentic or universal African Christian Theology must speak to real issues of life, especially in the African context. Africans value moral traditions such as kindness, purity, honesty, love, and friendliness and prohibit all forms of vices and evil such as

⁵³⁴ Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religions and Worldview*, 146.

⁵³⁵ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 8.

⁵³⁶ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, xv.

adultery, murder, stealing, rape, or cheating these are backgrounds that should aid the formulation of African Christian theology which corresponds to the general revelation of God. A balanced and authentic African theology should build on the positive values or gains of ATR as a foundation for African Christian theology and of course, discard the negative side of it in line with the scriptures.

Contextualization: An approach to formulating a balanced and authentic African Christian Theology:

Every contemporary African theology should be global and contextual, it is authentic if it is universal and globally accepted. The momentous difference we can see today in the Christian faith especially in Africa in the last century is the demographic shift in views away from their colonial masters from the West with a yearning for African-based theories and postulations. Theology is circumstantial or contextual⁵³⁷ hence the need to have a balanced and authentic African Christian theology.

Contextualization can be defined as “a dynamic process of the church’s reflection...on the interaction of the text as the Word of God and the context as a specific human situation.”⁵³⁸ The place of history in contextualization is very crucial as theological issues or questions develop over time as such a keen sense of historical developments over the issue of discussion is important. Historical developments of issues under discussion are again important because not all issues can be said to be in the Bible as such some new contemporary issues or challenges pose new questions to our understanding of the Christian faith. One key point in contextualization is the relationship between the Christian faith and African Religion which must be considered in its exclusiveness and on the contrary as antagonistic. This is the way for a balanced and authentic African Christian theology where the knowledge of the past is discussed in the present with great hope for the future in which Biblical materials are open to the daily concerns of the people and should find ways of contextualizing the truth of God’s word in ways that make theology transformative for the African in Africa.

Relevance to a local culture is basic to the task of contextualization and we need contextual theology because of the need for authentic African Christian theology. Contextualization can be seen as a critical assessment of the peculiarity of the African context in which the African theology has to be worked out and contextualization is far beyond adaptationist which implies the use of African thought forms in Christian theology and of African rituals in the liturgy and indigenization which is a response of the gospel to tradition and cultures but seeks to press for a dynamic concept which is also futuristic.

The underlying traditional worldview has remained a force that has to be taken seriously in formulating a balanced and authentic African Christian theology and care must be taken not to allow a problem of religious plurality such as how to be a Christian in a context that is determined by tradition and culture or other religious ideology. One example is liberalism (Liberalism is free thinking) which is a contextualization of the gospel into the Western philosophy which can be said to be European syncretism⁵³⁹ in a way. Evangelicalism came as a reaction against rationalism and liberalism and several theologies have emerged over time because of contextualization such as the Liberation theology or theology of liberation, Black theology, and each theology tries to make the message of the Bible relevant to its time. One major problem of contextualization is syncretism and compromise which true contextualization can address and that takes care of the risk associated with it.

⁵³⁷ John Parratt. *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, 2.

⁵³⁸ Nihinlolo, *Theology under the Mango Tree*, 38.

⁵³⁹ Palmer Timothy, *Christian Theology in an African Context*, 169.

Forms of contextualization:

Conscientization: This is to arouse people's consciousness or awareness of the structures within a context and how these structures do not meet the standard of God and humans for their creation. It involves developing a critical consciousness of the social, political, and economic realities that shapes one's life and community. "Conscientization refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social and political contradictions...(and) taking actions against oppressive elements in one's life as part of that learning."⁵⁴⁰ Conscientization calls for spiritual renewal and conversation that confronts and identifies the ills and evil of moral disintegration to overcome if our societies must flourish and thrive. In formulating a balanced and authentic African theology, conscientization should have an impact on the pattern of thinking of the whole society in the African context which should lead to reformation. Some of the action points in conscientization are advocacy together in a process of confession and actions. This calls for actions engaged in a committed process of recognition, education, and confession regarding things that do not promote justice in the African context and by the will or plans of God for Africa. It is on record that opinions are shaped less by their Christian beliefs than by their immediate situations, general social and environmental factors, and the pre-existing knowledge, attitudes, and values⁵⁴¹ which makes conscientization a tool for a balanced and authentic African Christian theology formulation it espouses or make awareness of these ills for the better or reformation in the context.

Inculturation: The starting point of this is from the angle of enculturation which helps us to acquire cultural knowledge or skills, and behaviours that should be adopted or integrated into the theology being formulated. This places the gospel into the African traditional context and has African theology based on the Biblical faith of Africans which speaks to the African soul. An authentic and balanced African Christian theology should look for the common ground that exists between Christianity or the Gospel and the African Traditional religious context.

African Liberation Theology: This is a form of Black theology whose context is not traditional African context but a contemporary political and socio-economic context that deals with the contemporary realities of poverty and political oppressions that characterized a typical African setting of old. Political emancipation and freedom must be factored into African Christian theology and by extension the life of Africans about his ways of life before the advent of Christianity which was seen as timid, primitive, and oppressed.

African Evangelicalism: There came a period where reasoning was placed above revelation and rationalism led to liberalism and evangelicalism came as a reaction against rationalism and liberalism. The Evangelical movement gave birth to Pentecostalism which has similarities with African Traditional Religion (ATR) in areas of speaking in tongues which can be likened to incantations and enchantment to a large extent. A balance is needed here so as not to encourage syncretism.

Prosperity and non-suffering theology: A distortion to evangelicalism is the theology of non-suffering and prosperity that is on the rise today in the African context which tends to nullify some portions of the scriptures that speak of such context. This theology which has American roots began in Africa with a simple teaching that God desires every person to be rich and not to suffer in any form or way. A song is usually sung to support that theology with the lyrics: *me I no go*

⁵⁴⁰ Agang, *African Public Theology*, 130.

⁵⁴¹ Agang, *African Public Theology*, 135.

suffer, I no go beg for bread, God of miracle na my papa oh. This theology emphasizes that a faithful Christian should be prosperous and free from suffering. On the contrary, we are told from oral tradition that the *gods* punish evil and wrongdoing which may be in the form of sufferings and afflictions depending on the severity of the wrong or evil deed. Suppose we must follow “Christ in the way of the cross matter where, no matter what” then suffering justly or unjustly is imminent.⁵⁴² Suffering finds us all in varying forms and unique to us individually but suffering in all forms should draw us into the fellowship of those who suffer (Jas 1:2).⁵⁴³

Conclusion

How do we formulate a balanced and authentic Christian theology within the African context? The dangers of not having a balanced and authentic Christian theology in Africa cannot be over-emphasized owing to the current trends and happenings, especially in the views of the African religious system and beliefs. More often than not faithful are left more confused than enlightened in cases where explicit statements are not made in the Bible concerning such cases. This action of formulating a balanced and authentic African Christian theology will take the African theologian or believer out of the pool of consumers of what was passed on to her. All theology in essence is contextual as it arises from a specific context, addressing a contextual issue within that context, which often and in most cases were exported or imported to the African issues without contextualizing the contents.

A balanced and authentic African Christian theology can be said to be the Gospel and free from syncretism. It is a theology that gives approaches to Christianity in African contexts by Africans who understand the pain of African Christians who love Jesus but resent the damage wrought by colonialism, imperialism, and well-meaning but misguided missionaries who at certain times were seen as agents of colonialism and slavery. Theology sets a process in motion that should be conceived in the presence of God rather than in the presence of men, if they do not come from an encounter with God, they are simply some forms of ideologies that may not make any impact. We must surrender our ideas to God so that the kingdom of God can take root and shape our actions as we formulate a balanced and authentic Christian theology for the African context. African Christian theology must be contextual, responsive theology, responding, and relevant to the African human situation because every contextualization is both interpretation and application. The global and contextual implications of theology offer a healthy balance in theological development.

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⁵⁴² Paul Borthwick and Dave Ripper, *The Fellowship of the Suffering: How Hardship Shapes Us for Ministry and Missions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 2.

⁵⁴³ Borthwick, *The Fellowship of the Suffering*, 13-14

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