Woldetsadik, MK 2026, Review of *Contextual Theological Interpretation: an Integrated Model for Reading the Bible*, BH Lim, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 7, no. 3 pp. 275-278

Review

Lim, Boh H., *Contextual Theological Interpretation: an Integrated Model for Reading the Bible.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2025. ISBN 9781540968890, vii, 158 pp.

Reviewed by Melesse K. Woldetsadik, PhD[1]

Boh H. Lim's monograph *Contextual Theological Interpretation* critically examines modern biblical and theological interpretations in light of their historical, cultural, and political contexts. Lim highlights the importance of contextual interpretation for the church's mission and critiques current practices in Theological Interpretation of the Scriptures (TIS), which prioritised theological readings of Scripture over traditional grammatical-historical interpretation. He advocates a more inclusive approach that incorporates global perspectives and engages with diverse interpretive models in contextual and theological hermeneutics. He supports socio-critical methodologies and emphasises a reader-response framework as a valuable interpretive lens.

Lim presents a comprehensive model of biblical interpretation that he believes is both theologically grounded and contextually relevant' (vii), while acknowledging its limitations. He emphasises the importance of biblical studies in contemporary scholarship and advocates a corrective approach rather replacement of traditional methods. Lim then identifies an urgent need for a pedagogical guide to help readers engage with the Bible in a contextual and theological manner.

Contextual Theological Interpretation is organised into two parts. The first four chapters are devoted to various aspects of biblical interpretation. These chapters address readers' challenges, recent trends in biblical studies, and concerns about contextual interpretation. In the opening chapter, Lim argues

[1] Melesse K. Woldetsadik is Pastor of Beta Selam Evangelical Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

that both trust and suspicion are feasible in interpretation. The second chapter reviews recent advances in the field, while the third highlights the importance of contextual interpretation. The fourth chapter advocates a critical theological approach, noting that TIS has not consistently upheld its promises or effectively addressed contextual issues.

The book's second section outlines a model of biblical interpretation across three chapters. It establishes a framework grounded in 'evangelical and Trinitarian principles' (116) while accounting for colonisation's impact on theological views. Chapter five presents postcolonial Christian interpretation as an alternative to historical-critical methods, focusing on a reader-response approach rooted in personal context. Chapter six explores models of contextual and theological interpretation from multicultural perspectives. Chapter seven emphasises that effective biblical interpretation must be both theological and contextual.

Lim articulates his theological and ecclesial commitments as Trinitarian and missional with a focus on multicultural churches. These churches encompass diverse communities that affirm ecumenical creeds and recognise the growing presence of Christians of colour and evangelical congregations in the Global South. Lim aims to develop a hermeneutic that addresses four overlooked realities in theological education: (1) the experiences of women and people of colour, (2) white hegemony, (3) the dynamics of Asian, African, and Latino/a Christianity, and (4) the growth of evangelical and charismatic spirituality. His goal is for readers to understand the current landscape of biblical interpretation and to adapt it to multicultural contexts.

Lim passionately argues that the crisis in biblical interpretation requires scholars to move beyond historical concerns and address ethical and ideological challenges. He asserts that 'Christian discipleship today requires Christ's followers to read the Bible critically and as a sacred text' (4) and proposes that a hermeneutic of trust can coexist with a hermeneutic of suspicion. He warns against the allure of the current culture wars, noting that naïveté and cynicism may offer false comfort but should not be mistaken for true Christian discipleship.

Lim contends that a contextual theological interpretation is necessary, highlighting the limitations of existing frameworks. His main reasons are the neglect of the Bible's moral objections, the church's ethical failings, and perspectives from the global church beyond the Western context. Citing Moore and Sherwood, Lim critiques biblical scholarship for overemphasizing historical analysis, which sidestepping theological and ethical issues. He calls for a postcolonial re-appropriation of fundamental church doctrines that engages within inheriting colonial ideologies.

Lim argues that the global church's transformative theological interpretation requires a postcolonial re-appropriation of doctrinal traditions, acknowledging Western theological influence while resisting colonial ideologies. He cites Kwame Bediako on reclaiming precolonial patristic theology from African primal religions and Renie Choy's glocal hermeneutic, which engages colonial history, to demonstrate the gospel's transcultural potential. He also highlights Gustavo Gutierrez's interpretation of liberation theology and Love Sechrest's associative hermeneutics. These frameworks, he argues, promote an authentic theological interpretation that integrates ecclesial traditions, indigenous elements, and postcolonial critique, thereby serving the global church's mission. Thus, Lim's analysis confronts the misuse of the Bible to dominate and oppress minority groups. Socio-critical approaches help uncover those oppressive intentions.

In his critique of TIS, Lim highlights shortcomings in adequately representing diverse voices and in incorporating contextual awareness. He emphasises the need to include non-Western perspectives and to understand readers' contexts. However, his analysis appears to sidestep the Bible's authority as the Word of God; while he recognises its status as a sacred text, he does not explicitly address the author's intended meaning. Furthermore, although Lim champions fairness and inclusivity in scholarly work, he fails to address crucial questions about whether the meaning within Scripture is determinate or indeterminate/polyvalent. These considerations are particularly relevant for evangelicals who value the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Addressing these fundamental issues would significantly enhance his evaluation.

Lim's work on theological interpretation stands out for its emphasis on integrating diverse global perspectives and challenging traditional interpretive

methods. He innovatively retains the reader-response approach while striving to include voices from around the world. However, his call for an integrative model would be strengthened if he placed greater emphasis on the discipline's advances and self-corrective measures. While his assertive tone effectively challenges dominant models and sheds light on the realities faced by minority groups, incorporating these developments would further strengthen his argument. Overall, Lim's monograph serves as a valuable resource for students and scholars, particularly when approached with an ethical interpretive mindset that respects the author's authority and the text's intended meaning.