

EDITOR'S NOTE

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS: REIMAGINING AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY THROUGH DIVERSE INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

The interpretation of Scripture in African Christianity has transcended the mere transmission of Western hermeneutics to include new models based on the African reality. In this present time, the multiplicity of voices engaging the Bible across Africa, especially in West Africa, signals a growing theological maturity that is both contextual and dialogical. The papers in this volume underscore the rich complexity of these engagements, each demonstrating how African Christianity continues to struggle with questions of authority, relevance, and authenticity in a rapidly changing socio-religious landscape.

Michael Kodzo Mensah, in his article, identifies three primary interpretive communities shaping biblical engagement in West Africa currently: the Church, the Academy, and lay-led groups. His study points out that biblical interpretation is not confined to universities, seminaries, Bible Colleges, and other higher institutions of learning. Rather, it thrives in real life situations: marketplaces, artisan workshops, and other social gatherings. These lay communities, which are often dismissed or ignored, bring to the biblical text another dimension that challenges both ecclesial and academic gatekeeping.

Mensah's study reveals how these interpretive communities are historically and theologically shaped by the competing influences of Western missionary traditions and African spiritual worldviews. Historic Mission Churches brought hermeneutical frameworks that emphasised European cultural norms. In contrast, African Indigenous Churches, and Pentecostal -Charismatic movements initiated interpretive methods deeply rooted in African cosmologies, emphasising the spiritual, miraculous, and immediate power of the biblical word. Pentecostal hermeneutics often stress literalism and prosperity theology, which, while sometimes problematic, also reflect the community's aspirations for empowerment and divine intervention in contexts of socio-economic hardship and struggle.

On the other hand, the academic community continues to push the boundaries of African biblical scholarship. Through inculturation, mother-tongue hermeneutics, communicative approach, and contextual theological models, biblical scholars are reclaiming the Bible as a resource that must speak to African realities, corruption, poverty, gender and social injustice, and religious pluralism.

Mensah's paper argues that no single reading of the Bible holds monopoly over its meaning or significance and call for interpretive plurality in a continent as diverse as Africa.

This call to seriously take African interpretive plurality in African hermeneutics is echoed in other papers featured in this volume. **Michael Ufok Udoekpo's** comparative study of Psalm 126 and the prophecy of Zephaniah offers an intertextual reading that not only showcases the literary richness of the biblical text but also reminds readers that Scripture itself is dialogical. His exploration of linguistic and thematic interdependencies underscores the interconnected nature of biblical voices and the importance of reading prophetic and poetic texts within the larger framework of Old Testament theology. For African biblical scholars and theologians, Udoekpo's paper is an invitation to explore how texts speak to and inform each other, even across genre and context.

From intertextuality to socio-political engagement, **Solomon Ikhidero** and **Bosede Gladys Ogedegbe** discuss governance in Nigeria, engaging ancient wisdom of Exodus 18. Their reading of Jethro's counsel to Moses offers a biblical model of leadership that mirrors delegation, discernment, and accountability. At a time when many African democracies face systemic challenges and accusations of authoritarianism, the authors draw a compelling connection between scriptural principles and national governance. The emphasis on decentralised leadership, transparency, and shared responsibility not only critiques the current political climate in Nigeria but also proposes a sustainable and ethical framework for political transformation. This article stands as a testament to the relevance of biblical ethics in political and national discourse.

Samora Harry Ayivor offers a pastoral critique of what he terms 'blame theology' within Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. In many such churches, divine healing is tied directly to the believer's

level of faith, and when healing does not occur, the individual is blamed for lacking spiritual commitment. Ayivor traces the roots of this theology to both African Indigenous beliefs and misinterpretation of biblical texts, showing how such teachings can cause emotional trauma, stigma, and spiritual disenfranchisement. Drawing on Jesus' compassionate model in John 11, he calls for a reorientation, a healing theology that is theologically sound, pastorally sensitive, and emotionally liberating. His study challenges both clergy and faith healers to embrace a theology of healing that affirms divine sovereignty while acknowledging human vulnerability.

From a different but related perspective, **Emmanuel Afoweke** defends the relevance of Yoruba Indigenous Religion (YIR) in contemporary Nigeria. Noting the decline of YIR due to misrepresentation, marginalisation, and the aggressive proselytisation by foreign religions, Afoweke argues for its revival and reintegration into the cultural and educational fabric of Yoruba society. The paper is a bold intervention in the ongoing debate over the place of African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) in postcolonial African societies. Through philosophical and phenomenological analysis, Afoweke reveals that YIR is not simply a relic of the past but a living tradition capable of contributing to moral development, health, and social cohesion. He advocates for practical strategies such as curricular inclusion and legislative recognition as key initiatives that would ensure YIR's survival and continued relevance in a pluralistic Nigeria.

Franz Gmainer-Pranzl's theoretical reflection on intercultural theology provides a fitting theological lens through which to read all the contributions in this issue. He argues that Intercultural theology is not a peripheral or 'exotic' discipline, but rather central to understanding Christianity in the contemporary world, a world marked by cultural hybridity, religious diversity, and ongoing struggle with colonial legacies. By engaging with context, culture, and plurality, intercultural theology becomes the intellectual framework that binds together the various interpretive, ethical, and socio-political dimensions of world Christianity. For African biblical scholars and theologians, this approach affirms the legitimacy of local expressions of faith while encouraging dialogue with other traditions and cultures.

The articles in this volume, therefore, present a compelling picture of African biblical-theological reflection as an ongoing conversation between past and present, tradition and innovation, and faith and reason.

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They challenge African scholars, church leaders, and lay interpreters alike to take seriously the question of context: How does the Bible speak to contemporary Africa? How do African experiences reshape our understanding of the Bible? And how do the interpretive communities, academic, ecclesial, and grassroots, enrich each other in this shared theological enterprise?

Thus, the task ahead is not merely academic; it is ecclesial, prophetic, and pastoral. It involves reclaiming African voices in theological discourse and envisioning a theology that speaks ‘the truth’ to the African reality.

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