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Editorial correspondence: Dr Annette Potgieter,  
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Technical correspondence: Mr Fraser Jackson,  
[admin@netactmail.org.za](mailto:admin@netactmail.org.za)

# African Theological Journal for Church and Society



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## The Bible in African Hands: a “Contrapuntal Perspective”

Humphrey Mwangi Waweru  
Kenyatta University  
waweru.humphrey@ku.ac.ke

### Abstract

Mercy Amba Oduyoye suggests a thorough examination of how the Bible, a triple religious heritage of Africa, has become our good news. ‘How do faith communities use these scriptures to orientate and regulate their lives together? Who are the recognised interpreters of these scriptures? How does the concept of authority operate in this regard?’<sup>1</sup> It is no accident that the emergence of black resistance to ‘colonial rule’ was often accompanied by the emergence of ‘indigenous readings’ of the scriptures. This article seeks to heighten awareness of the African theological reflection currently taking shape in indigenous biblical studies. It emphasises the use of indigenous religious knowledge in the design and implementation of research, particularly within African contextual biblical methods. It affirms the suitability of indigenous motif paradigms for African research within the field that affects Africans and their culture. In this article it is argued that there is a necessity for an emancipatory and participatory type of research which values and includes African cultural knowledge and peoples in reading the Bible. The aim is to arouse a voice in the predominantly Western-oriented theological academic circles and investigations where African voices are more often than not either sidelined or suppressed in biblical studies. An old woman reading the scriptures in Africa uses indigenous knowledge and methods to interpret the text, but she is often ignored or not taken seriously at the

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<sup>1</sup> See Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 2007. ‘Re-reading the Bible From Where We Have Been Placed: African Women’s Voices on Some Biblical Texts’, *Journal of African Christian Thought* 10(2), 3-7.

expense of Greek and Hebrew textual analysis methods. This article posits that to be meaningful and empowering, African theological research must, of necessity, include African religious thought and ideas from inception through completion to the implementation of readings of the Bible arising from the research. This article argues that African religious knowledge is an alternative approach of investigating, exploring, evaluating, and acquiring new knowledge from the Bible. This article is of the opinion that any means of investigation, particularly in the use of African indigenous knowledge, could enrich a creation of new breakthroughs in the interpretation of biblical texts. Hence this article is primarily advocating African religious indigenous methods as key in Bible reading within an African worldview. In this way the work of interpreting the Bible in Africa is both empowering and meaningful through indigenous research methods which are context-specific readings.

## Introduction

The article was provoked by TARA.<sup>2</sup> Its thrust is to heighten awareness, stimulate new thoughts, and generate discussion on the wealth of African religious indigenous knowledge already taking place in the field of African Biblical studies. For the purposes of clarity this article will specifically deal with African interpretive methods.<sup>3</sup> African biblical scholars have to persist in developing and using alternative methods of reading the Bible.

Africans have received the text and it is here to stay (Dickson 1979: 106). Hence Africans have to study the Bible using indigenous knowledge in order to discover the African reality, and refrain from sticking to the research pathways

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<sup>2</sup> On 2nd May 2017 a consultation was held at the University of Stellenbosch bringing together representatives of 5 African Faculties of Theology or Departments of Religious Studies that have existing bilateral agreements with Stellenbosch University which made a resolution to create an umbrella organization for the coordination of research on religion and theology in Africa, provisionally called TARA (Theology and Religion in Africa).

<sup>3</sup> JNK Mugambi (2001:11) says that the meaning of the words Africa and Africans affirms the identity of the continent that transcends race and religion.



mapped out by the Western research methodologies<sup>4</sup> within which many have been trained. Whilst this article neither seeks to negate nor denigrate known Western research methods of investigation, it intends to challenge African biblical scholars in particular to venture more into alternative methods of reading. As far as the investigation and preservation of the rich diversity of African culture and identity is concerned, such must be done through indigenous methods of interpretation, in order to develop and empower African Biblical scholarship. As Magesa (2004) puts it: “Africans are now writing about, investigating, and shaping a relevant Christian theology for the continent.” Such is possible through the use of the African languages in research and communicating the truth of African life.<sup>5</sup>

It is good to note the genesis of this article. On 2nd May 2017 a consultation was organised to bring together representatives of five African Faculties of Theology or Departments of Religious Studies that have existing bilateral agreements with Stellenbosch University and who were visited in 2016. However for certain reasons the University of Malawi and the University of Nairobi were missing during the said consultation. The purpose of the meeting was to explore opportunities for closer cooperation amongst the participants and Stellenbosch University. During the consultation other researchers from other Stellenbosch faculties such as the Faculties of Arts and Education which were working on specific research themes connected with any aspect of religion were also invited to attend. In a similar vein, researchers from Theology and/or Religious Studies from the University of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape and Kenyatta University were also invited. By the end of the two days consultation, several resolutions were made:

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<sup>4</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2009:3) argues that for the past four decades or so, the attention of the Christian world has been drawn to the fact that the axis of Christianity has shifted South making Africa the epicenter of expansion of Christianity.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://en.iyil2019.org/> where the importance of indigenous language has been emphasized as a means of communicating with the world. Indigenous language defines the people’s identity, express their history and culture, helps them learn and defend their human rights as well as participate in all aspects of society. It is through language that people preserve their community’s history, customs and traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking, meaning, and expression. In research it is used to construct the people's future.

- i) That the Faculty of Theology would continue to engage in further dialogue with Prof Bagele Chilisa on the topics of indigenous research methodologies and research within African contexts.
- ii) That Prof Hendrik Bosman, Dr Ntozakhe Cezula, Len Hansen, John Klaassen (UWC) and Dr Alex Nkabahona (Makerere University) were mandated with the responsibility for establishing an umbrella organisation for the coordination of research on religion and theology in Africa, provisionally called TARA (Theology and Religion in Africa). The team would equally promote the development of the following databases:
  - (a) Database of academics interested in the study and research of religion and theology in Stellenbosch University as well as database of academics interested in the study and research of religion and theology at other partner universities in Africa. In regard to this resolution a template was to be developed by Ms Magriet de Villiers to establish an internet portal with different databases, as well as the annual research reports of the participating institutions.
  - (b) Database of research on religion and theology accomplished at institutions in Africa – this can link up with the existing database “The Bible in Africa” developed in Old and New Testament (ca 600 entries) and dovetails with the previous recommendation (a).
- iii) Discussions during the collaboration indicated further needs that can be addressed by closer academic co-operation and in most cases it was noted that they are already addressed by the existing MOUs:
  - Postgraduate student and lecturer exchange.
  - Identifying academic expertise on different campuses to allow the appointment of competent examiners and co-supervisors.
  - Access to SU electronic academic resources and library facilities.

This article is a follow up to one of the three resolutions of the 2017 consultation at Stellenbosch University where Dr. Humphrey Waweru was

requested to offer an introduction to the proposed topic of Indigenous Research Methodologies and Research within African Biblical Contexts. This was to be done during our 2021 annual conference.

The initiative for organising the consultation on African Indigenous Research Methodologies and Research within African Biblical Contexts was taken by Prof Hendrik Bosman when he served as the head of the Faculty of Theology. The consultation noted that methods of investigation cannot be divorced from a people's cultural context and worldview, which shapes consciousness and forms the theoretical framework within which indigenous knowledge is sought, critiqued, and/or understood. It was well understood that all knowledge has cultural relevance and must be examined for its particular focus.<sup>6</sup> This means that no single method of research could be hailed as universal, but as Mugambi (2001:17) opines, methodologically, one can start with contextual experience and proceed to draw universal principles out of that experience. Equally one can also start with universal principles and then discern their applications in particular contexts, meaning that if the first approach is inductive and very akin to research in empirical science, the second is deductive and very identifiable with religious dogma of Africa. This makes one seek an understanding of the Bible in Africa in a contrapuntal perspective.

## **Bible in Africa: A contrapuntal perspective**

When I was doing my PhD in New Testament at KwaZulu Natal University, I had no idea of Contrapuntalism as a reading methodology. But entering my supervisor's office for consultation, one morning, Prof Jonathan Draper looked at me and said 'Do you want to go back to your African culture and walk without shoes? Do you want to abandon your culture and become a scholar enslaved by modern thinking? Or do you want to become a Christian and fly to heaven?' I had no answer, but then he said 'Contrapuntal perspective is the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul asks in 2 Cor. 2:16, 'Who is equal to such a task?' Perhaps we can answer with him 'We are not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves; our competence come from God' (2Cor. 3:5). In African research in biblical studies we agree with the Pauline understanding that 'God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant' (2 Cor. 3:6). Such a competence is found in African indigenous knowledge for the interpretation of scripture.

way to go.’<sup>7</sup> Since then my eyes have been opened to a different world. Borrowing from the wisdom of Edward Said (1993:62-80), who suggested that the nineteenth century novel played a major role in legitimating the Western imperialism, I suggested that the Bible constructed a ‘self-validating’ world in which domination appeared normative and permanent through the spread of Christianity in Africa. The Bible became ‘a sociological current’ that affected African lives in every corner of the continent. Hence it was important to recognize that it cannot be read in isolation from the African indigenous contexts. The ‘contrapuntal perspective’ reading became the way. It has introduced a new way of reading in order to understand different texts being read together.

Therefore, before we concentrate on the Bible in Africa perhaps we need to understand Africans themselves. Africa is home to the African race or people who were born and grew up within the continent. Defining Africa as home for the Africans is an uphill task. For Mazrui (1986), knowing Africa as home for Africans is not a mere intellectual exercise or a root for the idle mind. Africa is both cartographically and philosophically warped. Its area is disputed and even its name is problematic, where a small portion of the land mass has become the name of the whole continent. Some scholars like Ali Mazrui would even include the Arabian Peninsula into Africa and claim Islam to be an African religion. But unlike the Quran, the Bible has within a very short time plotted a world of its own by constructing ‘essentialist’ readings of the marginalised Africans.

No wonder scholars like Oden (2007:146) would equally want Christianity to be seen as a ‘Traditional African Religion’, arguing that the oral Gospel transmission occurred in Africa as early as 33-65 CE, even before the first Gospel was published. For such a reasoning Adeyemo (2001:31) argues that Africa is enigmatic, richest in trained scholars, natural resources, and languages among the seven continents, yet the poorest. The very first home of the human race yet the least developed. Africa has enriched many nations and peoples in the world yet its own vineyards are unkempt. This is probably why

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<sup>7</sup> The Contrapuntal perspective is a methodology that can critique, but also affirm ‘our intertwined and overlapping histories’ in Africa (Said 1993:18). It is a reading, a listening, and a dialoguing at the same time for rhythm that produces a counter-point (Waweru 2007; 2011; 2020).

Africa was treated by Europe as its subject for a long time and finally as a property to be divided amongst the European powers. Perhaps this explains why Africa has been wooed by both Christianity and Islam endangering and threatening its primal religious imagination. This could be the reason why Waweru (2011, 2020) has been interested with the dialogue between the Bible and African culture in order to investigate this assumed threat from a postcolonial perspective. It is proper to argue that the Bible should be read 'contrapuntally' in the modern postcolonial Africa. Regardless of the cultural rejuvenations that have often emerged within African circles, the Bible has positioned itself as a document that will continue dominating Africa in many more centuries to come.

The Bible arrived in Africa and has been planted and is growing strong within the African soil.<sup>8</sup> The Bible has remained resilient in Africa having been translated into Mother-tongue languages more than any other Book.<sup>9</sup> It has become a resource for African knowledge and spirituality. The Bible has equally become a reuniting factor for Africa which has remained divided along colonial boundaries during the colonial and postcolonial periods. During the colonial period, Africa was scrambled, and during postcolonial period Africa has remained divided as the 'Africa South of Sahara', 'North Africa which has remained Arabic' and the rest as 'Black Africa'. If Africa has remained imperialistically divided, then the question arises, how we could come up with one Africa of one people with a single destiny. This remains a challenge. Perhaps the presence of the Bible in Africa can be the uniting factor among Africans playing a positive role in acquiring our dream of unity. Thus the Bible is read on its own terms, with an appreciation of its cultural contribution, but in intimate connection with an understanding and critique of the social world which it propounds and equally legitimates.

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<sup>8</sup> For Africans to understand the new religions that have sprung in the continent like wild weeds, they have to remember that African culture is a fertile soil not only for Christianity but also for the Bible (Waweru 2020:2).

<sup>9</sup> The major question that every African should answer is, what has Africa done with the Bible? Have Africans trusted the Bible as the word of God, carrying the truth of life? Such invites dialogue between the Bible and the African culture (Waweru 2011:5).

## Developing a contrapuntal Reading of the Bible

Africans are said to be incurably religious. Others have termed them notoriously religious, a concept that made them wholly embrace the Bible. In this study we term them chronically religious for having embraced Christianity as a new religion in their midst.<sup>10</sup> A people of a religion without a book have become *Athomi*.<sup>11</sup> It is in the same spirit of *Athomi* that African scholars have emphasised the significance of reading the Bible. The Bible has played an ambivalent but key role in both the construction and deconstruction of modern society in Africa. For Draper (1997:3), the Bible had already entered the popular culture and repertoire of the African people, surprisingly and constantly emerging within indigenous forms and traditions.

In recent decades African theologians have expressed their desire to revitalise African contextual methods of reading the Bible. According to Emmanuel Obeng (2001:35), the concern of African Christianity has been the contextualisation of the Bible in Africa. This implies that the existing popular concepts and research methods propagated by Western scholarship are inadequate to explain all of the ways of knowing in African context. Hence Africans have used their own ways of reading, investigating, and interpreting the Bible. Such a re-reading has resulted in African cultures being respected and valued in their uniqueness. Such readings have stamped Africa's profile on global Christianity, whether in evangelical, ecumenical, or academic circles.<sup>12</sup> The language of the Bible, with its symbols and narratives has supplied a rich vein for creative re-formation, especially by African novelists, even when they are stridently hostile to the Christian church (Draper 1997:1-3).

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<sup>10</sup> Africans are now realising the mistake they made by embracing the statement 'You don't need to interpret the Bible, it is already translated for you; just read it and do what it says'. This may now be the major cause for a recession of Christianity in Africa today (a Kenyatta University student in a class discussion in February 2022).

<sup>11</sup> A term that was popular in the Mt. Kenya region referring to new converts as the educated. It simply meant that the presence of a religion of the book had made people readers. We should note categorically that up to date the most common mother tongue literature in Kikuyuland is the Bible.

<sup>12</sup> Within Africa, see for example Bediako (1995), Oduyoye (2002), and Waweru (2011, 2020).

Therefore, although still inchoate, it is obviously gratifying to see how fathers of African theology such as Mbiti (1968), Idowu (1973), Mugambi (1995), Adeyemo (2001), Bediako (2006), Bujo (1992), Oduyoye (1992), Musa (2001), Kato (1985), Chipenda, Karamanga, Mugambi, and Omari (1991), Setiloane (1979), Waweru (2011, 2020), and West and Musa (2000) among others have prioritised reading the Bible through African indigenous knowledge methods. Such ways of reading has offered an analysis and interpretation of the Bible in relation to African culture through a dialogue with Christian faith. They have taken on the important yet daunting task of making the Bible relevant to the African reality. These African scholars realised that African indigenous knowledge has much to enrich existing Western knowledge and methodologies in reading the text. African methodologies of reading as well as investigating have yielded results and contributions that have been discounted by many, sometimes even by African scholars themselves. It is notable that contributions made by African scholars in Bible interpretation are conspicuously absent from biblical commentaries and dictionaries for formal Religious Education and generally remain unknown to many. Such a system has subliminally perpetuated the myth that Africa and/or traditional African societies are incapable of developing rigorous indigenous interpretive methodologies within their own African contexts to make scientific inquiry in biblical texts. Knowingly or unknowingly African scholars have transacted with the Bible contrapuntally.<sup>13</sup> Reading the Bible in Africa remained mythical.

To counter such a myth, Getui, Maluleke, and Ukpong (2001) issued a groundbreaking publication entitled *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, featuring a number of scholars such as JNK Mugambi, Emmanuel Obeng, Teresa Okure, Benjamin Ntneh, Gerald West, Hilary Mijoga, Musa Dube, Chris Manus, and Emmanuel Katongole among others - all of them coming up with African indigenous reading methods as an attempt to fill the noticeable gap and facilitate systematic interpretations to scriptures. This is mainly an expression of an existing desire among Africans to further the development of African indigenous reading methods. By so doing African interpretive methodologies have acquired their unique nature.

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<sup>13</sup> Some scholars struggle with terms such as enculturation, indigenization, comparative studies and many others, but they were simply looking for counter between the Bible and the African culture.

## The Nature of Biblical Studies in Africa

Indigenous reading methods or African contextual methods of interpretation have been used interchangeably by various African scholars as systems of enquiry which are experiential by nature.<sup>14</sup> Such motifs are usually based on a cultural primal worldview that remains relational, where the reader and the text being interpreted have a common context. The phenomenon of this reading method is a cultural value of wholeness, both communal and contextual.<sup>15</sup> The major task of the methodologies of this nature is to locate the reader of the Bible within the African context. The harmony of the study and the reader creates a unique knowledge which is collective and contextual. Indigenous reading methods are also naturally rooted in a common background that has a contextual sense of responsibility (ethic fibre) that retains one in a worldview of interdependence and interconnectedness. For Mugambi (2001:11), ideologically Africa's cultural diversity has been exaggerated at the expense of its cultural unity. It is time for reading the Bible in Africa to be seen as one entity. David Jobling (1999) was struck by Africa, as a place where the Bible has been uniquely influential in the formation of identity.

A good example of the nature of African reading has been proposed by Gerald West (1995) through the method of the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) applied by the Ujamaa Centre at KwaZulu Natal University. The centre has engaged the CBS method as an indigenous reading method that has its 'origins in the interface between socially engaged biblical scholars, organic intellectuals, and ordinary Christian "readers" of the Bible' (Manual of CBS 2015:3).<sup>16</sup> The nature of this method is a see-judge-act method. People start reading the Bible from their own local context experiences (see). They then proceed to read a biblical text in their circumstances (judge), and, after hearing the message of God, they act. This is the best way to explain what Edward Said (1993) had in mind when he talked of colonial and post-colonial being offered together in the interests of a Contrapuntal perspective. The social analysis engaged here allows the community to understand its reality. When the community re-reads the Bible,

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<sup>14</sup> See a resource manual for Contextual Bible Study developed by Gerald West and Ujamaa Centre Staff in 2006. The Ujamaa Centre is an organized

<sup>15</sup> See for example Waweru (2007).

<sup>16</sup> See also West (2001).



it is able to judge if their experiences are as God intended them to be. Such provokes a counterpoint and an action that enables them to change the status quo. Although West (1996) may not be aware, and may not be thinking contrapuntally, his reading method once repeated is able to produce a rhythm resulting to the contrapuntal style of analysis.

## **Mapping the growth of African Contrapuntal Reading**

African contrapuntal reading methods are practical, communal, and contextual, impacting personal traits of knowledge. John Mbiti (1968) argued that when you walk through the Bible you hardly reach the middle before you realise that you are walking on familiar ground. This means that any African reading the Bible will quickly discover themselves. Bediako (1994) demonstrates the significance of indigenous ways of transaction once the Bible is read in an African way. Equally West and Dube (1996) develop an argument on the importance of involving the ordinary context in reading the Bible in Africa. Another indigenous reading of the Bible has been promoted by Justin Upkong in a paper read at a conference at Stellenbosch University on 14th-15<sup>th</sup> May 1999. Upkong emphasised the need for Africans to transcend the boundaries of enculturation and liberation in biblical interpretation.

The above readings were preceded by Teresa Okure's (1993) arguments that African women have to do their own hermeneutics. She was quickly followed by Mercy Oduyoye (1994) who equally urged African women to take up the challenge of an African woman's theological hermeneutics. Mugambi in his keynote address to a consultation for African theologians at Hammanskraal, South Africa urged African theologians to take up reconstruction theology motifs in doing readings in African contexts. Waweru (2011) also offers a contrapuntal reading of scripture. All of these African readings among others show that indigenous reading methods allow conceptions of intelligence to shape the results of biblical scholarship in African studies. One common feature of all these scholars is that they all want the Bible and African culture to dialogue in a contrapuntal style.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Said (1993:51-52) proposes that the great works of literature, whether novels,

Therefore, these African readings make us realise that the use of the context, the people, and worldview domains in the interpretation of scripture offers a different approach from the common cognitive academic intelligence that has long dominated Western concepts of reading the Bible.<sup>18</sup> Africans have often gained their knowledge through community life, which is participatory in a self-concept orientation. Such methods of reading the Bible have elevated the Africans to assume their place among biblical scholars within the Christian nations of the world (Waweru 2011). African biblical interpretations rely heavily on an indigenous cultural system of an oral heritage inherited from the forefathers and foremothers. Such literature had symbols, images, and narratives with a rich vein used in creative readings of the Bible by the indigenous people. Through contrapuntalism Africans were able to read the text for themselves, even when the missionaries were hostile to such readings.

Contrapuntal reading has the liberating potential to provide an intertextual reading of the Bible and African culture (Waweru 2007, 2011, 2020). Such a culture perceives, interprets, and makes sense of reality in biblical texts. This method is an examination of African reality from the perspective of Africans rather than Africans from the periphery perspective. African contrapuntal readings are erroneously looked down upon when compared with the written theories of research. For Draper (1997:3), the central Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the author and interpreter of the Bible makes every attempt to stop African readings null and void. The reason for this is that indigenous methods are usually people-centred and, on many occasions, may appear immeasurable. Hence they could be mistaken for a simplistic, non-scientific investigative sense of inquiry. Nevertheless African contrapuntal readings are full of rich complexities engrained in community ceremonies and practices such as narratives that are full of proverbs, folktales, riddles, songs, music,

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the Quran, or the Bible, should be read contrapuntally in the modern post-colonial world, such that the literature is read on its own terms, with an appreciation of its cultural contribution, but in intimate connection with an understanding and critique of the social world which it legitimates.

<sup>18</sup> Waweru (2008:139) argues that it is time for critical thinkers to apply new models or paradigms that are emerging in almost every discipline from sociology and economics to theology and religion.

dance, and other common knowledge-centred activities of education. This has continued in African thought, though not without shortcomings.

Therefore it is intelligent to say that African contrapuntal readings of the Bible are not without limitations by nature (Waweru 2020). This is because all readings - Western, Asian, and African - derive their strength from practices and beliefs that have lacked transparency for a long time and appears to avoid flexibility and constructive change (Waweru 2011). African cultural practices claim to be static and keep on rejuvenating forgetting that they are subject to change due to economic, environmental, and social circumstances that cannot be avoided (Waweru 2007). Nevertheless such limitations have not stopped contrapuntal readings of the scriptures from providing results that have helped communities acquire knowledge and information in various theological reflections (Waweru 2007).

## **African Contrapuntal Reading is the Way**

From the ongoing above, it is clear that the encounter between the African biblical research methods and Western methods of reading is usually an experience African researchers are often shy to discuss. The majority of African researchers are trained in Western theories of research and are usually supervised by intellectuals of other cultures. Such an experience makes African researchers mimic Western methodologies in biblical studies in order for their publications to be given a space, and as a result, they find themselves between a rock and a hard place. Western intellectuals have their research methods on one hand and their domination enterprise on the other hand. Africans have their cultures to be investigated and studied on one hand and the Western demand that their tools be applied on the other hand. To balance these two scenarios has been a nightmare in our research in biblical studies in Africa in the twenty-first Century. For Oduyoye (2007:3), both men and women should think together, dialogue, come to decisions, and then act for the common good, as well as for the wellbeing of all of us.

It is common to find African postgraduate students quoting theories and methods that make no sense at all in African contexts, yet supervisors will insist on those methods, even though the results will not tally with the expectations of the students. Remember what I said earlier about an examiner of my PhD

thesis who doubted that Edward Said's model of Contrapuntalism could be applied in New Testament Studies. This is the quagmire and the ambiguity research in African universities is facing today. Hence without blinking an eye, Africans have to demand that research on African issues be done purely through contextual research methods for better results.

The ambiguity of research in Africa has been expressed by Itumeleng Mosala (1986). Mosala unequivocally questions the status of the Bible in Black Theology as a revealed 'word of God'. For Mosala the Bible is an absolute, non-ideological 'word of God'. This simply means that many African researchers are still enslaved in their ways of research as far as their hermeneutical starting points are concerned. For Mosala, the Bible does not necessarily offer any certain starting point for a liberation theology in Africa, but this does not mean it cannot be used. However Mosala was critical of African researchers who do not realise that the Bible acted as a document for the ruling class, representing the ideological and political interests of the ruling class. Waweru (2011) opines that Africans have come to recognise their specific position in dispossession and cultural and economic exploitation at the end of a long history of colonial domination. Currently the problem in Africa is neo-colonialism, which is continued by the children of the haves, while the have-nots continue to struggle to make ends meet.

Hence the Bible must be de-ideologised before it can hermeneutically offer a straightforward motif for any liberation in Africa. On the same footing, Tinyiko Maluleke (1996) has extended this critique of African research by African theologians such as Lamin Sanneh, John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, and Jesse Mugambi for more-often-than-not ignoring the history, culture, and ideologies of the oppressors as they transacted their theology. This simply means that we must wrestle African research methods from the domination of Western research methods in order to allow them to stand free from any encumbrances.

## **Conclusion**

As we conclude this discussion, it is good to remind ourselves that the Bible had played a key role in the construction of the African as a benighted heathen, lost in idolatry, superstition, depravity and vice, and in need of the gospel. Such

a view reiterates earlier observations proposing that African contrapuntal readings be fully embraced in our research circles. Contrapuntalism is participatory and emancipatory, which is not against Western methods in anyway. Its application in biblical research carried out within African contexts is highly productive. African contrapuntal readings of the text are more realistic and complete in making our world more known. Such methods ought to be a key hermeneutical starting point in opening the African world of intellect and imagination that finally allows indigenous African-centred research to emerge. This is because, as Mji (2009:7) argues, research is part and parcel of our creation that helps us think and feel. It guides, protects, and makes us move to the next level of creation.

The point expressed here is that as African researchers we need to embrace a culturally balanced research method, because the majority of us have been trained outside our cultural orientations. This training underpinned and legitimated the imperial assumption of control and the colonial theft of intellectualism. In such a scenario, we must find creative ways of using the research methods developed in our cultural heritage, which is full of multi-layered knowledge systems that could help us understand our own reality in order to encourage and empower our people. African researchers need to revise their thinking that one can only be a good researcher if one applies foreign research techniques. In such a scenario contrapuntalism becomes an option since it will produce a counterpoint.

As our African knowledge system custodians continue to diminish, indigenous African knowledge becomes vulnerable. African indigenous scholars must arise to the task of documentation of indigenous African knowledge in order to preserve it for future generations. It is for such a reason that TARA has been formed to chart new ways to document our research and create a paradigm shift, which is imperative. In contrapuntalism African researchers will be required not to negate the already existing Western research methods of evaluation of biblical text nor undermine them, but will enhance their own in order to create and generate new knowledge, while respecting all existing sources of knowledge. A contrapuntal perspective is the way.

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## **The Church and Politics in Zimbabwe**

Ezekiel Baloyi (PhD)

University of the Free State, South Africa

revbaloyi@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The impact of church and politics in Zimbabwe has been an ongoing process from the days of the liberation struggle to the independent and conflicted Zimbabwe of 1987, 2000, 2008-2009, and 2017 to date. The church has upheld peacekeeping roles as well as defensiveness in some political settings being viewed as enablers of the ruling government of Zimbabwe led by President Mnangagwa of Zanu PF. Since the dislodging of President Mugabe in November 2017 and the role played by one priest, Father Mukonori of Roman Catholic Church, to convince R. G. Mugabe to avoid bloodshed by resigning, the church has been an outstanding participant in politics. This study is a descriptive qualitative study and relies mainly on secondary data from associated articles and research. Through this article, the researcher indicates that the church had a huge role in the achievement of independence in Zimbabwe as well as in brokering peace deals such as the Unity Accord of 1987 after Gukurahundi and the Government of National Unity after the disastrous 2008 national elections. The church also intervened through the Catholic Commission on Gukurahundi though its findings were denied by the former President of Zimbabwe R. G. Mugabe. Findings establish a gap between the expected role of the church in politics and its actual role as the role of the church is dwindling as most of the churches are declaring allegiance to favourite parties, compromising their mediation roles locally. This article confirms that the established roles of the church, including mediation, peace broking, and advocacy, are being infringed by church leaders as spokespersons of their congregations. The article recommends that the church remain neutral (non-partisan) in order to partake in its key roles of mediation, peacebuilding, and advocacy.

## Introduction

The involvement of the church in politics of Zimbabwe dates back to the time before the liberation struggle (Guti, 1994:6). The early involvement of the church included the critical role played by the Jesuit priests in the character formation of notable revolutionary nationalists like Robert Gabriel Mugabe (Kuvirimirwa, 2013). The duties of Jesuit priests were to identify and fund the education of potential leaders from the African continent and Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe long confirmed his allegiance to the Catholic systems for their contribution towards the liberation of Zimbabwe and his personal life. In 1932, the African Apostle visited the Kutama area to declare a prophecy of Robert Gabriel Mugabe as the first black leader of liberated Zimbabwe, a sign that the church was and is still a role player in the politics of Zimbabwe (Kuvirimirwa, 2013). During the liberation struggle churches such as the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Christian Church (ZCC), and Johwani Marange and Masowe held different roles in the then Rhodesia, that led to the independence of Zimbabwe. Some of the churches preached a gospel of human rights and the need for Zimbabwe to be independent from the jaws of colonial imbalances. Other churches were peddling the discriminations through the support of the non-liberal Zimbabwe-Rhodesia of Bishop Abel Muzorewa (Oden, 2010).

Kuvirimirwa (2013) posits that the pressure of the church led to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 when then Rhodesian leader Ian Douglas Smith decided to detach Rhodesia from the rule of Britain. Even before the days of UDI, the church increased pressure on the civic society which led to the formation of different liberation movements such as that of Zapu in 1961 and Zanu in 1963 (Oden, 2010). According to Gutu (2015:9), the African churches were not allowed to freely assemble during the Rhodesian rule, making them more politically conscious and supportive of the liberation of Zimbabwe. Their fight was to attain freedom of worship as well as restore the annihilated rights of the majority of native Zimbabweans. The church also contributed to the education of the nationalists in Zimbabwe. Mugabe was one of the beneficiaries of Catholic missionary education that benefited potential leaders. Some of the notable contributions of the church included assisting in the crossing of liberation struggle cadres from then Rhodesia into

neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zambia. The church also facilitated weapons through already established missionary routes in the case of those who opposed human rights (Dembedza, 2013). Through their mission hospitals the churches facilitated the treatment of injured liberation fighters through the likes of the late Doctor Simon Mazorodze who became the first health minister of independent Zimbabwe.

The churches also facilitated the organisation of the *pungwes* in the liberation struggle that facilitated the recruitment of young liberation fighters. The church preserved their security through educating young people in the communities and schools like St. Alberts Mission and Pamushana High School. According to Dembedza (2013) the greatest number of liberation fighters came from mission schools. The major facilitators were priests and bishops of various churches who commanded great respect in the communities affected. With the Rhodesians feeling intense pressure, they pushed for a church leader to takeover Rhodesia giving birth to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in 1979. Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the United Methodist Church became the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. The church realised that the imbalances were not fixed and rejected the pact leading to the universally accepted Lancaster House Convention. This saw the holding of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe in 1980 which confirmed the prophecy of Robert Gabriel Mugabe as the first elected black Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe (Kuvirimirwa, 2013).

In the aftermath of liberation struggle, Zimbabwean leadership did not seriously declare their allegiance to church as its major influence according to Dembedza (2013). Despite all, the first black President was Reverend Canaan Banana another church personality who became instrumental in the joining of the two liberation movements Zanu and Zapu to form Zanu-PF in 1987 (Vengeyi, 2013: 29). The outcome of the 1980 elections triggered a civil war that led to the split of the unified Patriotic Front of the Lancaster House consisting of Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. Realising the damage, the church came in using Reverend Canaan Banana as the mediator in the conflict which gave birth to Unity Accord of 1987. In the aftermath of Gukurahundi, the Catholic Commission played a role in researching the depth of the atrocities in the Midlands and Matebeleland Provinces. Despite these efforts, most of its findings were rejected by then President Mugabe. This led

to a temporary divorce between the government of R. G. Mugabe and the Catholic Commission.

Dembedza (2013) alleges that allegiance to church was made apparent in the wake of the threat to power when the new opposition of the Movement for Democratic Change was formed in 1999. The government-led Zanu Pto reignited its critical allies to save the fading giant from loss of power. Mugabe, then the President of the country, made frantic efforts to meet church leaders such as the popular Marange Sect, which declared its allegiance to Zanu PF leadership. The sect was not the only one as Johwani Masowe and other African churches such as ZCC through their founders and leadership also declared their allegiance. Ezekiel Guti was cornered at one point to declare allegiance and he confirmed supporting Zanu PF leadership (Guti, 2015:9). There were casualties of bishops who chose to stand with the opposition in the early 2000s such as Archbishop Pius Ncube of Catholic Church which led to embarrassment through a video footage of him with someone's wife. This silenced many Catholic priests who contracted their pledge to live their whole life without women in their lives as Pius Ncube was demoted from his church role as a result (Vengeyi, 2010:159). Pius Ncube's political influence had grown in Matebeleland as the first Catholic to stand against Mugabe.

Some of the chronicles of the influence of the church in Zimbabwean politics include the Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace (CCJP, 1997) report that eighteen Catholic missionaries and one bishop had been deported during the struggle and 23 expatriate missionaries and one local priest had been killed. By March 1979, 65 Catholic mission stations, schools, and hospitals had been closed according to Togarasei (2013:165). According to Ndlovu and Mwanaka (2017), the Church's Commission for Justice and Peace had been harassed and put on trial by the government of Smith. Its officers were arrested and deported, and its publications such as *Motto Magazine* by Mambo Press in Gweru which was blown up by Smith government agents during the election campaign of 1980 were banned. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace was founded in 1972 against the historical background of the Catholic Church's teaching on justice and peace spelt out in various papal encyclicals. The Commission strived to bring about a higher awareness in people of their socio-economic, civil, political, and legal rights. It is also acknowledged that the Commission was very instrumental in facilitating the negotiations leading to

the Commonwealth Conference held in Lusaka in May 1979. This led to the convening of the Lancaster House Conference followed by the Lancaster House Agreement. A ceasefire and finally democratic elections led to Zimbabwe attaining of independence on 18 April 1980 (Gunda, 2014:145). Today, Zanu PF is still in power thanks to the influence of the church as Zimbabwe is a heavily Christian society and most of its communities are guided by cultural and Christianity values from the economics and society to the political landscape (Vengeyi, 2013:30).

In the run-up to the 2018 elections, many parishes campaigned for conflicts to be resolved without violence. Since the riots in January 2019, the churches in particular have offered a forum for victims to discuss their experiences. Victims were encouraged to go public with their stories which the church presented as the first decisive step on the long road to restoring justice. In many regions, Catholic and Protestant churches have founded and trained local committees and groups such as the Peace Ambassadors in Mutare or Local Peace Committees in Bulawayo that unite people from all walks of life, parties, and religions. In the latest conflicts in Bulawayo, the churches assumed the important role of a civil society representative that the government could approach and talk to. These efforts for peace and non-violent conflict management are resulting in development initiatives within which people themselves are starting to take action, to negotiate with the authorities, and to improve their situations (Vengeyi, 2013:29).

## **Method**

Research methods consist of research design, procedure, and data analysis (Vengeyi, 2010:159). This study uses a qualitative study with a descriptive approach using desk research form dominated by theoretical analysis. A qualitative study uses descriptive data for its data collection (Zaluchu, 2020). The study results are then supported by various existing literature and theories (Gilbert et al, 2018). This study aims to observe the impact of the church on politics in Zimbabwe. The descriptions in this study related to the positive and negative impact of the church in Zimbabwean politics are supported by the literature and authorities as well as previous research and writings.

## Results and discussion

Several researches and results indicate that the role of church in Zimbabwean politics is both inevitable and critical as the church has become an integral part of Zimbabwean society. According to Vengeyi (2013:30), the relationship between the church and Zimbabwe politics can be discussed in various headings, all in line with their involvement in the day-to-day events of the country. Taylor (2002) posits that Zimbabwean politics' marriage to the church was inevitable as they walked a long road together in the liberation of Zimbabwe. Manyonganise (2022) indicates that there are perceptions that the church is siding with the ruling party given the long silence of these formerly vocal partners in the struggle for human rights. This comment is followed by an encouragement that the convention of the churches recommend strategies for the good of Zimbabwe which was taken as the first radical charge against the ruling party by the church in Zimbabwe. The church has a marriage with Zimbabwean politics which is usually perceived as alignment with the ruling party. The church is taking a brave stance in confronting the Zimbabwean government to address the socioeconomic issues affecting the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) posits that Zimbabwe was heavily influenced by Mugabeism and that the strategies of Mugabe on church were clear in that he would isolate churches that were against him by making their operations difficult while making it easier for those churches that supported him. Such indications are visible in the wake of the child marriage issues that surrounded the Marange Sect which was apparently swept under the carpet. This article further discusses the involvement of the church in Zimbabwean politics today as critical events in the country indicate its heavy involvement. According to Dube (2021:304) the government of Zimbabwe denounced the bishops who gathered towards finding a solution to a government seen as ignoring the pleas of its ordinary citizens. The role of the church in the national events such as the Heroes Day, Independence Day, political rallies, and the issues to do with gathering in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed hereunder.

## Heroes gatherings

Dube (2021) chronicles the contribution of the church in the liberation struggle and how the priests and bishops sacrificed their lives in supporting the liberation of Zimbabwe. Their efforts are still immensely appreciated and have inspired the traditional churches to commemorate these sacrifices by commemorating the National Heroes Day on the calendar through a heavy presence in stadiums to support the commemoration of souls lost towards the emancipation of Zimbabwe. Raftopoulos (2013:4) argues that the church continues to support politics directly in Zimbabwe and that most of the political influence comes from church hence commemorations such as Heroes Day in Zimbabwe have a lot of significance in the history of Zimbabwe. Church leadership such as that of ZCC, Johwani Masowe, Marange sect, Forward in Faith, Roman Catholic Church among others are observed as the prominent churches still visible in their uniforms. Until today most the government events have the slot for the Roman Catholic Church priesthood to preach and pray for the nation. This in turn makes it an open fact that the church is still heavily involved in Zimbabwean politics and their role has not been compromised because they have large numbers of followers from whom the politicians want votes.

According to Tshuma (2019) in publications in online news of late, churches are seen to be trying to make their contributions towards improving the country for the better of all Zimbabweans. Catholic bishops met President Emmerson Mnangagwa with his deputies Vice President Kembo Mohadi and Constantino Chiwenga at State House where they discussed issues affecting the country. Some of the outcomes of their Indaba included a 48-hour moratorium on the dismissed doctors returning to work without reapplying or being asked questions. The bishops also stressed the need for inclusive political dialogue in resolving Zimbabwe's challenges. Another group of church leaders under the banner of Inter-Denominational Churches met the President and Vice Presidents at State House where they discussed the political situation in Zimbabwe. All these indicate the visibility of churches in the politics of Zimbabwe.

According to Raftopoulos (2013: 4) in the times of leaders like Mugabe, the leader frequently attended the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Harare for mass



with the priests which made the priests feel honoured. The same priests would then make sure that all national events such as Heroes Day were attended. During the Mugabe regime, the church would be given the podium to explain their role in the liberation struggle so that they could justify their role in the planning and funding of national events such as Heroes Day. The stadiums would be filled with church members wearing different uniforms representing their churches, a move that has been observed as a marketing strategy to lure followers to vote for the ruling government. Opposition parties have criticised such gestures as being misleading since not many of the opposition leaders attended such events. Church leaders such as Andrew Wutawunashé have openly told their congregants that they need to vote for the ruling party as a sign of respect for the lost heroes according to Tarusarira (2020).

Mangudhla (2014) alleges that in the early 2000 the Masowe sect had one of their own Madzibaba Border Gezi die through an accident and the ruling party gave the church the hero's shrine in respect of one of their own who was buried at the national shrine. In many cases when there was a burial of a national hero before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were buses allocated for different churches to ferry them to the national shrine. They would have a chance to visit the national heroes acre and pay last respects to the predominantly Zanu PF cadres who fought in the liberation struggle. The opposition parties argued that they are a Zanu PF enabling group of churches. Mangudhla (2014:23) further postulates that churches such as the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and the Roman Catholic Church have had a huge bearing on the burial of the national heroes and the Masowe people have their own known terraces. The White Cloth predominantly maintain their presence since independence as some of the most loyal people of the cloth to the ruling Zanu PF. In return most of the politicians frequent their churches for blessings and healing and some to probe the next leaders of Zimbabwe. This has given the church huge relevance in the country's politics as it is believed that their leaders are able to foretell the Zimbabwean leadership (Togarasei, 2013:165). Madzibaba Wimbo was also known for prophesying the coming of Emmerson Mnangagwa and it came to pass. This has cemented the relationship between the church and the country's leadership and ruling party. In most cases, when they are given the time to speak, they end up encouraging their congregants to remember the liberation war and the sacrifices that were made by the fallen heroes, despite the young age in the liberation of Zimbabwe.

In that regard this article can tell that the national events such as National Heroes Day are sometimes where people from different parties collude to celebrate brevity. However most of the opposition leaders do not do that and usually take the days to criticise the mistakes which were made by the current government and the church as enablers of those mistakes. Mangudhla (2014:20) argues that the presence of the church in such gatherings is more historical than looking at the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe. Hence, to conclude that churches are being used would be an overstatement as they have fought even during the Rhodesian period for their rights of worship and freedom of worship hand-in-hand with the liberation movements something which cannot just fizzle out overnight.

## **Independence celebrations**

Raftopoulos (2013:4) posits that churches have been the main players in the celebration of independence and most of the churches, especially traditional churches, have had a huge influence on the recognition of the independence of Zimbabwe. We have witnessed apostles in white garments at many independence celebrations in Zimbabwe, followed by the heavy presence of different uniforms in the stadiums, an indication that there is a cordial relationship between the church in Zimbabwe and political holidays. According to Taylor (2002), despite criticism from some sectors of politics, the churches have maintained that they will stick to the ruling party of Zimbabwe as was confessed by the Marange Sect leaders that they were told by the Holy Spirit that they should vote the current government and not any opposition parties since it is the government that was installed by God. This portrays the Zanu PF as God's gift to Zimbabwe because of the role it played in the liberation struggle. According to Togarasei (2013) even new Pentecostal churches such as Prophetic and Healing Deliverance Ministries (PHD) and their leadership are believed to be forging relations with the Zanu PF government towards a consolidation of power through preaching. This has seen a lot of criticism of the church in the situation of Zimbabwe as peddlers of the ruling party forget the suffering of the masses from the policies of the country. Apostle Guti's spiritualised theology on politics was highlighted as a major setback for the church leader becoming the voice of the voiceless in the early 2000s. However, many other Zimbabwean Pentecostal church leaders have propagated the

same theology. For instance, as highlighted elsewhere in this article, Prophet Andrew Wutawunashé of the Family of God Church was a close associate of the ZANU–PF party at one time and could not speak against ZANU–PF (Togarasei, 2006). However, the same Wutawunashé, who professed that President Mugabe was chosen by God, in 2017, after the coup, reversed his statement. He purportedly admitted that God had elected Mugabe to finish his race, just like Moses who handed over his work to Joshua. He claimed to have talked from a spiritual point of view, but, in the end, that is not what happened. The country was not developing; rather, it was having factional wars. He commended the Zimbabwe Defence Forces for the wisdom they applied in midwifing a peaceful transition in the governance of our nation, Zimbabwe (Ndlovu and Mwanaka 2017).

From the narratives we can tell that the church is married to politics in Zimbabwe. Most of the churches are simply abiding by that covenant. This has incensed many opposition politicians. They believe that the independence of Zimbabwe should mean independence of all sectors of the country for everyone to participate, something they believe is not the case. They believe that the media remains controlled by the government in office hence, they do not celebrate the independence of Zimbabwe (Dube, 2021). Despite all these reservations, the apparent reality of the church and Zimbabwe politics is that they are still in a marriage relationship. The leading party, Zanu PF, still leads in the cordial relations, making the church an ever-present stakeholder in their independence celebrations and commemorations across the county.

## **Political rallies**

Dembedza (2013) confirms that Zanu-PF presidents have been an ever-present feature in the Marange Shrine during their congregations, claiming that people are dying during those congregations because the sect refuses medication. The current scenario claims that the Marange people have refused to vaccinate their people against the coronavirus, something the government cannot deny or force because they have given them a freedom of worship that respects their ethics. According to Dembedza (2013), child marriages are happening under the government's watch but because of the cordial relationship and government respect for their beliefs, the government is playing catch and release. Human rights organisations decry the cordiality as they believe it is

suffocating some congregants from the sect as the government cannot be seen to be disturbing the cordial relations because it guarantees votes. In 2013 Cde Mugabe was seen in the congregation and instead of introducing himself in the church shrine with the '*Rugare*' meaning peace, he introduced himself by saying '*Pamberi neZanu PF*' which means 'forward with Zanu PF.' Rather than incense the congregants, it excited them instead. This confirms that there is a huge relationship to be safeguarded between the church and politics of Zimbabwe. The Zanu PF is the only party that is allowed to campaign at a church service and given the coverage in those Mapostori (Apostolic churches) of white cloth and the Zion Christian Church in Zimbabwe including the Family of God led by Reverend Wutawunashe. Mapostori is a syncretistic church in Zimbabwe, mixing traditional African beliefs with Christian teachings. This group pledged loyalty to ZANU-PF, instructing all adherents to vote for this party in the past election (Kuvirimirwa: 2013) and pledging to support and help the party win the election in 2018 (Dembedza, 2013). As an outcome of this relationship President Mugabe spoke to a group of over one hundred thousand Mapostori at the Johane Marange Apostolic Church during his campaign before the last elections (ZANU-PF Team, 2013). This was a strong endorsement of the *Mapostori* by the President.

The former opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, had on more than one occasion visited Nigerian Prophet T. B. Joshua, probably seeking divine guidance (Staff Reporter, 2013). Another example of political interaction with the prophetic churches is the desire of the Minister of Tourism to use the popularity and crowd-pulling ability of the churches to create a market for religious tourism. He hoped that twenty-percent of Zimbabwe's tourism earnings would come from religious tourism, much of that from prophetic churches. He argued that sixty percent of tourist arrival in Nigeria to visit T. B. Joshua's church (Mangudhla, 2014). He would like to see similar inflows in Zimbabwe. The high-level interaction of prophets with political leaders is notable. Zimbabwean prophets Makandiwa and Mudzanire known as Hubert Angel have been invited to private meetings with national leaders like the late Robert Mugabe (Mutsaka, 2012) and President Ruto of Kenya (Staff Reporter, 2013). This all demonstrates that the church and politics in Zimbabwe are inseparable. Campaigns are apparently happening in churches making the houses of God into political rallies. This is evidenced by the then First Lady Grace Mugabe inviting all the apostles in Rufaro Stadium to address supporters

of the firing of now President Emmerson Mnangagwa, indicating the power of the church to influence the political outcome. Unfortunately, that was the last address before the coup. Grace Mugabe would frequent the Forward in Faith Conventions in the National Sports Stadium on Women Days and preach the gospel of maintaining the leadership of Cde Robert Mugabe on a church podium with ululations from crowds using the church to campaign.

## **The church's response to politics (2000–2020)**

At the dawn of 2000–2020, Forward in Faith's leadership was quick to shift from its open support of the ZANU–PF government. As ZANU–PF's legitimacy grew ever more tenuous and it resorted to more political violence to stave off its opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change, Forward in Faith's relationship with ZANU–PF became shaky. From 2000 to 2020, Apostle Guti decided to change the phrase 'Praying for our President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and praying for our soldiers and police' to 'Let's pray for our country Zimbabwe so that God may have mercy on us'. This is a sign that Apostle Guti deliberately decided to edit his Ten-days letters by removing the phrase 'pray for President Robert Mugabe' to maintain his political camouflage. Praying for President Mugabe would indicate open support of Mugabe who had caused much suffering to the ordinary masses. Thus, to mention Mugabe in his prayer letters during this time would imply that Apostle Guti openly supported ZANU–PF and not the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) which was controversial considering the MDC support in the urban constituencies. Furthermore, in doing that, Apostle Guti would lose a sizeable number of the youthful members who constitute the majority of his urban church membership. Again, for Apostle Guti to keep his church from splitting, during Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe's time as President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Apostle Guti and his church, Zimbabwe Assemblies Of God Africa, also known as Forward in Faith, left the organisation and rejoined the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), citing the partisan attitude that EFZ was now exhibiting (Togarasei, 2013:165). Prophet Wutawunashe, as the President of the EFZ, had come out openly as a supporter of the ZANU–PF party and worked closely with the party. As a result, Wutawunashe was regarded as a ruling party collaborationist by some members of his church. Wutawunashe would often be seen praying at national

events such as the independence celebrations. As if that was not enough, Wutawunashe endorsed the presidential election results of 2002 as the will of God, and he openly supported the controversial land reform programme the ruling party had introduced in 2000. However, Apostle Guti did not want it to be so apparent that he was pro-ZANU–PF. Thus, Apostle Guti withdrew from the EFZ and joined the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. To authenticate that his moving from EFZ during Prophet Wutawunashe’s tenure was Apostle Guti’s political camouflage, after the lapsing of Prophet Wutawunashe tenure as the EFZ President, the Forward in Faith bounced back to the EFZ.

On 26 January 2020, Apostle Guti received President Emmerson Mnangagwa and gave him a platform to address men and women of the collar who had come all the way from different continents for a spiritually deeper life conference. Perhaps President Mnangagwa had imposed himself on the conference, but it confirmed the continuous political conniving of the church leader. In his address, Mnangagwa confirmed that the church leader had intimated to him that the church prays religiously for the state President and his ZANU–PF government every day of the first 10 days of January (Mpofu, 2020) even though the Ten-days letters since 2000 were no-longer stating that people should pray for the President and the ZANU–PF government. Accordingly, it is against this background that the presence of President Mnangagwa at this leadership summit underscores the church leader’s motive with regard to setting the politics of the agenda.

## **Recommendations**

The researcher recommends that churches in Zimbabwe should avoid declaring allegiance to certain parties even if they support the parties in order to be able to be recognised as neutrals. There are times when conflict needs church to resolve the conflict as the only objective mediator or to be the salt of the world. In the Zimbabwean setting, it is difficult for Reverend Wutawunashe, Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, Noah Marange, or Destiny for Africa Network to mediate the dispute between the opposition parties and Zanu PF. They have already declared their allegiance creating polarisation in the churches and among the members. The researcher also recommends that church takes a distance from political rallies to avoid discrimination in the society as that can turn into future conflict in cases where the opposition gets

a nod in the elections. The researcher also recommends that the church attend national events but not to denounce any other political player in their speeches because they will leave other political players feeling that they are irrelevant. Thus, safe-guarding the role of religion and the church in the nation is important to avoid conflicts in the future such as are happening in the Arab world where the same religion fights for leadership making everything politicised. Praying for leadership is a better way than declaring prayers for a specific leader which may be taken as a marketing gimmick by other political players. Hence, the recent efforts to locally solve Zimbabwean political conflicts proved difficult, thus the resorting to the likes of Comrade Thabo Mbeki or Kgalema Monhlante of South Africa to broker peace while before that Zimbabwe used to do it on their own with the use of Canaan Banana and Catholic Commission among other local credible conflict resolvers.

## **Conclusions**

The church has sought to provide effective leadership in a heavily polarised political environment. In particular, church leaders have challenged the political leadership to give dialogue a chance in many settings from the time of Lancaster House in 1979, Unity Accord in 1987, Peace and Reconciliation in 2008, Government of National Unity in 2009, the dislodge of Mugabe being facilitated by a Catholic priest Father Mukonori convincing Mugabe to resign, which he did, and most recently the Compensation of the White Commercial Farmers for developments made of their lands. They have openly denounced violence as degrading both the victim and the perpetrator. They have called for realistic economic policies that place the needs of the poor at their centre as well as trying to foster national healing through the Catholic Commission. Recently the bishops signed a petition to seek the audience of the President on the challenges facing Zimbabwe which was rejected because the coordinator had previously criticised the government. All these efforts were made to create and maintain the influence of the church on politics of Zimbabwe and for the welfare of the society of Zimbabwe. In many cases churches are caught in the conflict of criticising the state while cooperating with it and performing their function as a forum for resistance and opposition. They remain in discussion with the governing authorities, organise the National Dialogue, and prepare the ground for resistance and opposition

against excesses of power. There are certain church leaders who do not value the views of their followers and declare allegiance to certain parties which then reduces the ability of those churches to participate in the acceptable dialogue when it involves the opposition. There are some impressive examples of how the churches engage in witnessing peace such as Unity Accord and GNU in Zimbabwe. Such indications of influence of the church on the politics of Zimbabwe are critical and valued.



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## **Achieving a Christocentric deliverance praxis in the churches of Matatiele and Maluti, South Africa**

Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi  
South African Theological Seminary (SATS)  
modisa@sats.ac.za

Gordon Harrison  
South African Theological Seminary (SATS)  
gordonh@mweb.co.za

### **Abstract**

This article describes a study of deliverance praxis in the South African church, focusing on a qualitative analysis of the exorcism practices examined therein. Between November 2018 and March 2019, a small-scale empirical study was conducted in the forty-eight churches of Matatiele and Maluti in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, which arguably constitute a microcosm of the general South African church as regards diversity and representation. The study identified non-optimal deliverance practices that need to be reviewed. As detailed in this article, its objective was to advocate Christocentric deliverance instead and to highlight the ecclesial praxis best-suited to these churches' situation. Consequently, this article advances a specific, self-regulatory diagnostic tool to create a more God-glorifying deliverance praxis and preclude the need for state intervention to regulate exorcism in South Africa.

### **Introduction**

Healing and deliverance from demonic possession formed part of the ministry of Jesus Christ and the early church and continue to play a crucial role in sub-Saharan African Christianity. In a contemporary context, however, this ministry

has been tarnished by rampant fraudulent abuse and significant tendencies towards syncretism. Many mercenary charlatans have taken advantage of the naïve and desperate faith of a spiritually and economically vulnerable African population. This study of the deliverance praxis of the forty-eight churches of Matatiele and Maluti, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, uncovers evidence of dangerous religious practices, the use of hypnotism, emotional and financial exploitation, and unscrupulous deception. It also highlights a deep-rooted ancestral veneration praxis within Christian deliverance and the appropriation of traditional healers' paraphernalia and practices. Consequently, the study cautions against taking an exclusively phenomenological approach to the study of deliverance, advocating instead the adoption of a Christocentric filter to bridge the divide between the experience of supernatural deliverance and a theoretical or academic understanding of it (Anderson 2018:317). Given that God chose to reveal himself and model deliverance praxis in Jesus Christ, considering the mission, teaching methodology, and operational principles of Christ must establish the best deliverance practices and, by extension, expose corruption and abuse wherever there is disparity. Deliverance praxis in the churches of the research area, when viewed through a Christocentric filter, is far from normative. The conspicuous discrepancies and abuse cannot simply be ascribed to isolated aberrance, cultural context, or denominational idiosyncrasy. Clearly, malevolent intentions have infiltrated the African Church and are freely operating to exploit the vulnerable and ruin the integrity of the Christian faith. This article addresses these abuses by designing a Christocentric deliverance approach to empower the churches in question.

## **Research method**

Our study used the four distinct steps in Richard Osmer's *Practical Theology* (2008): (a) the descriptive-empirical task – gathering empirical data to understand the situation and context; (b) the interpretive task – using analytical tools from other disciplines to clarify and comprehend this situation; (c) the normative task – establishing theological traditions, ethical norms, and best practices; and (d) the strategic task – proposing an enhanced or alternative praxis and action plan. That is, the steps ask, 'What is happening?', 'Why is it happening?', 'What ought to happen?', and 'How might we respond?'

We used these steps to develop four subsidiary research questions to supplement our main one, which asked what strategies could be developed to ensure a more Christocentric deliverance praxis in the Matatiele and Maluti churches. The subsidiary questions were: (a) How is deliverance currently conducted in the various churches of Matatiele and Maluti? (b) Why are there exploitative and abusive deliverance practices in some of these churches? (c) What are the biblical models or prototypes of deliverance? (d) What measures could be implemented to develop a more Christocentric deliverance praxis in the Matatiele and Maluti churches? The study hypothesised that a strategy to create a more God-glorifying and Christocentric deliverance praxis could be developed.

This article will present a brief overview of exorcism – in Western church history and from an African perspective – before outlining the findings of the study. It will then discuss the Gospel of Mark and the Book of Acts, using Biblical examples to illuminate normative exorcism praxis. Finally, it will propose a specific model of Christocentric exorcism praxis for the churches in Matatiele and Maluti.

## **A brief view of Western perspectives on exorcism**

Though popular western literature – in works such as *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens 1991), the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling 2014), or *The Exorcist* (Blatty 2011) – has evoked great curiosity in the paranormal, Western post-Reformation Protestant theology has tended to dismiss it as the product of hoaxes, psychological disturbances, and the imagination (Brady 1995:152). Detractors postulate various psychological theories to explain bizarre ecclesiastical behaviour and extreme religious experience, including deliverance from demonic possession (Bull 2011; Collins 1988; McDonald 2012). Their explanations point to stage hypnotism, emotionalism, fraudulent trickery, and mental illnesses such as psychosis or dissociative identity disorder. Even in seminary training, the traditional Roman Catholic acceptance of the supernatural now coexists with a modern secular scepticism of its ostensible manifestations (Brady 1995:153).

Alongside these theological developments, medical science has advanced exponentially since the time of Neolithic trephination, when discs of bone

were removed from the skull to allow demons to escape (Pressman 2001:98). Multiple scholars have highlighted the difficulty of distinguishing between psychopathology and demonology and, by implication, the need for psychotherapy or deliverance (Bull 2011; Collins 1988; McDonald 2012; Rosik 1997; Rowan and Dwyer 2015). In particular, Jean Mercer explores the interface between deliverance and conventional psychotherapy and highlights possible areas of abuse in the deliverance ministry (2013:595). She mentions the American Psychological Association's code of conduct (2013) as a useful benchmark for the ethics of deliverance (Mercer 2013:605), though for most Christians, especially Evangelicals, the Bible still provides the ultimate ethical framework.

Ultimately, the abuse of deliverance fuels contemporary Western scepticism and mitigates Christian witness. It discredits authentic miraculous events by association and undermines the faith of devoted Christians. There are many abuses and excesses in contemporary deliverance ministry but the sceptical Western tendency to disregard exorcism in response (throwing the baby out with the bathwater) ought to be avoided.

## **Exorcism in church history and from African perspectives**

Cristian Dumitrescu explains that during the first three centuries of the Early Church, many considered performing powerful acts of healing, prophecy, exorcism, and speaking in tongues to be key indicators of baptism in the Holy Spirit (2015:28). However, interest in exorcism waned subsequently: Apostolic Fathers such as Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, Ignatius, and Barnabas did not deal explicitly with this ministry while the Didache deliberately avoided discussing the miraculous, probably to dissociate Christianity from the arcane machinations and deceptions of charlatan exorcists (Twelftree 2007:285). By the third century AD, Orthodox Christians in Alexandria were engaging in a blend of exorcism rites derived from Hellenistic culture, ancient Babylonian culture, Jewish Rabbinic practices, and Egyptian papyri; these involved the invocation of foreign names, incantations, and rites such as exsufflation (Twelftree 2007:291).

Later still, Peter Canisius (1521-1597), a Jesuit priest operating in Augsburg, introduced a series of 'staged exorcisms' between 1560 and 1580 to promote



Counter-Reformation Catholicism (Young 2016:106). He was followed by the renowned Catholic exorcist Girolamo Menghi (1529–1609), whose magical practice involved the suffumigation of roots and herbs. Menghi's 1572 work, *Compendio dell'arte essorcistica* (Compendium of the Exorcist's Art), supports the existence of *incubi* and *succubi* and asserts that demons can shape-shift and adopt the appearance of animals (Young 2016:108). Pietro Stampa's *Fuga Satanae* (Flight of Satan, 1597) fuses 'exorcism, counter-witchcraft and apotropaic practices' (Young 2016:110) in a way reminiscent of contemporary deliverance praxis. Its anti-witchcraft measures include burning witchcraft instruments, suffumigating the afflicted, burning written names and images of demons, tying a stole around the neck, exorcising objects, blessing candles, and blessing houses by sprinkling holy water and placing an inscribed wax cross in them as an apotropaic amulet (Young 2016:111). Subsequently, Frans Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) claimed he could cure people by transmitting a vital force through his fingers that caused them to convulse and enter a trance-like state resembling demonic possession (Young 2016:156). His approach was the forerunner of hypnotism (Tartakovsky 2018:1).

Questionable exorcism practices thus have a long history within the church, including in the now-sceptical West, and were readily adopted in Africa. Admittedly, secular and ecclesiastical Western intellectualism and rationalism have failed to apprehend the profound beauty of African heritage, spirituality, and cultural expression for many centuries. As G. C. Oosthuizen laments, patriarchal benevolence and missionary zeal led the West to impose Eurocentric theology and religious views onto the indigenous African worldview (1997:57). Nevertheless, in the case of exorcism, the notion of Christian deliverance resonated with many constructs of the Pan-African, non-dichotomous worldview of *Ubuntu*, resulting in its widespread acceptance by Africans (Mzondi 2014:210).

The *Ubuntu* worldview sees malady and misfortune as stemming from witchcraft or curses, which emanate from spiritual or human agents (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23). Deliverance, through breaking curses and warding off evil, provides the spiritual solution that restores harmony and wellbeing (Oosthuizen 1997:58). Several of the core values of this fundamental and pervasive African worldview, *Ubuntu*, resonate with the Christian Gospel message – community, respect, sharing, and caring. Two others – belief in a

divine world and the *seriti/ isithunzi* (vital/moral force) – provide challenges when reconciling the belief systems of Christianity and African Traditional Religions, particularly with regard to ancestral veneration and the use of tangible objects like apotropaic amulets in deliverance (Mzondi 2014:294).

Buti Vincent Modiko explains that one of the attractive features of the African Initiated Churches is their vigorous style of worship, which includes dancing, beating drums, and other rites and sacrifices reminiscent of ritual ancestral veneration (2011:3). The cultural and spiritual heritage from the historical church certainly has a role to play in contemporary deliverance praxis, but indigenisation and the syncretisation of practices from African Traditional Religion with traditional Christian worship have created a unique blend. According to Mookgo S. Kgatle, prophets and the afflicted enter a trance-like state as evil spirits are expelled and the Holy Spirit received (2017:3). He believes that the prophet identifies the offending spirit, establishes the root of the problem, and deals with it effectively, which may take several days using symbolic healing objects such as staff, cloth, blue and white uniform, and, most significantly, water. A major source of contention and division within Pentecostal and Protestant Churches, therefore, is whether and how to accommodate ancestral veneration and other traditional aspects of African Traditional Religions within the church.

African support for deliverance is vested in culture and traditions, historical church roots, West African Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel teachings, biblical instruction and example, and experiential evidence. In particular, the prevailing socio-economic conditions on the African continent favour Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel teachings, which provide hope of deliverance from abject poverty, illness, and the fear of witchcraft and evil spirits (Golo 2013:369–370; Sackey 2002). Significantly, the bizarre and extreme occurrences found during many African deliverance services are most alien to those who do not feel the need for a God of miraculous healing, protection, and provision.

## **Deliverance praxis in the churches of Matatiele and Maluti**

Our study's forty-eight participants ranged from affluent, white, commercial farmers to indigent, black, peri-urban residents. Questionnaires were

administered to each leader of these Pentecostal, Catholic, Evangelical, Reformed, and African Independent churches in the Matatiele and Maluti area. The questionnaire was detailed, requiring both quantitative and qualitative responses, and notable case studies were recorded in addition to it. Following Patricia Phillips, Jack Phillips, and Bruce Aaron's *Survey Basics*, the questionnaire was also available in *isiXhosa* to minimise the Hawthorne Effect (2013:44) while varied questions involving binary responses, polar adjectives, multiple choices, rating scales, levels of agreement, importance rankings, and open- and closed-ended options (Phillips P, Phillips J, and Aaron 2013:85–101) were employed.

Of the forty-eight churches in the research area, forty-seven completed the detailed, semi-structured questionnaire, which provided quantitatively and qualitatively rich data for analysis. Video- and audio-recorded observation sessions and interviews supplemented the data from questionnaires. These were transcribed and the data was stratified into three primary streams: (a) Eucharistic/Sacramental churches, which comprised 21,3% of the sample, (b) neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic, 42,6% of it, and (c) Evangelical, 31,9%. Two churches (4,2% of the whole) were not comfortable to be categorised as belonging to any of the streams above.

The study showed that 91,9% of the church leaders engage in deliverance from possession, with a high degree of individual variation. This practice is most frequently performed in neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches. Of church leaders in Matatiele and Maluti, 87% believe deliverance is an essential ministry for the African context and view deliverance as more important than sacraments and prophecy, but less important than worship and baptism. In contrast, the Evangelical stream were more likely to consider deliverance the least important facet of Christianity. All the participants agreed that humans can be possessed by demons, although only 87% of church leaders believed that Christians could be possessed.

Furthermore, there was typically a strong agreement that deliverance should take place before baptism, using the name of Jesus only, but general disagreement with the idea that demons leave during the baptismal process. The Eucharistic/Sacramental stream believed deliverance should be conducted according to a set liturgy, and generally most pastors strongly

favoured reading Scripture during deliverance and including confession in the process. There was also strong support for mass deliverance and general disagreement across all the streams that deliverance should be conducted in private. Only three church leaders dissented from the idea that all deliverance should be conducted in the power of the Holy Spirit. The participants strongly supported addressing demons directly and modelling deliverance praxis on the work of Jesus Christ.

The data further revealed that 90,9% of the church leaders use tangible objects during deliverance sessions: the Bible (used by 90,1% of leaders), followed by anointing oil (43,2%) and holy water (36,4%). Sacraments, crucifixes, incense, salt, and candles are each used by over a fifth of church leaders.

Additionally, the data from the participants reveals that common deliverance praxis includes commanding demonic forces to leave in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, supported by prayer, fasting, intercession, and laying on of hands. Although pastors emphasised that there is no set deliverance formula, the data shows specific deliverance approaches in each of the church streams. The Eucharistic/Sacramental churches, who rely on liturgy and tangible objects, tend to be more deliberate and thorough in their preparations, often require hierarchical approval, and often use designated and trained exorcists. The neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic churches have a more vibrant, spontaneous, and loud deliverance praxis, with words of knowledge, prophecy, singing, breaking of curses, and vigorous commands issued to the demons. In these churches, demonic spirits manifest in acts such as speaking in different voices, vomiting, spitting, screaming, and slithering on the floor. Amongst the Zionist churches, deliverance may also include many features of African Traditional Religion, including animal sacrifice, ancestral veneration, fortune telling, the use of herbs, and burning incense. The extensive use of water and other tangible items, and the integration of ancestral veneration, separate the Zionist churches from other Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches. As indicated earlier, Evangelical churches use deliverance less frequently, typically in small groups with mature Christians laying on hands, praying, reading the Bible, administering holy water, and commanding evil spirits to leave.

Finally, the data reveals that abuse of deliverance ministry is rife in Matatiele and Maluti. Almost three fifths of church leaders in Matatiele and Maluti indicated that hypnosis was used in deliverance. In one observed case study, Christian rhetoric and carefully choreographed stage hypnosis were interwoven into a quasi-spiritual experience. There was an overt agenda to emotionally charge the atmosphere, in cheerleader fashion, through body language, repetition, and the use of emotive phrases. With considerable financial incentives to exploit the gullible and uneducated, fraudulent behaviour is a prevalent feature of certain deliverance contexts. The sale of sacred water, oils, bangles, and protection stickers in various churches within the research area suggests the presence of avarice and unscrupulous, financially motivated deception.

## **Normative Christocentric deliverance**

Reflecting on exorcism praxis in Galilee helps contextualise the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. Several biblical accounts of deliverance in Mark and Acts are particularly illuminating: in the Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:23–39), on the blind and mute man (Mark 3:10–15, 20–27), on the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20), when the disciples are sent out (Mark 6:7–13), on the daughter of a Gentile woman (Mark 7:24–30), on the deaf and mute boy (Mark 9:14–29), at the conclusion of Mark (Mark 16:9–20), when the apostles heal many (Acts 5:12–16), concerning Philip in Samaria and Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:4–28), on the slave girl with a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16–19), and on the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11–20).

The Book of Mark is generally considered the earliest gospel (Hurtado 2011:2), written around AD 70 (Kurian 2015:11) and providing source material for Matthew and Luke. It was written in the 'Palestinian environment of the historical Jesus' (Stein 2008:11), primarily for Roman unbelievers, and does not include an account of the birth of Jesus, any genealogies, or many of Jesus' teachings. Instead, Mark outlines the powerful ministry of Jesus and focuses on his ultimate sacrifice in propitiation and atonement for the sins of mankind. Mark records eighteen miracles (including four exorcisms and references to many more) but only four parables and one extended discourse (Pawson 2015:788). The numerous, fast-paced accounts of Christ's power to banish the agents of Satan and to heal diseases are designed to attest to his authority as

the Son of God (Akin 2014:3) and appeal to Roman pragmatism (Short 2008:1106). Mark thus stresses Jesus' spiritual engagement with demonic forces more than the other Gospels, though this only serves to underpin the centrality of Christ's victory on the cross as the suffering servant (Hurtado 2011:10–11).

Luke, the author of Acts, carefully compiled and documented pertinent events in Palestine and the Near East from AD 27 until Paul's first imprisonment around AD 62. In Acts, Luke provides the most significant events related to the early church regarding God's salvation plan and the fulfilment of promises and prophecy, reassuring the church that, despite the physical ascension of Jesus, God's presence and power is still available and active (Adeyemo 2006:1297).

The seven above-mentioned pericopes from Mark illustrate the deliverance praxis of Jesus, anchored by his authoritative commands to demons to exit possessed individuals. Nevertheless, brief verbal exchanges, including Jesus' frequent instructions to demons to maintain his messianic anonymity, do not form part of the exorcism rites *per se*. Thus, in the four passages from Acts, the apostles emulate Jesus' praxis but issue commands in Jesus' name, invoking his authority rather than depending on their own abilities and powers. Paul's use of handkerchiefs and aprons to effect healing and exorcism in Acts 19:12 form a secondary praxis. Flowing from these observations, the mission, life, and work of Jesus Christ and his apostles provide an unambiguous normative prototype for authentic, God-glorifying deliverance praxis. They enable the extraction of biblical, Christocentric principles to contextualise this paper's study.

In brief, this article draws four significant Christocentric conclusions from the pericopes in Mark: (a) Jesus Christ has no regard for man-instituted religious constructs; (b) he does not tolerate idolatrous syncretisation of worship; (c) he does not exploit spiritual power for material gain; (d) his humility is antithetical to religious arrogance and abuse of power. Six lesser Christocentric deliverance principles derived from these passages are: (e) deliverance praxis must reflect Christ's mercy and love; (f) faith and trust in Jesus are required; (g) the signs and wonders associated with deliverance are for building faith and not for entertainment; (h) deliverance may be conducted by laity and is not

the preserve of clergy; (i) deliverance is not intrinsically linked with baptism; (j) deliverance is extended to all.

## **A strategic action plan to enhance Christocentric deliverance praxis in the research area**

In a contemporary African context, portraying Jesus as a loving and compassionate liberator of the poor and marginalised, rather than an ancestor or traditional healer, will help normalise the practice of salvation. A useful way to mediate the gospel of Christ's liberation in this context is to emphasise and demonstrate his love, compassion, and care for those poor and marginalised. Conversely, combining the rhetoric and practice of salvation with ancestral mediation, and using objects associated with traditional healing, undermines the exclusivity of Christ as the saviour and only mediator between man and God. They are reminiscent of the operations of *inyanga*, *izangoma*, and *mamosebelets*, and of *maSione*, *amaZayoni*, and *Bapostola*, which underpin belief in ancestral conservation (Mzondi 2019:113).

Some denominations have taken precautionary measures to counteract the frenzied deliverance praxis of ecclesial deceivers. To avoid accusations of engagement in extreme practices, certain clergy refrain from participating in exorcisms while others denounce exorcism and everything associated with it. This latter view overcorrects, to the detriment of those in need of deliverance, but it stems from the rampant abuse of deliverance in so many churches, reinforcing the need for protective measures drawn from the best practices of established denominational policies. Only by consciously guarding against both extremes can deliverance continue in a Christlike manner.

Several denominations provide useful practical guidelines for deliverance. The 1999 revision of the Roman Catholic *Rite of Exorcism* prohibits exorcism on people considered mentally ill or under a spell or curse, mandating a pre-exorcism medical examination (Burton 2017:2.i). The Anglican *House of Bishops' Guidelines for Good Practice in the Deliverance Ministry* (1975, revised 2012) contains five main principles: '(a) [deliverance] should be undertaken by experienced persons authorised by the diocesan bishop, (b) it should be done in the context of prayer and sacrament, (c) it should be done in collaboration with the resources of medicine, (d) it should be followed up by continuing

pastoral care, (e) it should be done with the minimum of publicity' (*The House of Bishops* 2017:2–3). A multi-disciplinary, holistic approach involving 'pastoral and sacramental care', theology, psychology, and psychiatry is advocated. The praxis indicated involves 'professional counselling, prayer, absolution, anointing, laying on of hands and Holy Communion' (Archbishops' Council 2000:169). The Methodist deliverance guide follows very similar lines (Methodist Church guidelines 2020:1) but the Dutch Reformed Church provides the following interesting additions: (a) the service of deliverance should be an extraordinary service and not routine; (b) people who practise this ministry have a great responsibility not to cause damage by treating sickness (especially psychiatric disturbances) as possession or demonisation; (c) care must be taken not to adopt an animistic view of the ministry or to believe that certain objects contain magical powers, nor to have long confrontational discussions with evil entities or revel in the triumphalism of sensational deliverance services (Die Kerkorde 2015:183).

Reviewing contemporary praxis in the light of Christocentric principles enabled us to identify abuse and non-optimal deliverance praxis and to generate an appropriate diagnostic and corrective tool to assist churches in analysing and refining their operation with prayerful introspection. The proposed diagnostic strongly encourages those conducting the ministry of deliverance to spend time in prayer and fasting before exercising the ministry. It further assumes that those who require deliverance are not born-again believers. They need to be provided with relevant counselling after deliverance and be taught the importance of conversion, that is, to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ after the deliverance session.

This tool comprises a flow chart with corrective feedback loops. Stage 1 ascertains whether or not deliverance praxis is in accordance with the mission of Christ, is biblical, and follows Christocentric principles. Stage 2 filters out spiritual, physical, financial, emotional, and sexual abuse. Stage 3 deals with the use of tangible objects; a checklist of eleven pertinent questions highlight areas of concern. The mission of Christ identified in Luke 4:18 and the aforementioned examples in Mark and Acts are accompanied by the ten Christocentric principles detailed above: (a) Jesus Christ has no regard for man-instituted religious constructs; (b) Christ does not tolerate idolatrous syncretisation of worship; (c) Jesus does not exploit spiritual power for

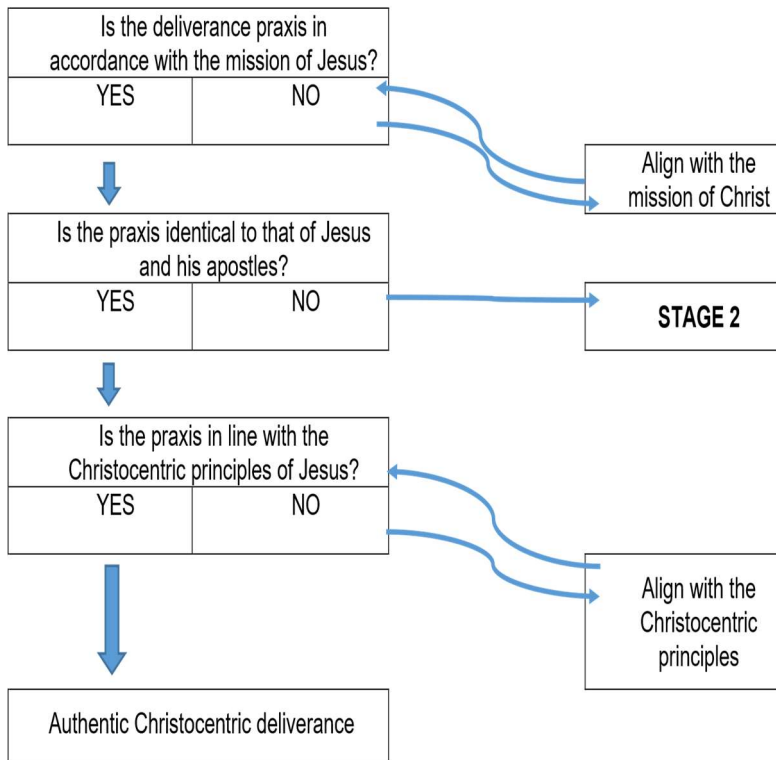


material gain; (d) the humility of Jesus is antithetical to religious arrogance and abuse of power; (e) deliverance praxis must reflect Christ’s mercy and love; (f) faith and trust in Jesus are required; (g) the signs and wonders associated with deliverance are for building faith and not for entertainment; (h) deliverance may be conducted by laity and is not the preserve of clergy; (i) deliverance is not intrinsically linked with baptism; (j) deliverance is extended to all.

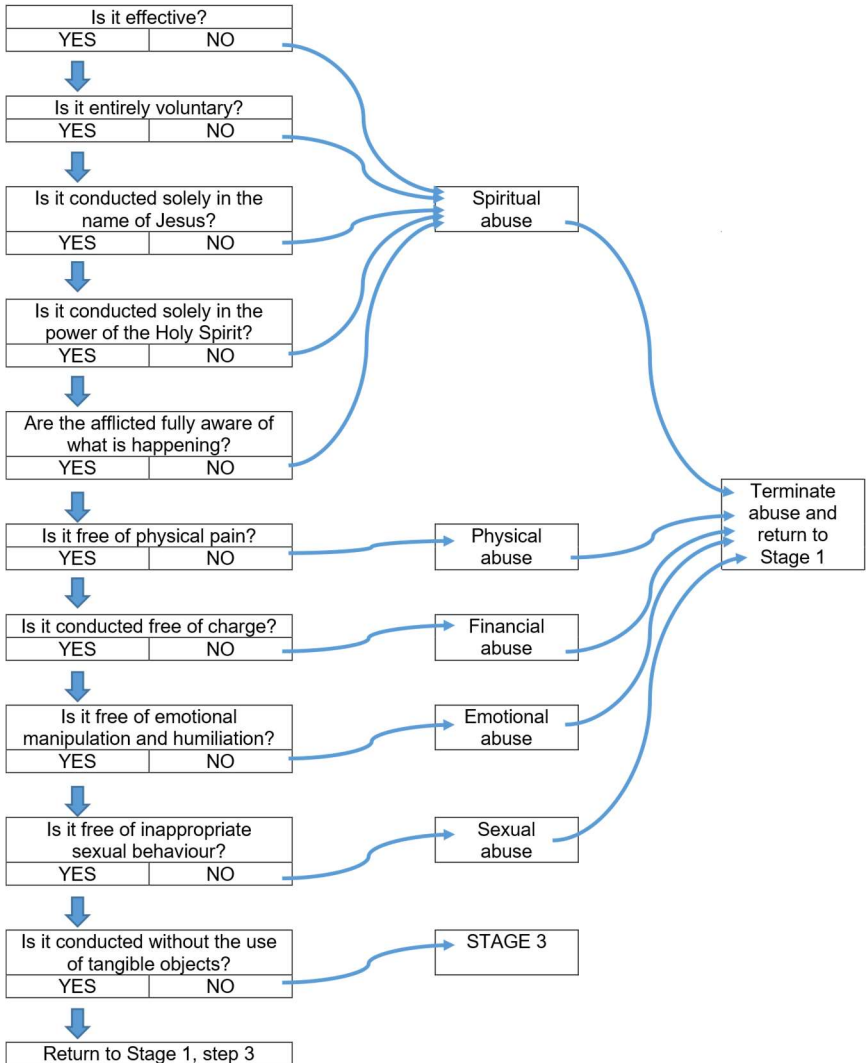
The diagnostic tool is as follows:

Deliverance diagnostic and correction tool

Stage 1



## Stage 2



### Stage 3

The use of tangible objects in deliverance is not normative. Complete the checklist below. If you answer YES to any of the following questions, please review this practice in the light of the Christological principles. Return to step 3 of Stage 1.

Question	YES	NO
Are these tangible objects also associated with the ways of the ancestors and traditional healers?		
Are these objects assigned powers to bring good fortune, avoid curses, or ward off evil?		
Do these objects add additional power to the deliverance process?		
Do members of the congregation purchase these items from the church or members of the church?		
Do these objects include medicinal herbs and potions?		
Does the use of these tangible objects replace the need for prayer?		
Are these objects used to call up spirits?		
Is the justification of these objects based on historical church precedent rather than the Scriptures?		
Does the use of these objects cause any physical pain or result in humiliation of the afflicted?		

Does the use of these objects result in an altered state of consciousness, for example a trance?		
Is the use of these objects in deliverance linked with baptism?		

## Summary

This study demonstrates that many excesses, aberrations, and religious abuses in each discussed church tradition still accompany exorcism. Nonetheless, it observes that one can argue for authentic deliverance praxis grounded in the ministry of Christ, as shown in seven pericopes from Mark and in the ministry of his disciples presented in three passages from Acts. This argument enabled us to generate a detailed, Christocentric strategy for the Matatiele and Maluti churches of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, to ensure a more authentic and God-glorifying approach to deliverance. Consequently, our main hypothesis – that a strategy could be developed to create a more God-glorifying and Christocentric deliverance praxis in these churches – is supported. To this end, the diagnostic tool also aims to preclude the need for state intervention in South Africa to regulate exorcism, as individual churches apply the tool.

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## Conceptualisation of Circumcision as a Purging Ritual: An Inter-Textual Reading of Joshua 5:2-9

Dr Kamande Thuo

Pan Africa Christian University, Nairobi, Kenya

peter.thuo@pacuniversity.ac.ke

### Abstract

This article examines the relevance of the circumcision ritual in Joshua 5:2-9 as it seems to have incapacitated the army of Israel. The article argues that observing the circumcision was a matter of spiritual significance as implied by the Old Greek (OG) translator's use of *περιεκάθαρεν* ('he purged/purified') to render *לִּחַ* ('he circumcised') in Joshua 5:4, instead of any of the expected Greek cognates of the concept *περιτομή* "circumcision." I will discuss the conceptualisation of circumcision implicit in this choice, touching on ways in which circumcision could have been conceived as a spiritual process with morality and cultic purity as its salient factor. The rendering in the later Masoretic Text (MT) tradition of Joshua 5:2-9 as an attempt to harmonise this text with Genesis 17:9-14 account of circumcision as well as its rendering with the concept *περιεκάθαρεν* in the LXX Pentateuch will provide illuminating points of comparison. Finally, the article will broaden its focus to consider the Kikuyu concept of *irua* ('circumcision') and its affinities with the OG conceptualisation of this ritual.

### Introduction

The circumcision ritual recorded in Joshua 5:2-9 – considered an interruption to the flow of Joshua's war-like events – is of unclear relevance to the book's overall narrative (Winther-Nielsen 1995:164). Joshua 5:1 depicts an ideal opportunity for an Israelite military advance as it describes rival kings whose hearts had melted with fear and who had no courage to face the Israelites.

However, 5:2 confounds any expectation that the Israelites will attack as the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the sons of Israel, incapacitating the army for some days (see Genesis 34:24-29, where recently circumcised men are successfully attacked). The importance of the circumcision ritual at this moment is thus evident, though a number of explanations for it have been advanced. It has been suggested its observation re-established the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the new generation born in the wilderness, a view seemingly attempting to harmonise the Joshua 5:2-9 ritual with that described in Genesis 17:9-14 (Butler 1983:58). Another interpretation is that the ritual was a preparation for the Passover, which is not one of the reasons given in Joshua 5:4-7 but follows from the understanding that only the circumcised could partake of the Passover (Goslinga 1986:62; Bratcher and Newman 1983:60; see Exodus 12:43-50). Alternatively, the passage does serve to explain the source of the name ‘Hill of Foreskins’ at Joshua 5:3 (Gray 1967:68), though identifying this specific location seems of little importance within the Book of Joshua (Soggin 1972:69-70). Nevertheless, in his translation of Joshua 5:4, the Old Greek (OG) translator gives his own interpretation of the circumcision ritual’s role. Deliberately rendering the Hebrew concept לָחַץ (‘he circumcised’) as περιεκάθαρεν (‘he purged/purified’), rather than as any of the conventional Greek cognates for περιτομή or ‘circumcision’, tacitly highlights this ritual’s conceptualisation as a spiritual process whose salient factors are morality and cultic purity. I will discuss the OG translator’s conceptualisation of this ritual and discuss why the later Masoretic Text (MT) tradition sought to correct the OG attitude in light of Genesis 17:9-14.

I will begin by analysing this conceptualisation of Joshua 5:4 circumcision as a process of purging or purifying, before examining similar views of circumcision throughout the LXX Pentateuch to argue that the OG translator adopted his conceptualisation from there. The article will then discuss the MT tradition’s textual treatment, establishing that it drew from a later textual tradition than the OG translator did and discussing likely motives for the Masoretic Text’s difference. Finally, I will demonstrate that the OG conceptualisation of the ritual has affinities with that of *irua* or ‘circumcision’ in the Kikuyu context.

## The Conceptualisation of Circumcision as a Purging Ritual

The concepts of circumcision and uncircumcision occur eight times in the Old Greek text of Joshua 5:2-9, conveying the Hebrew concept of  $\text{קָטַן}$ . In every instance but one, a cognate of *περιτομή* is used (Liddell et al., 1996:1375c; Muraoka 2009:549a). Consequently, the peculiarity of 5:4's invocation of purging/purifying suggests it is more than stylistic variation or euphemism. To better understand it, I will analyse extrabiblical treatments of the concept before suggesting reasons for its rendering in Joshua 5:4.

Extrabiblical sources lean variously towards the MT or OG renderings. Though overall the fragmentary 4QJosh<sup>a</sup> seems to represent an independent Hebrew tradition (De Troyer 2003:35; Woudstra 1981:40), it follows the MT tradition for this specific conceptualisation in Joshua 5:4 (van der Meer 2004:94, 96). So do translations such as the Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate (Soggin 1972:68). Notably, the Vulgate is distinctive in retaining the ambiguity of 'they' in 5:6, allowing for the possibility that the first generation born in the desert was already consumed and Joshua circumcised their successors.<sup>1</sup> Josephus does not mention the circumcision ritual at all but only discusses the Passover in 5:10-12, possibly embarrassed to admit to a Roman, non-Semitic readership that the Israelites failed to maintain the covenant of circumcision (Auld 2005:124). Conversely, the *Codex Vaticanus* (B) – the oldest Greek manuscript of Joshua, dated fourth century AD – uses the same concept as the OG translator (Auld 2005:12; van der Meer 2004:23). Philo, in *The Special Laws* 1.1-11, calls circumcision 'an act of purification that sanctifies the whole body as befits the consecrated order' (van der Meer 2004:349), similarly according with the OG.

With the OG translator's use of the concept of purging for Joshua 5:4 not universal (even if not entirely unique), the question arises why he translated it as he did. Crucially, of what were the Israelites to be purged or purified? Joshua 5:9 refers to the Lord removing 'the reproach of Egypt' from them, possibly alluding to the shame of Egyptian slavery disgracing the Israelites before other nations (see Zephaniah 2:8-9 and Ezekiel 36:15). E.J. Hamlin, who agrees with

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=6&c=5>

that interpretation, argues that circumcision should be understood as a restoration of freedom and dignity and a purging of servitude (1983:34). However, it has also been suggested that this ‘reproach’ refers to the Israelites’ uncircumcised state (van der Meer 2004:353). That view gains credibility from Genesis 34:14, where uncircumcision is a reproach that was supposed to be removed by ‘cultic ritual in obedience to Yahweh’ (Butler 1983:59). J. Neusner – quoting M. Nedarim 3:11 – points out that Rabbis described ‘the foreskin as a disgusting imperfection, the removal of which renders the body perfect’ (1996:121), further associating ‘reproach’ specifically with uncircumcision. Moreover, between the second and fourth centuries AD, there was a ritual script with five liturgical parts that accompanied the operation of circumcision, the first two of which were prayers of sanctification (Hoffman 2000:91). Thus, uncircumcised males were viewed as unclean and needed to be specifically purified through the ritual of circumcision (van der Meer 2004:347). This is why the translator of OG Joshua 5:4 made salient the ritual’s role of purging or purifying the Israelites.

## **The Influence of the LXX Pentateuch**

With the ritual in Joshua 5:2-9 conceptualised as purifying the Israelites, I will now discuss the translation technique that could have determined the OG translator’s choice of verb, arguing that it was influenced by the Greek translation of the Pentateuch. This will be demonstrated via an analysis of three LXX Pentateuch passages that could have influenced his decision. As S. Olofsson points out:

One major contribution to the study of the Septuagint is the theory that the Pentateuch, the first translated part of the LXX, has served as a sort of a text-book for the rest of the translators. It is only natural that the Greek Pentateuch should influence the translation of the subsequent books, because this translation not only preceded that of the other books; the Pentateuch is also without doubt the most important part of the Holy Writ in Jewish tradition. (1990:26)

The particular verb used in OG Joshua 5:4 is found only once in the LXX Pentateuch, at Deuteronomy 18:10. The context is that of a parent offering his

or her child to the god Molech by sacrificing him or her with fire (Chingota 2006:160), which would violate Exodus 20:3's stricture not to entertain any god apart from Yahweh. The MT renders this act as מַעֲבִיר ('one who makes to pass [through fire]') while the LXX translates it as *περικαθαίρων* ('one who purifies or purges [his/her child with fire]'). The purification here is achieved 'by means of an object calculated to absorb defilement or contagion', metaphorically denoting a complete purification (Lampe 1961:1066a; Liddell, et al.:1996, 1375c; Muraoka 2009:549a). This condemned practice is said to have been used to 'turn away a divinity's wrath or as part of the cult of the dead', possibly with 'the survival or death of the child indicat[ing] a yes or a no answer' (Nelson 2002:233). Fire is the means of purification in this passage and the god's wrath upon one's family is what is removed. The passage thus seems close to Joshua 5:4, where circumcision is the means of purification and reproach is what is removed. Their main difference concerns the role of the divine being, who supposedly grants the favour after receiving the human's sacrifice in Deuteronomy 18:10 but is an agent throughout the process in Joshua 5:4.

LXX Deuteronomy 30:6 is another passage where the concept of purging or purifying occurs, this time in the context of restoring the people of Israel. The MT phrase וְנָלַל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־לִבְבְּךָ ('and Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart') is rendered in the LXX as *καὶ περικαθαριεῖ κύριος τὴν καρδίαν σου* ('and the Lord will purge/purify your heart'). The idea behind the LXX rendering is that God purges people's hearts by removing whatever prevents them from following his teachings (Christensen 2002:739). Contextually, the things to be purged include rebellion and iniquity; the agent of this process is Yahweh himself. The same metaphor occurs in LXX Deuteronomy 10:16 but is rendered differently to Deuteronomy 30:6, using the word *περιτεμεῖσθε* ('you circumcise') with *τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν* ('stubbornness') as its object. The individual himself is called upon to take the necessary steps towards fearing, loving, and serving God and walking in his ways (see Deuteronomy 10:12-13). These two different renderings of the same metaphor indicate that the LXX Pentateuch translators used the two concepts interchangeably, since both renderings call for moral uprightness and obedience to the terms of the covenant by getting rid of everything that hinders commitment to God. They also demonstrate that physical circumcision is insufficient to put an individual in a right relationship with God.

Yet another LXX Pentateuch passage that uses the same conceptualisation of circumcision is Leviticus 19:23. There the translators use a synonymous Greek cognate, *περικαθαριεῖτε* ('purge away'), with the object *τὴν ἀκαθαρσίαν αὐτοῦ* ('its uncleanness') (Lampe 1961:1066a; Muraoka 2009:549a). The passage concerns how the Israelites are to behave when they enter the Promised Land: for the first three years, the produce of the fruit trees was to be regarded as unclean and not to be eaten (Hartley 1992:306). The MT uses the phrase *וְעָרְלָתָם עָרְלָתוֹ*, which means they were supposed to regard the fruit as uncircumcised or as a foreskin. Though they are to consider the fruit as foreskin – i.e. something to be removed – the MT does not present the practical act of removal as something the Israelites were expected to do. Nevertheless, the LXX translators clearly give instructions on how the Israelites are to go about in dealing with such unclean fruit; they are to purge or remove the fruit's uncleanness by plucking it off (Milgrom 2000:1679). Thus, according to the LXX, the unclean fruit was to be purged from the trees as a practical expression of holiness. Since the context of this passage is that of pruning trees, the literal rendering of the Hebrew verb *וּל* would not have been a good choice by the translator (van der Meer 2004:346). Just as in the Joshua 5:4 passage, the context has to do with purging or removing uncleanness.

## **The Reformulation Behind the MT Tradition**

This next section seeks to establish the motive behind the Masoretes' harmonisation of the ritual in OG Joshua 5:4 with Genesis 17:9-14. To do so, I will first argue that the *vorlage* used by the OG translator of Joshua 5:2-9 is older than the one behind the MT text.

### ***The OG as a Pre-Masoretic Text of Joshua***

It is important to establish whether the Hebrew *vorlage* behind the MT and OG texts were the same or different. If they were based on different recessions, then it is vital to establish which among the two is older. In this section, I will seek to establish the differences between these two texts as proof that the parent Hebrew texts behind the two recessions were different. After establishing that difference, I will proceed on the basis that the earliest recoverable reading is the shorter and more difficult of the two (Nelson 1997:23).

There are some distinct differences between the MT and OG in Joshua 5:2-9. In verse 2 the MT has ושוב (‘and return/again’) while the OG has καθίσας (‘sat down’). This could be attributed to a mistake if the OG translator read ושוב (‘again’) as ושב (‘sit down’) in the source text (Butler 1983:55). Alternatively, the *vorlage* behind the OG could have been detailed to the point of mentioning the posture of those performing the ritual. Again in verse 2, the translation of שנית (‘a second time’) is omitted in the OG. This could be a result of the Greek translator avoiding ‘the literal understanding of a second circumcision of adult males that had already being circumcised’ (van der Meer 2004:341). The OG has added the phrase ἐπὶ τοῦ καλουμένου τόπου to verse 3 to help clarify that Βουνὸς τῶν ἀκροβυσιῶν (‘hill of circumcision’) is the name of a place, which readers cannot have known. The OG translator also further explains הַרְבֵּוֹת צִיָּרִים (‘flint knives’) as μαχαίρας πετρίνας ἐκ πέτρας ἀκροτόμου (‘stone knives made from sharp rock’), possibly to help his audience understand what flint knives were. Another omission occurs in the OG in verse 9 where the closing formula הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (‘until this day’) is not translated. Similarly, the MT has an omission in that it refers to Joshua without mentioning his father’s name while the OG describes him as ‘the son of Naue’.

The OG seems to offer a completely different interpretation than the MT of the events of Joshua 5:4-6. In verse 4, apart from the unusual rendering of the verb מָלַךְ as the Greek verb περιεκάθαρσεν (the subject of this article), the OG focuses on the uncircumcised born in the wilderness and omits reference to those circumcised *before* leaving Egypt who died in the desert. In the last part of that verse, the MT talks of הַזְּכָרִים כֻּלָּם אֲנָשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה מָתוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּיָרֵךְ בְּצֵאתָם מִמִּצְרָיִם (‘all the males, the men of war, had died in the wilderness during the journey after they went out from Egypt’), which is not translated in the OG text. In verse 5, the MT distinguishes between the two groups by laying emphasis that *all* those who left Egypt were circumcised and therefore it is only those born in the wilderness whom Joshua circumcised. Conversely, the OG states that most of those men who came out of Egypt were not circumcised. This would allow the possibility that among those who were circumcised by Joshua there were those who had come out of Egypt. The OG rendering is plausible, since only those who were twenty years old and above were condemned to die in the wilderness and since it is possible the Israelites circumcised their boys in the later teenage years (Hamlin 1983:31; Gray 1967:68; Num. 14:29).

Another difference between the MT and OG concerns the exact period that the Israelites stayed in the wilderness: forty years according to the MT and forty-two according to the OG. It is possible the MT rounded the number down to forty or that the OG included the Israelites' two years in the wilderness before their rebellion against God (see Numbers 10:11-12). Moreover, whereas the OG calls the wilderness through which the Israelites wandered *Madbaritidi*, the MT omits this name. It has been suggested this resulted from the OG translator misreading a reduplicated *mabr* ('desert') (Boling and Wright 1982:189, 193), though it may instead be due to the Masoretes erasing the name in order to avoid the difficulty of tracing the historical site or due to them reading the word once rather than twice. That *Madbaritidi* was probably a historical place is reinforced by its reoccurrence in OG Joshua 18:12.

All these differences indicate that the Hebrew *vorlage* behind OG Joshua is based on a different recession from that of the MT parent text (Soggin 1972:18). Since the Greek text of Joshua is five percent shorter than the MT, it can be concluded that the OG was dependent on an older textual variant since 'the shorter or more difficult reading is judged to be the earliest recoverable one' (Tov 1999:387; Nelson 1997:23). It is therefore plausible that the OG translator worked from a pre-Masoretic text that came from a different recession than the MT's parent text.

### ***The Tendenz Behind the MT Tradition***

Having established that the Hebrew *vorlage* behind OG Joshua 5:2-9 reflects an older tradition than that of the MT's parent text, in this section I will argue that the MT or its parent text was restored from the parent OG text. I contend this happened for two reasons: to harmonise the MT tradition with the conceptualisation of circumcision described in Genesis 17:9-14 (i.e., as a covenant sign between Yahweh and the people of Israel) and to present Moses as an obedient servant of Yahweh who would not allow his covenant of circumcision to be broken (Soggin 1972:18, 70; Butler 1983:56).

Conceptually, the Genesis 17 circumcision ritual is the sign of a covenant that every Israelite male child was supposed to undergo, a normative practice that was to be observed on the eighth day after birth (Gen. 21:4; Lev. 12:3). Anyone who broke this covenant sign was supposed to have been cut off from God's people. In using the Hebrew word לֶחֶט to denote the ritual, the Masoretic



reformulation of the Hebrew *vorlage* behind the OG tradition could be theologically motivated – an attempt to present the ritual event in Joshua 5:2-9 as Yahweh re-establishing a covenant with the new generation born in the wilderness. A.G. Auld describes the Masoretes' *tendenz* behind restoration of the MT tradition by pointing out that '[t]he MT is not only longer, but more strident and more orthodox; and it is fair to assume that this text has been reformulated for dogmatic reasons, and probably in the light of God's command to Abraham (Genesis 17:9-13) that the rite should be carried out universally and after but one week of life' (1998:14).

Another motive behind the reformulation may be the Masoretes' desire to portray Moses, the hero, in a positive light. The OG implication that there were uncircumcised men among those who went out of Egypt could not go unchallenged by the Masoretes. That is why the MT repeats a number of times that *all* males who came out of Egypt were circumcised. Admitting that there were some who were not circumcised would allow the interpretation that some of the men partaking of the Passover feasts in Exodus 12 and Numbers 9 were uncircumcised. That could portray Moses in a negative light, since he must have failed to keep the people of Israel in obedience to God's commands and allowed this abomination to take place. The Masoretes seem to have assumed the responsibility to protect Moses from such an accusation.

## The Purging Effect of Circumcision in Kikuyu

Viewing circumcision as a purging/purifying ritual is consistent with the Kikuyu conceptual understanding of the role of *irua rĩa arũme* ('the circumcision of males'). *Irua* is conceived as the step of being purged from the behaviour of uncircumcised boys and from fear. Accordingly, I will discuss the purging or purifying effect of *irua* in relation to both of these purged qualities.

The first associated meaning is that upon circumcision *waana* ('childish behaviour') or *ũhĩĩ* ('behaviour of one who has not undergone *irua*') is removed and the circumcised male is not supposed to participate in such behaviour anymore. From then on, he is expected to take on the behaviour of an adult; hence, one of the synonyms of *irua* is *kũgimara* or 'to become an adult' (Kanogo 1987:77). The cutting of the foreskin symbolises the purgation or removal of the childhood behaviour of the uncircumcised. The association of

foreskin with childish behaviour is demonstrated by the advice normally given to initiates, that they need to leave childish behaviours (such as naughtiness, mischievousness, or playing childish games) just as their foreskin is detached from their bodies and thrown away.

The second associated meaning is that fear is removed and the circumcised one automatically acquires the title of *mündũ mürũme* ('a man of courage'). J. Gray hints at this perspective, seeing the circumcision ritual as a signal for fitness for war (1967:68). Since initiates are not anaesthetised during the surgery, the moment of the cut itself demands a display of courage against a process made as painful as possible. Those who go through the ritual courageously are applauded while those who show signs of fear are labelled cowards and teased for the rest of their lives (Gatheru 1966:59; Murray 1974:22-23; Mugo 1982:19). Essentially, the one undergoing the ritual is expected to prove that he has what it takes to be *mündũ mürũme* ('a man of courage'), with a number of tests imposed during a seclusion period (Muriuki 1985:14). Going through circumcision courageously qualifies him to become a warrior, with the role of protecting his community from raids and perpetrating cattle raids on neighbouring communities. This principal cultivation of courage among initiates – its centrality to the circumcision ritual – coheres with the warlike tone of Joshua and its exhortations for warfare (see Joshua 1:6, 1:7, 1:9, 1:18, 8:1, 10:8, 10:25, 11:6).

## Conclusion

This article has looked at the semantic domain of *circumcision*, focusing on the rendering of הִכָּרַם ('he circumcised') as *περικαθάραρον* ('he purged/purified') in the OG translation of Joshua 5:4, rather than as a cognate of *περιτομή* as might be expected. I have argued that this is due to the OG translator's view that uncircumcised males were unclean and required this purification. The translator likely adopted this concept for Joshua 5:2-9 under the influence of the LXX Pentateuch, which includes similar concepts and related cognates. I also discussed the Masoretes' reformulation of the passage, suggesting it was intended to harmonise the ritual in Joshua 5:2-9 with that in Genesis 17:9-14 and to portray Moses in a positive light. The article concluded by describing the similar conceptualisation of circumcision as purging in the Kikuyu ritual.

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## **Analysing African Traditional Gods Through a Trinitarian Apologetic**

Dr Kevin Muriithi Ndereba

Department of Biblical & Theological Studies, Pan Africa Christian University  
kevin.ndereba@pacuniversity.ac.ke

### **Abstract**

Christian apologetics within the African continent is undergoing some level of retrieval. While classical topics such as the existence of God and the problem of evil and suffering are critical questions to answer for emerging generations, there is a need to answer specific questions that emerge from the African religious heritage. Among them is the question of whether the Triune God of Christianity is the same as the gods of the African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and if not, what do we make of the doctrine of God in view of the two traditions? To explore this question, this article utilises a comparative approach in analysing the understanding of God in ATRs and in classic Christian trinitarianism. Beginning with an overview of the socio-cultural and worldview antecedents in African societies, this article then contrasts the doctrine of God within ATRs with the doctrine within a Christian worldview. The contribution of this article is in explicating the continuities and discontinuities between ATRs and Christian trinitarianism, and especially in formulating apologetics within the African context.

### **The African Religious Heritage**

Christian apologetics within the African continent does not come to a continent that is *tabula rasa*. By this I mean that defences of the Christian faith meet a continent that is not “empty” when it comes to preconceptions of the divine. Rational justification for the truthfulness and practicability of the Christian faith often encounters a more religious context within the continent

than a post-Christian context, as is the case with apologetics in the global North. Granted, statistics in the census of different African countries point to a rise of the “nones” among the emerging generations. Yet, missiologists continue to speak of the growth of Christianity within the continent for the foreseeable future (Jenkins 2011). The grip of Christianity in the global South has grown steadily since 1900 from one of the least evangelized continents to 70% evangelization of its population in 2021. The upward trend of African Christianity can be discerned through its contribution to global Christianity, growing from 18% of Christians being located in the global South (with 82% located in the global North) in 1900, to 66% of Christians living in the global South in 2020 (Zurlo, Johnson, Crossing 2021). Scholars at the Gordon Conwell Center for Global Christianity argue that by 2050, 77% of Christians will live in the global South (Zurlo, Johnson, Crossing 2020). Given these statistics, various critiques can be offered. The critiques of such statistics often focus on qualitative factors such as, what do we mean by Christian? Is one Christian merely by name or birth, as is common in African countries, or is it based on being a believer in Jesus Christ? However, the point is that Christian apologetics on the continent will likely engage more religious people than atheists or agnostics.

A seminal figure in African philosophy of religion, John Mbiti (1990), argued almost thirty years ago that Africans are incurably religious. The history of the Christian enterprise on the continent is both varied and complex. Scholars such as Thomas Oden (2007) have argued for the importance of African theologians such as Augustine and Tertullian in “shaping the Christian mind” in early church history. Athanasius’ (1903) exposition on the incarnation of Christ against Arius, Augustine’s (2009) political theology in the *City of God* as well as Tertullian’s *Apologetic* (Dunn 2004) within the Roman empire, all function as important apologetics within a continent that has always been multi-cultural and multi-religious. The growth of Islam in the 7th Century quelled Christian expansion. Much of the apologetic work in the 11th and 12th Century in the continent takes a polemic strain – even though Thomas Aquinas retrieves the cosmological argument from Islamic philosophers of his time (Craig 2000:4-7). It is critical to note that despite the lull in Christian mission, Christianity did not disappear entirely in the continent, particularly in Egypt and Ethiopia, where the oldest churches can be found (Mbiti 1975:182). Prior to the Protestant

Reformation, Portuguese and Spanish missionaries brought the Christian faith to the African coastlines in the 15th and 16th centuries (Mbiti 1975:183).

The Reformed heritage bequeathed to the global Church a return to the authority of Scriptures, which was the basis of the modern mission movement. In the last 300 years, the Christian missionary enterprise in the African continent has been interpreted in various ways (Nthamburi 2002). While some are overly-critical of the missionary enterprise as a purely political process, others are more sympathetic to the gospel cause, by separating the spiritual task of missions from the political task of colonialism. Whatever the case, Christianity was reintroduced to a continent that was not *tabula rasa* but that had a long Christian history and a multi-coloured religious history. In contemporary times, the Christian faith shares a table with Islam, African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and other world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. For example, bordering Nairobi's Central Business District, the Parklands area is literally owned by Hindus. Another neighbourhood called Eastleigh is an Islamic area. African urban spaces are increasingly pluralistic in religious, ethical, and philosophical senses.

Thus, apologetics on the continent meets a varied pluralistic context and must attend to several tasks. First, there is a need to engage with false gospels and theologies that have arisen, such as the prosperity theology (or theologies), which creates problems around the doctrine of God, biblical hermeneutics, and the goal of the Christian life and witness. Second, apologetics in Africa must engage subtle yet increasingly popular secular worldviews, such as secular humanism, agnosticism, atheism, and postmodern relativism. Ndereba (2021:187-198) has explored ways in which Christian apologetics can address these divergent worldviews within the emerging generations. Third, Christian apologetics must answer the question of the African traditionalists. A popular critique from African traditionalists goes something like this: "the *mzungu* (white man) came with the Bible on one hand and a gun on the other hand". This critique conflates the political and missionary thrusts of our colonial history and views the Christian faith as an intrusion into African soil. The historical evidence demonstrates that this could not be further from the truth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, robust historical analyses of Christianity in Africa in Isichei (1995) and Sundkler (2009).



Unfortunately, many have used this fallacy to conclude that Africans should (re)turn to their African Traditional Religions (ATRs) as authentic forms of religion and spirituality. How might the Christian, who is convinced of the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Scriptures, respond to this? Our response must distinguish between the concept of God in ATRs and the concept of the Triune God in the Christian Scriptures, particularly his self-revelation in the Scriptures and in his Son Jesus Christ. The rest of this article will explore this response in detail.

## **The Doctrine of God in African Traditional Religions**

With the exception of pockets of atheistic Africans in urban cities, need for the classic apologetic proofs for the existence of God are negligible. Africans already function within a religious worldview that already assumes the existence of God or the gods. The only question is which God or gods? An exploration of the doctrine of God in ATRs reveals varied interpretations of God, yet also traces out particular points of similarity. The earliest African philosophers of religion and theologians grappled with how the doctrine of God in ATRs relates with the concept of God in Christianity. Mbiti, already mentioned, viewed the ATRs as preparatory for the *evangel*, the gospel.

### ***The African Theological Enterprise***

Mbiti charted a new territory when he viewed ATRs as preparatory for the gospel. The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 had observed that the “primal religions”, to use Bediako’s (1993:14-19) words, “contained no preparation of Christianity.” Bediako (1993:16) notes, however, how Mbiti laid the groundwork for African Theology by prioritising the African experience and identity as an important locus for theological reflection. Moving beyond liberation as a theological theme, African theological reflection has engaged the themes of inculturation and, eventually, of reconstruction. While the forefathers, closer to the colonial history, engaged in a postcolonial struggle of identity in “African theology”, contemporary theological reflections have utilised these resources to deeply interrogate the theological disciplines and to reflect on issues facing contemporary African societies. For example, the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology<sup>2</sup> organises annual conferences, has

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.asetconference.wordpress.com](http://www.asetconference.wordpress.com)

a partnership with Langham Publishers, and has published seven volumes, the last three being on God and Creation, Pneumatology in Africa, and Christology in Africa. Langham Publishers, under their Global Library Imprint, have been publishing a wide range of PhD dissertations and academic monographs, covering fields as wide as New Testament Studies, Theological Education, Public Theology, Practical Theology, and Systematic Theology - all written by majority world scholars and attending to issues within their societies including integration of faith and learning, African religions and worldviews, communality, HIV/AIDs, creation care, ethnicity, political violence, and *ubuntu* among a host of sub-themes relevant to the continent.<sup>3</sup> The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has applied theological reflection, even Christology, to the reality of gender, women's studies and women's issues, usually from a liberation and feminist perspective (Oduyoye 2002:18; Mombo 2003; Gathogo 2008; Stinton 2010). Katongole (2017) observes the multifaceted nature of African theological reflection based on institutional challenges, rapidly changing socio-cultural contexts, and the need for theologians on the continent to somehow be up-to-date with these wide shifts. Regardless of the challenges and prospects, ATRs looms large as an implicit worldview that must always be considered, and which Mbiti, among others, brought to the foreground.

In Mbiti's (1980) conception, ATRs are like the Jewish religion – they have more continuities than discontinuities with the gospel of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ himself being their fulfilment. On the opposite pole, Byang Kato (1975), an evangelical theologian who was once a General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, claimed that ATRs have more discontinuities with the gospel message than continuities. Elsewhere, Kato contended that Mbiti's view led to a universalism in his soteriology and that Idowu's view led to a syncretistic mixture between the Triune God and the pagan gods. Kato, committed to a high view of Scripture and seeking to engage the African context, has been variously interpreted (Bowers 2009; Shirik 2019). His later softening of his critiques towards these "liberal" African theologians is a mark of his imperfections as well as of his maturation. Kwame Bediako, another important theologian, has straddled these two poles of continuity and discontinuity, with a long-standing debate around the areas of gospel and

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://langhamliterature.org/books?filter=allbooks>

culture and gospel contextualization (Kato 1975). In his magnum opus, Bediako (2011:xi) observes:

My interest in the theme of Gospel and Culture, which forms the background to the treatment I have given, is rooted in the development of my own Christian self-understanding. From early in my Christian conversion experience, I have felt the need to seek clarification for myself of how the abiding Gospel of Jesus Christ relates to the inescapable issues and questions which arise from the Christian's *cultural* existence in the world, and how this relationship is achieved without injury to the integrity of the Gospel.

While one could view Mbiti and Kato as being at opposite poles, Bediako has always been in conversation with them, delicately balancing African identity and Gospel fidelity (Hartman 2022:3). His magnum opus, *Theology and Identity*, sets African identity at the centre of meaningful theological reflection among Christians on the continent. Bediako (2011:xv) has returned to this abiding theme time and again.

Bediako (2013:36) claims that in order for one to wisely interpret the significance of the New Testament, one must consider the background of Greco-Roman culture and religion. Like ATRs, he views Greek religion and Roman religion as “primal religions”. What this means for the apologetic task in light of the ATRs, is that it must utilise “theological idioms without surrendering Christian content” (Bediako 2013:44). The consequence of this statement is the significance of exploring African concepts such as ancestors, sacrifices, and community from within a biblical worldview. Such explorations will have some continuity, and possibly some discontinuity, with how these concepts are used in African thought forms. Yet, such an approach will also give them much more significance in light of biblical revelation. To successfully reflect on the theological significance of Christ in the continent, Bediako infers that one must consider ATRs. In his later years, he formed the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture, an academic institution that has spearheaded a profound engagement with Africa's languages and concepts such as mother tongue translation and other significant African hermeneutical approaches. Bediako, Kato, and Mbiti remain luminary figures in any discourse

of the theological or apologetic task in the continent. This article seeks to further build up on the ongoing conversation for the task of Christian apologetics today.

### ***Concepts of God in ATRs***

Mbiti's *Concepts of God* analyses the doctrine of God in 300 African ethnicities. The doctrine of God in these various African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have similarities to each other, yet also show some divergence. African Traditional Religions have various names for God or the gods based on the activity or attributes of the said divinity. For example, based on the study of the Ashanti religion by J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, Parrinder (1970) notes that the traditional names of God communicated the basic idea of deity, personality, and infinity in his being. Within most ATRs, God can be approached through a combination of rituals, sacrifices, prayers, and worship - all conducted through a mediator (Mbiti 1975:19). Bolaji Idowu explains the Yoruba (Nigeria) conceptualisation of God as a pantheon of gods, *orisha*. He argues that this is different from polytheism and that the two or three hundred gods make up a single "soul," which brings coherence to their understanding of the Supreme Being (Parrinder 1970:82).

For the Sukuma in Tanzania, relationship with the divine is through "a direct ritual relationship with the spirits of their ancestors" (Tanner 1967:5). The Supreme Being has various names, contingent on one's geographic location – primarily, the Supreme Being is a solitary spirit with different aspects based on his character. As with the Yoruba above, the Supreme Being is preeminent within a world of lesser spirit beings (Tanner 1967:5). In more contemporary contexts, the Sukuma Christians have returned to the traditional names of God such as *Seba* and *Liwelelo*, which were avoided by the missionaries so as to distinguish the Christian God (*Mulungu* or *Mungu*) from the traditional god of the Sukuma. Other African Traditional Religions (ATRs) speak of God based on his attributes. For example, the Akan (Ghana) refer to God as "he who knows or sees all", while the Zulu (South Africa) and Banyarwanda (Rwanda) call him "the wise one" (Mbiti 1970:3). These names are not far removed from the Old Testament names of God such as *Elohim*, *Jehovah Rapha*, *Jehovah Nissi*, among others. The point is that the concepts of God on the continent are broad and reveal some level of continuity with Scripture in terms of attributes and names for God.

In terms of the sources of the conception of God in African Traditional Religions (ATRs), one must look to the oral traditions that are prominent in African societies. Hymns, songs, poems, speeches, proverbs, festivities, morals, and communal ceremonies all contain important material for theological reflection in the African context (Mbiti 1975). In summary, ATRs have a conception of a Supreme Being, a spirit world, mediators such as elders and ancestors, initiatory rites, and the practice of magic (Idowu 1975:137). Contestations remain as to the relationship between these ATRs and Christian conceptualisation of God. Within the religious landscape of Africa, religious thought traverses “pantheistic, monotheistic, polytheistic and animistic strands” (Parrinder 1970:86). The following section compares trinitarian theism with ATR conceptions of God. It argues that inherent differences must offer caution in theological reflection and apologetic engagement.

## **A Critique of Concepts of God in ATR**

With most African scholars, I agree that we need to take ATRs seriously if the Christian mission is to spread further on the continent. One sees recurring themes in Christian theology within the African context when one considers that the question of this article is similar to the questions that earlier theologians were asking in 1998 (Ngewa, Shaw, Tienou 1998). These theologians explored the salience of the Christian worldview for Biblical inerrancy, the doctrine of God, the spirit world, and demonology. This article is not a rehashing of the importance of these aspects but a fresh exploration for the contemporary African context. While earlier African theologians, closer to the colonial history were seeking the good in ATRs based on the generalisation arising from the missionary enterprise, today’s sceptics are pushing for a total abandonment of the Christian faith in favour of our ATRs. In essence, their claim is not similar to the forebearers of Christian theologising in the continent, but different in its repulsion against Christ. While the earlier scholars retrieved ATRs in order to understand the African worldview and its role in theology, I seek to focus more on the contrast in this section so as to show the difference between the African and trinitarian theism, and its role for the apologetic task in the continent.

## ***ATRs and the Question of Salvation***

The Christian worldview is unique in its exclusivity concerning how humanity attains salvation. While many religions teach different truths or parallel concepts such as *Nirvana* in Buddhism and *Yoga* in Hinduism concerning salvation, Jesus Christ walks a unique path. Adeyemo (1997:75) observes this contrast between Jesus Christ and the traditional systems of religion:

But Jesus did not come to offer a religion, an idea, a law, or a formula about reality. Rather, by his coming, he put an end to rituals and religions. He fulfilled the law in himself. He unveiled the personal Creator-God. He offered life. By a life of sinless obedience, he manifested the highest degree of morality and ethics. By his acts of mercy and compassion, he demonstrated the love of God. His teaching about what is right, good, and just has never been paralleled. He met the quest of philosophers concerning reality and truth. He lifted the poor; released the oppressed; healed the broken-hearted; set the captives free; fed the hungry; raised the dead; opened blind eyes; and proclaimed the good news of God's Kingdom. Above all, he suffered and died on the cross in the place of all sinners - not for any crime he had committed but to pacify the wrath of God. He died so as to reconcile man to God. He rose again so that justified man may be able to live by the power that raised Christ from the dead.

Adeyemo here spells out an orthodox Christian understanding concerning Christology. He speaks of Christ's vicarious atonement, which is central to the concept of salvation in Christian doctrine (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 3:18, Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, 2 Corinthians 5:21).<sup>4</sup> In his statement, one hears the apostolic confession of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ as the heartbeat of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:1-7). Adeyemo also expands how this objective work of Christ on the cross is applied by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers through forgiveness, adoption, sanctification, and future glorification. As such, one understands the past,

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<sup>4</sup> In the recent past, William Lane Craig (2018) has offered an exegetical, philosophical, and theological treatment of the doctrine of atonement in view of the intersection of legal theories and the different atonement theories within historic Christian doctrine.

present, and future aspects of Christ’s salvific work, that it is objective in its reality and subjective in its application in the lives of different Christian believers across time and space. Adeyemo finally speaks about the kingdom of God, inaugurated through Christ’s first coming and coming in its fulness in his second return. These aspects are the pinnacle of God’s special revelation to his elect.

While general revelation is evidence in the natural world of God’s existence as Psalm 19 and Romans 1 teach, without spiritual illumination from the Holy Spirit, no human being can ascend to the truth of God and form a personal relationship with him (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Calvin’s concept of *sensus divinitatis* speaks to the classical proofs of God’s existence. However, the reality of sin renders the human faculties of cognition, affection, and will powerless – no wonder the apostle Paul notes that before Christ, we are “dead” (Ephesians 2:1-10). What is needed therefore is spiritual surgery that can reveal Christ to the hearts of humanity. While we would agree with the traditionalists that all people everywhere have a conception of God, we would critique this knowledge on the grounds that the Christian faith invites us into a personal, saving relationship with the One True and Living God (Acts 17:22-31). Paul’s apologetic engagement is different from the concept of God in ATRs:

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>ATRs</b>
<b>Creator</b>	Creator of the whole universe - “Lord of Heaven and Earth” (17:24)	Creator of the world (with a focus on a particular ethnicity)
<b>Presence</b>	Spirit and Omnipresent (17:24)	Spirit and should be worshipped in particular places (mountains, trees, etc)

<b>Sovereignty</b>	Accomplishes his own purposes – not in need of anything (17:24-25)	Can be appeased into a relationship of either blessing or cursing
<b>Culture</b>	Made one man from every nation (17:26)	Made a man or a couple from a particular ethnicity
<b>Personal</b>	A personal relationship with only One Mediator (17:27, cf. 2 Tim 2:5)	Ritualistic practices through many mediators (e.g., elders, ancestors, spirit world)

*Table 1: Distinction between Concepts of God in Acts 17 between Christianity and ATRs*

### ***ATRs and the Question of the Trinity***

While ATRs may contain some understanding of the divine, the biblical God has revealed himself as Trinity - thereby parting company with traditional African notions of God, which, as discussed above, are a constellation of monotheism, polytheism, and animism. While the word Trinity is not used in the Bible, the concept of the Triunity of God is evident in the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Trinity rests on three biblical truths:

1. That God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:29, Zechariah 14:9, See also 1 Timothy 2:5, James 2:19);
2. That God has revealed himself through three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1-2, 1:26, 16:7, 18:3, Psalm 110:1, Isaiah 61:1);
3. And that the three distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are “coequal” and “coeternal”.

Theologians help us to understand the triunity of God through consideration of the titles of God, the attributes of God, and the works of God. Concerning the titles of God, the Father is called God (Deuteronomy 6:3-5, John 6:27), the Son is called God (John 1:1, Hebrews 1:8), and the Holy Spirit is called God (Acts



5:3-9, 2 Corinthians 3:17). Concerning the attributes of God, the Father is called Holy, the Son is called Holy, and the Spirit is called Holy (Revelation 15:4, Acts 3:14, Isaiah 6:3). Therefore, the Father, Son and Spirit must have one essence even though they are of distinct personhood, which has been the orthodox understanding as per the Nicene formulation.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the works of God, the Scriptures reveal that the Father was involved in creation, the Son was involved in creation, and the Spirit was involved in creation (Genesis 1:1-2, John 1:1-2). A similar parallel could be made regarding God's redemptive purposes – the Father plans salvation, the Son accomplishes salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation to God's elect (Romans 8:29, John 17:2, John 16:13-14). Although Swinburne (2018) argues that one requires an "a priori argument" for the Trinity as one cannot derive the doctrine of the Trinity from the New Testament, I would argue, as expounded above, that it is plausible to conclude the Trinity based on the overall biblical data: that God is One yet has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Further, the councils of the Church throughout her long history have understood the Trinity to be a core doctrine for Christian believers. If the early church heresies could be seen as a confusion between the unity and diversity in the Godhead, then the concept of Trinity developed by the Church councils settled the matter. The Westminster Confession, as an example, summarises:

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<sup>5</sup> Following Boethius, Swinburn (2018) defines "persons" as "an individual substance of a rational nature". The systematic theologian, John Webster (2010), explores the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of creation. Readers may benefit from how he unpacks the doctrine of the Trinity through a systematic exploration of essence, persons, and external processions. He notes, for example, that "God's unity is characterised by modes of being in each of which the entire divine essence subsists in a particular way; this simultaneous, eternal existence in these three modes is the one divine essence. Accordingly, the persons of the godhead are not distinguished from the divine essence *realter*; there are not three eternal, or three incomprehensibles, or three uncreated, or three almighties, or three gods. This is not to reduce the persons back into some anterior unity (that is, this does not 'confound the persons'), but simply to state that the persons are inseparable from the essence, and the essence inseparable from its threefold personal modification".

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory (1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19).

The biblical arguments aside, the formulation of the doctrine has taken various approaches. Kombo (2016:7) lists these as: (1) “God as essence”, which is based on Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thought; (2) “God as Absolute Subject”, borrowing from German idealism; (3) “God as Community in Unity”, based on apophaticism-doxology; and (4) “God as Great Muntu”, borrowing from Ubuntu philosophy. Unpacking these approaches, Kombo notes that contextual location influences and feeds into theological reflection, even on this mysterious doctrine. However, it may be, these approaches all seek to synthesise the unity and diversity in the Godhead. The ATRs, however, confuse the doctrine of God, for there seems to be no unanimity concerning whether ATRs are monotheistic or polytheistic. Further, in the ATRs God is accessed through intermediaries and moralistic rituals. In the Christian conception, God is a Trinity, a concept that distinguishes Christianity from both monotheistic religions (such as Judaism and Islam) and polytheistic religions (such as Hinduism). The biblical and theological conception of the Trinity distinguishes itself from the African conceptions of God, and functions as a central theological hermeneutic of the Christian faith (Kombo 2016:8).

## **Conclusion**

The concepts of God in ATRs have been considered because the metaphysical make-up of the African world is pregnant with spirits of various kinds. Africans have an incessant push to be right with God through these various intermediaries. The resurgence of African traditional practices such as the offering of sacrificial goats through elder initiatory rites affects the understanding of the new covenant that we have in Christ Jesus (Ndereba 2021). Within African Christian practice, some Christians lack Christian assurance and confidence, when they interpret life’s challenges through the eyes of ATRs. Seen that way, some African Christians either resort to prosperity preachers or return to traditional priests or mediums. The salience of this apologetic approach therefore is not merely an intellectual quest, but is also central to a pastoral response within the continent.

This article presented African theological interpretations on the concept of God. By exploring the work of African theologians such as Kwame Bediako, John Mbiti, and Byang Kato, this article presented the continuous challenge of responding to the gospel message in light of African traditional worldviews. The article revealed that the conceptions of God on the continent are as many as there are people groups. These include pantheistic, monotheistic, and polytheistic conceptions, among others. While understanding ATRs is critical to the missionary task of the gospel on the continent, there is a need to explore the discontinuities between concepts of God in ATRs and Trinitarianism. This article outlined two differences between ATRs and the trinitarian formulation of God. First, this article observed that ATRs are primarily concerned with communal harmony and not salvation. While this expands concepts of reconciliation to a holistic scope, it bypasses the underlying salvation theory of atonement. Secondly, this article observed that the concept of Trinity, which interfaces with the person and work of Jesus Christ, is central to an elementary doctrine of God, and parts company with the monotheism, pantheism, and polytheism of African Traditional Religions. Thus, this article concludes that while there is benefit in ATRs - in terms of holistic worldviews, the importance of communality, and concepts of *ubuntu* – by and large, the difference lies in the significance of the doctrine of God to the story of redemption, and its theological, missiological, and pastoral implications.

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Oguntade, A O 2022, 'An Appraisal of Televangelism in Nigeria as a Means of Evangelization', *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 90-107

# **An Appraisal of Televangelism in Nigeria as a Means of Evangelization**

Ayotunde Olayori Oguntade, PhD

Department of Intercultural Studies, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary  
olayorioguntade2017@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

Televangelism has helped the church take the gospel beyond the confines of its own environment. However, televangelism is not without its shortcomings. There is, therefore, a need to appraise the effectiveness of this practice as a medium for disseminating gospel messages. This study used a descriptive method to gather data. It explores the emergence of television evangelism in Nigeria and reviews previous studies on the use of media and television for evangelism. Also, it discusses the merits and demerits of televangelism and appraises the use of television as a medium for evangelism in Nigeria. The study reveals moral laxities that televangelists and Christians in Nigeria should address. It recommends that televangelists not exploit their audience financially, materially, or in any other way that may be considered unethical. It also recommends that they be mindful of preaching on controversial issues.

## **Introduction**

The word "televangelist" combines two concepts: television and evangelist. Television is a medium of communication; an evangelist is a proclaimer of the gospel of Christ. Therefore, a televangelist is a proclaimer of the gospel who uses television as a medium of communicating that message to his or her audience. Since the 1970s, television has been a medium of evangelism in Nigeria (Ojo 2001:181). Televangelists believed that the medium would reach a larger audience with the gospel of Christ. Now that television channels have moved from analogue to digital, evangelism on television channels has



become globalized. Televangelism has helped the church take the gospel beyond the confines of its environment as Nigerian Christians are making use of television in the propagation of their faith.

Ojo (2001:181) affirmed that "virtually all Christian groups in Africa are involved in media evangelism, but it is more characteristic of the Charismatic and Pentecostal groups." Ogunewu (2022:12) confirms that Pentecostals have continued to enhance evangelization through the use of various media platforms. However, in contemporary times other Christian denominations are also making use of the media, especially television, in the propagation of the gospel. Besides reaching out to the populace with the gospel message, televangelism contributes economically to the sustenance of the television industry in Nigeria. These evangelistic telecasts are broadcast especially on the weekends. Many run their telecasts once a week, while others run theirs throughout the week. Some even broadcast their telecasts on more than one television channel. These televangelists buy airtime ranging from five minutes to one hour. The price tag for this airtime varies in the television industry. There are also various presentation programmes by Christian organizations that include choir ministrations, teachings, preaching, symposia, and others. The concern of this paper is to appraise communication of the gospel in Nigeria via television.

## **Previous Studies on the use of Media and Television for Evangelism**

The use of media and television for evangelism has attracted a level of scholarly attention. In previous studies various views were expressed on the relevance of this practice for church development. According to Ogunewu (2013:502), there are those who believe that today "the media occupies an indispensable position in the work of evangelization." Ogunewu (2013:502) stresses that proponents of this view encourage the church to go all out and avail itself of every available technology in order to facilitate the work at hand because the media has become an integral part of peoples' life in virtually all societies of the world. It has become a purveyor of information, communications, entertainment, and civilizations (Baum 1993:65).

Loorthusamy (2000:138) asserts that because of the subservient nature of the media to secular interests, it has produced a materialistic culture that has captured the minds and hearts of our society. The media directs the world to consumeristic values and behaviours and has become a rival to priests, religions, teachers, and parents. Today, the media does much more than mediate information; rather they influence lifestyles and values, and create the categories in which we perceive the world (Baum 1993:65). In this light Long encourages the church to make use of the media because it serves some groups of people. He emphasizes that the use of mass media will enable the church to reach those who cannot come to church, those who do not have a church, and those who do not have any conception of the gospel. Ilo (2000:18) is also of the opinion that since we are in the era of giant leaps in communication technology, it is advisable for the church to adopt the best means possible for proclaiming the good news. He observes that the present form of spreading the good news in churches has proved insufficient and ineffective. Therefore, the time has come for us to explore new "market strategies" that will properly package and present the gospel to the world.

Cho (1984:55-71) says that these modern media of communication exist for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that one of the chief evangelistic tools the church has at her disposal today is the media. The church should be using the media to a greater extent than anyone else, because the church today is faced with many challenges. These include the ever-increasing world population, the different nature of society, the emergence of new cities and locations the world over, terrorism and increased transport cost, and the many restrictive measures against the activities of the church in some societies of the world. To enhance its activities in the face of these challenges, the church needs to devise new and appropriate means of reaching the populace from time to time, in their various locations, scattered in the nooks and crannies of the world (Ogunewu 2013:502-503). Different societies have to be reached in different ways. We cannot expect the world to adapt to the church's strategies for evangelization. It is the church that has the responsibility of studying the world in which it finds itself and of devising the best means to communicate its message to the masses (Ilo 2000:18). Brawner (1997:369-375) is of the opinion that if the church is to effectively reach this "sight and sound" generation for Christ, it must utilize the same

media which much of society is using. In this regard, therefore, media utilization should continue to be an integral part of Christian evangelization.

The realities of these views notwithstanding, there are those who urge the church to take precautions in its use of media. Such people warn that the church needs to strike a balance in this regard. It is not advisable for the church to become overly dependent on the media. Neither is it ideal for the church to cut itself off from the media. The watchword here is moderation. First, the church must be selective and cautious in its media utilization if evangelization is to be effective. The media is a channel of information and communication to people within an environment. Many factors have to be taken into consideration in the choice of which media form to use. A media form which will work for one environment may not work in another. For example, print media may work within a literate community, but audio or video cassettes in the language of the people will definitely be more ideal in communities with low levels of literacy. It is therefore necessary for the church to make sure that the media it utilizes is able to communicate effectively to its audience (Ogunewu 2013:503).

Ogunewu (2013:503-504) further observes that there is another group that encourages the church in the use of media, but this raises serious caution on the use of electronic media, especially television. The concern of this group of Christians is the spate of violence and sexual immorality on television. Collins supports the view of Ogunewu when he notes that some movies and television programmes promote violence (Collins 1988:298). These have the propensity to produce violent behaviours in their viewers. In fact, some criminals confirmed that their attitudes and violent dispositions were fashioned by what they saw on television ("Television" 2006:3-9). As a result, some Christian denominations are sceptical about the use of media for evangelism.

However, Ogunewu (2013:504) acknowledges the fact that some television shows promote violence and immorality cannot be denied. Therefore, the watchword should be controlled. Sogaard (2000:127) shares the same opinion with Ogunewu. He is of the view that the church should not allow television programmes to destroy their families' lives, because that would also have a negative effect on the church. The view of Real (1989:259) is no different. He counsels media consumers to win back control of the media. In this light of

control Duncan (1982:140) suggests that those who use the media on the church's behalf should be men with a high level of spirituality. Duncan is of the view that since we live in an age of technological advancement, there is no denying the fact that scientific tools – radio, television, printing presses – could be of great assistance in world evangelization. However, he cautions that all of these would avail nothing if those who handle them are not spirit-filled. Murray (1988:111) is of the same opinion as Duncan. He is of the view that world evangelization depends on the spiritual state of the Church. The observation of these two writers is that spirituality plays a great role in evangelization. The problem of ineffective evangelization lies with men. There is therefore a need for men to effectively use the right tool, at the right time, in the right manner, and in the right situation. This will help boost the work at hand more than when people use these media forms for self-aggrandizement.

To achieve favourable results, Forest (1993:194-197) proposes nine steps to be taken by those who intend to be effective in the proclamation of the Word of God. These include having the mind of someone chosen and sent; speaking with humility and conviction; preaching Christ and not oneself, money or other irrelevant themes; and being a witness to the Word that they proclaim; as well as being courageous; depending on the power of the Holy Spirit and not on one's oratorical skill; giving time to prayer and preparation; seeking and expecting signs and wonders, and sounding joyful and optimistic.

Recently scholars are researching the dynamics of social media for evangelization. Barigbon, Nsereka, and Tessy Nwanze (2021:643) are of the opinion that many Christian organizations have not embraced the lofty disposition of the internet. According to them, there are two reasons for this disposition. First, the cost of sustaining evangelism online is costly. Second, some Christian organizations have written off the Internet as an "unrighteous" thing that is not fit as a channel for religious messages. Their position is predicated on the many ignoble, vicious, and immoral posts on the internet via social media platforms. The view of David R. Dunaetz (2019:143) is no different. He posits that comments written in an aggressive tone by people with a social or political agenda could be responsible for Christians' unwillingness to share the gospel with others on social media where people can anonymously criticize and attack others with impunity.

One could argue that there are two views on the use of social media for evangelization. Some Christians do not see the reason why social media should be used as a channel for evangelism. However, it can be contended that like any other medium, what one does with internet technology is purely one's choice. The medium itself is not the problem (Nsereka and Nwanze 2021:643). On the other hand, some new generational pastors are making use of social media as a strategy for reaching out to the youth. Ajibade (2021:159) asserts that "the largest group engaged in the use of ICT are the young people – from their teens to their forties." Gospel proclaimers must make efforts to reach them because they are important in every generation and are also the future of coming generations.

## **Overview of Television Broadcasting and Television Evangelism**

This section provides an overview of television broadcasting, the antecedent to the emergence of televangelism.

### ***The Emergence of Television Broadcasting***

Mass media came into being as a result of human enthusiasm to hear the news. Before the invention of radio and television, information was transmitted through the telegraph and the telephone to newspaper editors, printing presses, and then to the public (Emery, Ault, and Agee 1974:80). From the early 20th century, there were remarkable successes in technology-facilitation by the establishment technical universities. According to Kranzberg and Pursell (1967: 12), "technological work since 1940 has been done primarily by men who have earned a university degree." This, in turn, increased the speed of technological advance. In the 1920s, television broadcasting experimented in the United States of America. In 1927, a "closed-circuit television picture was sent from Washington to New York" (Emery, Ault, and Agee 1974:90). This period could be called a formative period. By 1948 television had become a significant and relevant media (Emery, Ault, and Agee 1974:90-91).

In Nigeria, the history of television broadcasting can be traced to 31 October 1959, when Western Television (WNTV) beamed out a signal for the first time. A year later, Eastern Nigeria Television began. The federal government

established Nigerian Television Services in 1962, while Midwest Television Station began to broadcast in 1973. Benue and Plateau Television (BPTV), Jos, has been transmitting in colour since its inception in 1974. In May 1977, through a decree of the federal military government, twenty-four television stations metamorphosed into a single network. This was the genesis of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). All existing television stations were incorporated into NTA. Later, private-owned television stations like African Independent Television (AIT), Channels, Galaxy Television, and others emerged. Some state governments in Nigeria also owned television stations like the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) and Ogun State Television (OGTV). Likewise, lately, Christian denominations such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Synagogue of All Nations, Deeper Life, and Baptist denominations have private television stations on cable television. This has afforded them the opportunity to control the content of what will be aired.

### ***The Emergence of Television Evangelism***

In the 1950s, television evangelism, also known as televangelism, started in the United States of America (USA). At the time, this was called the "Electronic Church" (Litman and Bain 1989:329). Billy Graham, a renowned evangelist, took the lead. His "first nationally televised crusade generated 1.5 million letters to the broadcasting station, proving the effectiveness of the medium" (Brigada 1974:n.a.). Rex Humbard, Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts joined later this new medium of propagating the gospel (Brigada 1974:n.a.). However, 1988 and 1989 was a period of decadence in television evangelism in the USA because some televangelists were reportedly involved in various sexual scandals, financial scandals, and pursuing unsuccessful political ambitions. These include Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson who made an unsuccessful bid for the American presidency in 1988, and Oral Roberts (Brigada 1974:n.a.). This led the National Religious Broadcasters association to form an Ethics and Financial Integrity Commission to regulate such anomalies (Brigada 1974:n.a.).

The use of television as a medium for propagating the gospel started in Nigeria in 1974. Benson Idahosa, the founder of the Church of God Mission, set the pace. Notably, this was "the first largest and most successful project in televangelism in Africa" (Iherjirika 2005:38-44). Another notable Pentecostal

pastor who followed Idahosa in this direction was Ayo Oritsejafor who tagged his television programme "The Hour of Deliverance". By the 1990s, televangelism became solidified in Nigeria (Ihejirika 2005:38-44). Since that time, many preachers and teachers have been buying airtime on Nigerian television stations. Most of these televangelists are Pentecostals, who usually have attractive tags for their religious programmes. Recently, preachers from mainline churches and African Independent Churches have also begun proclaiming gospel messages via television. Though they are few in comparison to their Pentecostal counterparts, they also use this medium to reach prospective converts who might eventually become members of their churches.

## **Merits and Demerits of Television Evangelism in Nigeria**

This section discusses the merits and demerits of televangelism. It provides the basis for the appraisal of televangelism in Nigeria.

### ***Merits of Television Evangelism***

Many people spend a lot of time watching television programmes in our modern world. Television is prevalent among teenagers and youths. Even in offices, hotels, guest houses, and on the streets, there are television sets standing by to entertain customers, visitors, and passers-by. It is becoming "increasingly difficult to divide work and leisure activities into separate compartments in people's lives" (Mayled 2006:n.a.). These television programmes not only inform and entertain; they are also educative. Thus, "in this day of almost instantaneous mass communication, members of the mass media are doing more than recording history; they are helping to shape it" (Emery, Ault, and Agee 1974:96). Most of these programmes also affect moral values. Mayled (2006:n.a.) shares this view when he notes how "lifestyles portrayed in the media and advertising may have a bad effect, particularly on impressionable young people or older people who are not well educated. For example, in many drama series, the main characters are married and divorced several times, have affairs, and commit crimes." In some cases, the audience watches pornography on television programmes like "Big Brother Naija", which offers material and monetary gifts to the winner.

Since Christians are to be light and salt in the world (Matt. 5:13-16), television evangelism should be encouraged to shape human lives and society. Ojo (2001:182) notes that "televangelism has been used by religious conservatives to gain political power and social influence within the wider society... The more religious a society has been, the more likely that religion can be used to shape public values through the media." Televangelists see gospel broadcasting as a strategy for positively affecting the social situation of society. They believe that if they will take over Nigeria, they must take over the press, the radio, and the television stations. In short, their presence must be massively felt in the nation's media (Ihejirika 2005:40).

Hence, televangelism in Nigeria is a medium for making Christianity relevant in contemporary Nigerian society. It is a medium for consolidating and safeguarding religious values. Other religions including Islam and the traditional African religions are competing with Christianity in the use of television. Thus, television evangelism is used in Christian circles to popularize religion. It is also used as an instrument for enhancing and sustaining Christian virtues, religious worship, and Christian growth (Ojo 2001:182).

Furthermore, supposedly there are instances of conversion from one religion to another due to religious messages heard on television (Ojo 2001:182). Televangelism in Nigeria has made it possible for those who do not attend worship services for one reason or another to listen to Christian messages through the television. Because of the wide coverage of television stations, evangelism has been brought to almost all Nigerian homes. Television evangelism in Nigeria by the Pentecostals is a challenge to the mainline churches. Such that many mainline churches are now developing new strategies in missions and evangelism. This has reinforced mission enterprise.

Televangelism has also made an impact on the political scene of the nation. From time to time, political leaders during elections, national conferences, and other national projects call on the public to fast and pray for the success of such tasks. Public officers even offer prayers in public discourse (Ihejirika 2005:41). Some televangelists have been speaking on the political situation of the nation. For example, Tunde Bakare, a trained attorney and pastor of Citadel Global Community Church (formerly Latter Rain Assembly) Lagos, has been remarkable in this regard. Televangelists have been acting as prophetic



figures for the nation. They are giving Christians a voice in the political sphere of the country. Thus,

the socio-political significance of Pentecostals on media lies in the fact that the increased visibility of their preachers on television has elevated the churches from the fringes to the centre of the "socio-religious public sphere" in Nigeria, at the same time allowing them to formulate public symbols and attitudes (Ihejirika 2005:42).

Unarguably, televangelism has made Christian's message relevant to the political, social, and religious situation of Nigerian society. However, there are demerits of televangelism in Nigeria.

### ***Demerits of Television Evangelism in Nigeria***

In contemporary society, there is a high degree of commercialization and consumption. Nigerians purchase things that will suit their lifestyles. The media has contributed to the value placed on commercialization and consumption. Thus, "apart from the struggle for soul winning cum supremacy, we also have the social-economic considerations" (Dairo 2010:195). Ojo (2011:183) opines that "much of what is produced and disseminated through the media by religious organizations is usually consumed in private homes. Mediated religious experience is consequently a privatized religious experience. Therefore, the privatized nature of the consumption of media products presents a challenging paradox". Moreover, observably, some televangelists have commercialized evangelism in Nigeria. Some televangelists are involved in what Agazue (2013:177) called "miracle-marketing." Dairo (2010:195) affirms this position when he notes that "all over the world and in Nigeria, in particular, 'marketing' God is fast becoming a top bracket business." Citing Harrington, Obiora (1958:52) shares a similar view:

The new evangelism, whether in soft or hard-selling, is a quasi-religious approach to business, wrapped in a hoax – a hoax voluntarily entered into by producers and consumers together; its credo is that of belief-to-order... It is the truth-to-order as delivered by advertising and public relations men, believed in by them and voluntarily believed by the public.

Likewise, Adjua Akinwumi (2012:6) argues that "televised miracle sessions have become more and more controversial. From pastors goading congregants to eat grass for healing to a general debasement in the presentation of the afflicted, there is often a sense of irrationality and absurdity about these practices, as well as those who partake in them." Akinwumi stresses his point by citing the example of Temitope Joshua, a popular Nigerian televangelist who established Emmanuel TV as a platform that streams Sunday services and broadcasts miracle sessions in 2007. Temitope Joshua used miracle water to heal the sick and the afflicted. According to Akinwumi (2012:8), Temitope Joshua "built a reputation around his miracle-water miracles (healing and poverty alleviation), his prophecy/predictions and exorcisms. His services have attracted hundreds of thousands of people across the globe, including influential political figures". Several others used the platform to advertise their church programmes and project the church's identity and the pastor.

Moreover, some televangelists present their messages as a product that must be consumed. Thus, the media is being used as an avenue to advertise their religious products. Jacob Ayantayo (2010:207) observes that prosperity preachers undertake paid advertisement: "They often employ the services of professional advertising agents who are good in the choice of words such that will be catchy enough to win the attention of the public. Some of these advertisements appear on radio, television, banner, billboard, etc. Those on Radio and Television are aired intermittently..."

Observably, televangelists struggle to outwit one another in their presentations and their preaching. In the words of Mathews Ojo (2001:182), "with the pluralization of beliefs and the emergence of different religious groups all struggling for visibility and support in the public space, the battleground has shifted to the media". Some televangelists use the platform to oppose doctrinal issues and settle scores. This has generated unhealthy rivalry and is not helping promote unity among Christian denominations in Nigeria. Instead, it has further fragmented the Christian denominations.

Furthermore, most of the time the audience focuses its attention on the televangelist rather than on the person of Jesus Christ whom the televangelist claims to represent. This is partly because the structure of media programmes revolves around the presenter. It is also because most television evangelists

give bogus or forged testimonies that present themselves as "super-man of God." Each televangelist creates a "business trademark" or identity. Some of them have appellations like "*baba lesekese*", that is, "father of instantaneous miracle". This serves as an identity to project the personality of the televangelist, not necessarily the person of Jesus Christ. The messages of most televangelists in Nigeria centre on wealth, health, deliverance, self-actualization, the state of the nation, rigorous prayers, and prophecies. The audience rarely hears preachers on television preaching about salvation, eschatology, holiness, and sanctification.

In addition, some televangelists in Nigeria use the medium to raise funds for their ministries or to raise sponsorships for their programmes. At times, they use "marketing techniques in their presentations. In doing this, they usually compromise the integrity of the gospel" (Ojo 2001:183). This is evident in their emotionally appealing or motivational messages. It is also reflected in their invitations to their church programmes and the sale of their materials. Nigerian televangelists follow a multi-media approach in their media evangelism. They engage in the production of music cassettes, CDs, books, and the likes (Ihejirika 2005:38). They usually use their telecasts to market these products. It can then be said that there is a shift from Christ to self. There is also a gradual shift from "making followers to attracting fans" (Ojo 2001:183). It is in this light that Dairo (2010:195) elucidates that "what we are witnessing today is aggressive proselytizing in which each denomination seeks for domination. Even some of the leaders try to entrench their church to the preeminent position in the nation's religious sphere. Apart from the struggle for soul-winning cum supremacy, we also have the social-economic considerations".

On 30 April 2004, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria banned the broadcast of miracles on television stations. They could not have miracles aired on television because they were not verifiable. According to NBC, broadcasting unverifiable events was against Sections 3 and 4 of Article six of the Broadcasting Code, which prohibits religious broadcasts from promoting unsubstantiated claims (Ihejirika 2005:38-40). The regulation states that "religious broadcast shall be particular in terms of content to its creed and shall not be presented in a manner to mislead the public" (Eyobaka 2006:n.a.). Unverifiable miracles were considered a practice that preys on the sensibilities

of the Nigerian people. One can argue that some television evangelists in Nigeria are running television programmes for self-aggrandizement and personal enrichment.

## **Appraisal of Television Evangelism in Nigeria**

A careful study of the history of televangelism in America compared to that of Nigeria shows that they have a similar outlook. For instance, Chris Okotie and Tunde Bakare have aspired to be the president of Nigeria like Pat Robertson, an American televangelist, although, their failure in the presidential contest was not associated with scandal. In some instances, televangelists in Nigeria have promoted unverified miracles and used the medium to exploit the audience with their hard-earned money. To put a check to this, Nigerian televangelists can borrow a leaf from America. They can establish a Religious Broadcasting Commission that will formulate ethics to guide their conduct. Moreover, Nigerian theological schools and religious studies departments in universities can include a course on media and communication in their curriculum.

Christian television evangelists must present to the world, from time to time, unifying and sound biblical messages. The diversity of messages issuing by Christian media tends to portray Christendom to the world as a “Kingdom in Confusion.” Duncan (1982:140) is of the view that the unconverted are already bored and perplexed with the multiplicity of Christian sects and messages. The task of world evangelization will be difficult, especially if the churches that are the custodian of the message of evangelization continually sing discordant tunes. The task of fashioning uniform theologies for the consumption of mass media users is therefore imperative. The essential content of all aspects of evangelization should be Bible teachings, centred on the person and work of Christ. This should be the message of the church, especially when mass media is used to broadcast these messages to the general populace. Issues of doctrinal differences should be reserved for private church media such as magazines, and audio and video cassettes.

Furthermore, televangelists should obtain feedback from their viewers from time to time through statistical research. This will help them evaluate the impact of their religious broadcast. This is necessary because it is the viewer

who shapes the medium, not the televangelist. It is the viewer who selects physically (by simply switching the set on and off) and psychologically (by accepting or rejecting what he sees, hears and chooses to believe) what will emerge from his home receiver (Bluem 1969:170).

The televangelists telecasting in Nigeria mostly have close similarities in content and format. The presentation of televangelists in Nigeria is primarily preaching and teaching. There is not much variety. In only a few cases have televangelists been innovative by directing their messages to a specific audience. For instance, the late Bimbo Odukoya focused on families, marriages, and singles. Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship uses testifiers to propagate in her gospel broadcast. But overall, there is a need for variety in gospel broadcasts. Although the gospel broadcaster has a central message, he can present that main message differently (Loveless 1946:325). The televangelists can channel their programmes toward Bible quizzes, young people's hour and religious news. Although some Christian television stations like that of the Christ Embassy and Nigerian Baptist Convention (New Frontiers Television) have a session for news and other varieties, this should be intensified and emphasis should be laid on religious news and information. It can focus on social issues, dilemmas related to religious outlook, the spiritual needs of society, and create awareness on the happenings in mission fields and Christian persecution through the medium. This may create opportunities for attracting increased viewers to televangelism. Bluem's (1969:174-175) observation is still relevant in this respect: "The vast majority of human beings are interested in the social, political and moral issues that relate to their position in the social structure. They are interested also in changes in society which have the most direct influence upon them."

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has traced the history of television broadcasting and television evangelism. It evaluated the criticisms of the use of media in the propagation of the gospel. It examined the merits and demerits of televangelism in Nigeria. It discussed its merits in the light of social, political, and religious spheres. It also examined its demerits in the light of televangelists' personal motives and negative impacts on Nigeria Christianity in general and viewers in particular. Moreover, it appraised television evangelism in Nigeria as being critical for

faith proclamation in contemporary society. Thus, the writer concludes that there is a need to retain television evangelism in Nigeria. However, the motive for engaging in televangelism must be examined in the light of the biblical message. Furthermore, it must do it in such a way that it will not distort the gospel message. Further research is needed on the use of media by Christian denominations for gospel proclamation, especially social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. To enhance the use of television for evangelism, the writer recommends the following moral principles for televangelists in Nigeria:

1. They should watch their temperament in their presentation. Television evangelists should not be abusive and should not use the medium to settle scores with their supposed rivals.
2. Televangelists should not exploit their audience financially, materially, or otherwise. They should also faithfully discharge their obligations to the television station.
3. The gospel message should not be compromised for any reason. The televangelist should be bold enough to rebuke sin and corruption in society.
4. Televangelists should be mindful of preaching on controversial issues. If they should preach on politics, it must be Bible-based and not pitch their tent with a particular political group or politician.

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## "The Politics of Righteousness"

Prof Sunday Bobai Agang  
ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, Nigeria  
sunday.agang@jets.edu.ng

### Abstract

More and more Christian denominations across Africa are showing unprecedented interest in politics. It is critically important, therefore, to draw their attention to the need for those of them who are going into politics to model what godly politics entail. For we live in a continent where our religiosity has not stopped corruption in high and low places. Both Christian and non-Christian leaders at every level of our society tend to disconnect their faith and morality from their political activities. As a result, the masses in Africa are denied access to the common good and flourishing life or the respect for their human dignity and the right to earn a living as dignified human beings. Thus, they have not yet had the Africa God wants them to have and enjoy the realization of all their God-given potential as dignified human beings. To have the Africa God wants us to have, politics must be seen as a sacred (divine) affair. In other words, although politics is a divine responsibility, today, however, the average African politician does not seem to see any correlation between politics and their faith and spirituality. This is what has led many people to see modern politics as a dirty game or to associate it with deceitfulness. It seems that many African Christians who go into politics go with the notion that God has no interest in politics. As such, they are free to do whatever they want with the national resources at their disposal. Therefore, this article is primarily arguing that politics is a divine assignment and therefore it cannot be devoid of righteousness. This clarification is necessary because of the increased interest in politics that Christians in Africa are showing. If we must change the present wrong notion of politics, it is absolutely critical for Christian politicians in Africa to rediscover the Christian roots of modern politics. For instance, it was the belief in "the

priesthood of all believers" that led to the discovery of the idea of modern democracy in the 17th century. This revolutionary discovery was led by John Calvin and his disciples. Consequently, the old status quo of rulership where a few people held the rest of society to ransom was changed to a government of the people by the people for/with the people. Democracy supplanted the old feudal system. Modern democracy all started with the Calvinists' revolutionary belief in the biblical idea of "the priesthood of all believers." So, in this article, I attempt to argue that to have the Africa God wants us to have and enjoy the realisation of our full potential as dignified human beings, all Christian politicians need to grasp the correlations between their faith, everyday life, and governance.

## **Introduction: Situating the Context of Politics of Righteousness<sup>1</sup>**

Politics has long been associated with deceitfulness, so the concept of politics of righteousness would naturally raise some eyebrows. To calm some nerves, the starting point for a conversation or a discourse on the politics of righteousness is faith in Christ.<sup>2</sup> It is the cross that made us right with God, ourselves, other humans and with the environment. So, the truth embodied in the politics of righteousness cannot be understood without faith in Christ. This is why a politics of righteousness is not a simple possibility.

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<sup>2</sup> The present study differs significantly from similar work based on interviews with 520 'Christian patriots' who either resided in Idaho or were closely linked to groups headquartered there written by James A. Aho, *The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); cf. Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012); Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, "The Politics of Memory and Moral Righteousness: A Case Study from Dresden, Germany," *PoLAR* 18/1 (1995): 89-95; Next is a work entirely based on a reinterpretation of Matthew 7:3-5 by Carl E. Schneider, "Hard Cases and the Politics of Righteousness," *Hastings Center Report* 35/3 (2005): 24-27; Judith Casselberry, "The Politics of Righteousness: Race and Gender in Apostolic Pentecostalism," *Transforming Anthropology* 21/1 (2013): 72-86.

This article hopes to correct some Christian assumptions. It is, thus, part and parcel of human cultural lenses that provide the data needed to fully understand how to navigate life in a world of complicities and excesses. In discussing the politics of righteousness, therefore, it will be a big jump and a grievous mistake on our part if we allow the human pursuits of political goals and aims to distract us from concentrating on the important principles that should guide this discourse.

The politics of righteousness is not in the political dictionary of many of our contemporary politicians, both Christians and non-Christians. As we watch where and how contemporary politicians come into the political arena with faulty assumptions, philosophies and ideologies that badly impact the way they do and practice politics, we cannot help but wonder whether there is any hope. Given the absence of the idea of politics as righteousness in most political agenda, we see many of our so-called ‘honorable’ abusing many God-given opportunities, which they are supposed to use to transform and reposition the nation. Such attitudes of these politicians have been described as a “culture of corruption”<sup>3</sup> or what Nigerians would prefer to refer to as “the Nigerian factor.”

In the wake of atrocities such as the barbaric killings of Christians in places of worship or the incessant attacks in the Northeast, Stephen Dawson is right when he notes, “The choice between the politics of righteousness and the politics of fear will press upon us with a renewed urgency. However, it is righteousness—justice and ethical probity<sup>4</sup>—that is the only genuine answer at such a time.”<sup>5</sup> Put differently, if Nigeria has “fallen” as Karl Maier would

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007). Ngozi Nkonjo-Iweala has given a deep insider analysis of how corruption has eating deep into the Nigerian system. see Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, *Reforming the Unreformable: Lessons from Nigeria* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); idem., *Fighting Corruption is Dangerous: The Story Behind the Headlines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, *Justice and Righteousness Biblical Themes and their Influence*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 137 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Dawson, “The Politics of Scripture: The Politics of Righteousness—Zephaniah 3:14–20,” no page. *Political Theology Network*, 2015. Cited 10 June 2022. Online: <https://politicaltheology.com/the-politics-of-righteousness-zephaniah-314-20/>

want us to believe, then, the politics of righteousness is that which can resuscitate it.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, these unacceptable turns of events have raised some sober, rhetorical, and hypothetical questions in this article that demand urgent attention. For example, do our politicians know (1) whose idea is politics? (2) If we will get them to grasp the idea of a politics of righteousness, what specific assumptions will we need to dislodge? (3) Why is it that we, the electorates, cannot trust many of our politicians anymore? (4) Why have our politicians turned politics into a business venture to the detriment of the interests of the masses that elected them? (5) Why are some politicians doing well and others doing badly in the same country? (6) How can our political discourse lead us to a movement that will bring the needed sanity in the whole gamut of Nigeria polity today, so that our nation will be infused with a new moral consciousness that will usher it into the committee of developed nations that are experiencing a renaissance, a new dawn? (7) How can Nigeria, as the proverbial giant, give Nigerians and Africans the country and continent God wants and/or a country and a continent we have all been longing for?<sup>7</sup> These are critical questions to navigate and carefully respond to in our quest for a

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on how Nigeria has fallen from an American perspective, see Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Nigeria despite its condition as potentially the richest, and most dangerously dysfunctional nation in Africa, it remains Africa's bellwether. According to the World Bank, "If we talk about growth in Africa, we have to think of Nigeria because it is the largest in Africa. So Africa cannot grow unless Nigeria grows so for us in the World Bank, Nigeria is a very high priority and we want to see how we can support and help the Nigerian economy grow faster and achieve all developmental objectives." For a discussion on the role of Nigeria in the transformation of Africa see, All Africa News, "Africa Cannot Grow Unless Nigeria Grows - World Bank." Cited 3 August 2018. Online: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201808050005.html>. For a discussion on the dysfunctionality of the Nigerian state see, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, *Reforming the Unreformable: Lessons from Nigeria* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); idem., *Fighting Corruption is Dangerous: The Story Behind the Headlines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018); Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa and the Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), Patricia Taft and Nate Haken, *Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends* (New York: Springer, 2015), Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998). For an insider exploration of the details of hope and ambition and how both gone wrong in the Giant of Africa, Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, see Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966–1976)* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009).

better life through the politics of righteousness. But how do we realise the politics of righteousness?

The impression we have is that we often expect people to be automatically righteous because they have believed in Christ Jesus as their Lord and the Lord of all of human social, political and economic life and practice. The complexity of a globalised world makes politics of righteousness extremely difficult to come by. The problem or challenge we face as humans is that our priorities often get distorted to the extent that we pursue life without remembering that we do not exist by our own power. For example, human pursuit of the search for meaning, security, and fulfilment in a world that has continued to be increasingly complex and sophisticated to the extent that politics of righteousness is no longer a simple possibility. The psalmist gives us a clue to the gravity of the challenge when he says,

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.  
But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore, pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. (Psalm 73:1-6)

The implicit question in the heart of the psalmist is, why am I good or why do I need righteousness to live in this world? Would righteousness put food on the table? After all, we know of people who got into politics without trusting God, and yet they are making it in life. So, what is the essence of worrying about politics of righteousness? To put it in political context, Olusegun Obasanjo writes, “If a righteous life does not necessarily guarantee health, wealth, power, position, happiness and earthly pleasures, then the logical question is, What is the point in being good and righteous?”<sup>8</sup> When we ask these questions, we have basically failed to recognise the fact that, “The reason for being good is not found in this world alone, because the true meaning and purpose of life, the sources of true happiness and joy do not

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<sup>8</sup> Olusegun Obasanjo, *This Animal Called Man* (Ibadan: ALF Publications, 1998), vii.

reside in man. They are found outside self and outside man [*sic*]. They can only be found in God through faith, obedience, service and worship of Him and in love and service to humanity.”<sup>9</sup> The immediate implication of Obasanjo’s reflection in relation to this article is that the politics of righteousness transcends human explanations. Thus, in what follows, we examine the biblical basis of the politics of righteousness.

## The Biblical Basis of the Politics of Righteousness

This topic has a biblical basis. It is based on Proverbs 14:34, which contains a sound political maxim, the simplicity of which is often overlooked: personal righteousness in the population—both in citizens and leaders—is the single most important commodity that any country can possess! This virtue, states Solomon, is preeminent to everything else because: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”

The writer of Proverbs was a political leader whose grasp of the principles of righteous politics was incomparably great. No wonder Scripture states that he was the wisest man to ever live. He proclaims in this passage that personal righteousness is the most important ingredient—and should be the focus—in order to achieve the advancement of any nation. Note that Solomon does not say that the presence of natural resources exalts a nation, nor does he say that it is attributable to the excellence of its education system, as important as those are, among other things. Rather, personal righteousness is what is the most important! Next, we clarify some of the concepts in this article as they are used.

## Conceptual Clarifications

We need to clarify what we mean by some terms in this article.

- ***Politics***

The term ‘politics’ has different definitions. It can be seen as the activities associated with the governance of a country or area, especially the debate between parties having power. It could be

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

defined as the way countries are governed, and to the ways that government makes rules and laws. Politics is also about making agreements between people so that they can live together in groups such as tribes, cities, or countries. It can also be referred to as the conflicts within organizations over issues of leadership, structures, and policies.

Aristotle once defined politics as the activity of the city. I like this definition because it shows that everybody you find in a city is a politician. We are political animals, so to speak. For if politics is the activity of the city, then none of us is exempted from politics. All we do as individuals, families, communities, and organisational levels, and so on, contribute to the polity of a city or a nation-state. In summary, politics is about the organisation and administration of ourselves, our environment, and the God-given resources in it.

- ***Righteousness***

Righteousness is the quality of being morally right or justifiable. It is also the condition of being in the right relationship with the Lord. Righteousness is all-encompassing. It is relational. According to its Hebrew original meaning, righteousness is relational. Thus, it is about the right living, the right relationship with God, with other fellow humans, and with the environment.

- ***Principles of Politics***

Principles of Politics refers to the underlying logic of political behaviour, collective action, structural, and institutional politics. There are five major principles of politics<sup>10</sup>:

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on some of these principles see, for example, Joe Oppenheimer, *Principles of Politics: A Rational Choice Theory Guide to Politics and Social Justice* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012). Cf. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, edited by Stephen Nathanson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004).



- i. *The Rationality Principle* holds that all political behaviour has a purpose and that people tend to be goal-oriented in their political activities as they make instrumental choices about how to act.
- ii. *The Structure and Institution Principle* recognises that political institutions provide incentives for political behaviour, thereby shaping and structuring politics.
- iii. *The Collective-Action principle* refers to the idea that, although all politics is collective action, getting people to act in concert is difficult. Thus, political action often involves both formal and informal lobbying, dialoguing, and bargaining along with other efforts to overcome the obstacles to collective action.<sup>11</sup>
- iv. *The Policy Principle* holds that political outcomes are the products of individual preferences and institutional procedures. Combining lessons from the Rationality and Institution principles, we see that individual political actors' personal, electoral, and institutional ambitions are filtered through, and in many ways shaped by, institutional arrangements in politics; and that policy outcomes are the products of the complex intermingling of individual goals and institutions.
- v. *The History Principle* reminds us how we got here matters. Political circumstances and outcomes are understood to be past-dependent (partly determined by past events and choices) and to influence existing rules and procedures, political loyalties and alliances, and political viewpoints and perspectives.

Given the above terms and principles of politics, let's now examine what this politics of righteousness entails.

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<sup>11</sup> For a brief discussion on this principle see, Oppenheimer, *Principles of Politics*, 25-142.

## What Politics of Righteousness Entails

It has been extremely difficult for humans to recognise that politics is both a divine and human affair.<sup>12</sup> Politics across the world has largely been turned to an opportunity for the few who get there to serve their self-interests and their desire and greed to power, wealth and obsession to amass wealth to the detriment of the poor and the least of these.<sup>13</sup> This is why we have given politics a bad name in order to allow politicians to feel that it is okay to ignore the poor, ignore justice, order and freedom or ignore the primary duty of ensuring stability and security. Politics is largely a failure today because we have given politicians a license to feed what Reinhold Niebuhr calls, their “self-interests and the will-to-power.” We are going against the tide of contemporary politics when we talk about politics of righteousness. This is completely a foreign idea. Where and how do we begin to talk of the politics of righteousness?<sup>14</sup> So, politics and governance are God’s ideas for the flourishing of the human race and his entire creation. Humans and all their cultures—politics, economy, art, clothing, dressing, dancing, music, architecture, governance, military, commerce, transportation, to mention a few—are intended for God’s glory, not humans egoistic and selfish glory.

## The Southward Movement of the Church and the Politics of Righteousness

In spite of the global south movement of the gravity of the Christian faith, there is a clear absence of the politics of righteousness in many of the nations of

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<sup>12</sup> See, Miguel Vatter, *Divine Democracy: Political Theology after Carl Schmitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); J. Robin King, “The Joseph Story and Divine Politics: A Comparative Study of a Biographic Formula from the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 12/106 issue 4 (1987): 577-594.

<sup>13</sup> See, Jason Weeden and Robert Kurzban, *The Hidden Agenda of the Political Mind: How Self-Interest Shapes Our Opinions and Why We Won’t Admit It* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014). Cf. Leif Lewin, *Self-Interest and Public Interest in Western Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> In responding to this pertinent questions, Ananya Vajpeyi situates the quest to ‘the search for the self’ within the context of India. See Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Africa.<sup>15</sup> Nigeria is one of those nations where the lack of politics of righteousness has made it extremely difficult for citizens to be happy with their government, with elected officials, or with the nature of politics at almost all levels. Many countries have embraced modern democracy. Yet those who campaign for elected office often seem to forget or neglect campaign promises after being elected and become self-serving rather than dedicated public servants.

This perennial political situation described above is very pronounced in Nigeria. For example, since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed phenomenal progress. Yet that progress is a far cry from what would have happened if our socio-political life and socio-economic practices were rooted in love, the fear of God, right living characterised by respect for, promotion of, and defense of human dignity. Many of our politicians, including those who are from the Christian faith, have failed the masses.<sup>16</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>15</sup> Violence is a major case here. See Paul T. Zeleza and A. Nhema (eds), *The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007); Monty G. Marshall, *Conflict Trends in Africa, 1946-2004: A Macro-Comparative Perspective* (Arlington: Center for Global Policy, 2005). For a discussion on the New Testament understanding of righteousness see, for example, J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> See analysis in Yusufu Turaki, *Historical Roots of Ethno-Religious Crises & Conflicts in Northern Nigeria* (Jos: Yusufu Turaki Foundation, No Date); Yusufu Turaki, *Tainted legacy: Islam, Colonialism and Slavery in Northern Nigeria* (McLean: Isaac Pubsliding, 2010); Mazi Kanu Oji, *The Nigerian Ethical Revolution 1981-2000 AD* (Lagos: Federal Secret Printers, 1982), Viktor Eke Kalu, *The Nigerian Condition: Arthur Nwankwo's Viewpoints and Blueprints* (Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1986), Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa and the Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), Randee Ijatuyi-Morphé, *Africa's Social and Religious Quest: A Comprehensive Survey and Analysis of the African Situation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2014); Sunday Bobai Agang, *The Impact of Ethnic, Political, and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria, and a Theological Reflection on Its Healing* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2010). For its extension to African states see, for example, Paul T. Zeleza, "The Causes and Costs of War in Africa: From Liberation Struggles to the 'War on Terror,'" in Paul T. Zeleza and A. Nhema (eds), *The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007); Monty G. Marshall, *Conflict Trends in Africa, 1946-2004: A Macro-Comparative Perspective* (Arlington: Center for Global Policy, 2005).

since our polity is profoundly heated up in preparation for 2023 general elections, this consultation is such a relevant and needed conversation. Nigeria is one of the beautiful and richly blessed countries in the world by its Creator, God. Yet, it is pertinent to observe that it can be very depressing and deeply saddening to see how many of the God-given opportunities our political class has had to turn things around for the betterment of our nation, have been abused by some politicians who are obsessed with the desire to amass wealth. For this caliber of politicians, politics of righteousness is nonexistent in their vocabulary. What can this consultation do to change the tide?

## **The Nigerian Socio-political Terrain**

The socio-political climate of Nigeria presents two scenarios. First, Nigerians are capable of doing tremendous good, whether they are Christians or non-Christians. Second, Nigerians are equally capable of doing tremendous evil, whether they are Christians or non-Christians. These two realities have to be kept in proper balance so that the capacity for tremendous evil does not overshadow the fact we have human dignity, to the extent that we dehumanize our brothers and sisters who are in politics. The essential question is where our morality comes from?<sup>17</sup>

We have a socio-political environment that is faced with unimaginable challenges. First and foremost is our way of viewing the political landscape. Our perspective about our nation is defective. We regard the nation as a commodity. Olusegun Obasanjo observes that in Nigeria two ways of seeing are involved. On the one side, Nigerians tend to regard the nation as a commodity belonging to us (politicians). This perception leads us to hurt ourselves and our fellow humans. For instance, he writes, “We misgovern, abuse, misrule, exploit and perpetrate corruption and injustice.” On the other hand, he writes, “When we see the nation as a community to which we belong and our duty as trusteeship responsibility for which account has to be given in meticulous detail, we will begin to govern, rule and act on the basis of justice and fear of the God and love.”<sup>18</sup> So, Matthew Hassan Kukah is right, “We

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion on how bad politics and unrighteous use of religion are responsible for dividing people see, for example, Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Obasanjo, *This Animal Called Man*, 201.

created most of our mess ourselves and we are the ones who have to clean it up.”<sup>19</sup>

Second, our lack of a sense of human dignity, whose basic idea is rooted in the creation narrative of Genesis 1:26-27 and the incarnation narrative in the Gospel of John 1:1-2, 14., which we will discuss in detail in the paper. We are all created in the image of God to be like God, our Father who is not only in heaven, but also in all spheres of life on planet earth. “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible. But man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary”.<sup>20</sup> Thus, governance is primarily about the protection of human dignity through knowing how to organise the activities of our community, cities, and the entire society to ensure justice, freedom, order and probity. It is also about how to administer ourselves as well as our affairs in harmony with our environment in order to achieve the purpose for which God has created us and the whole gamut of our existence on earth. Our purpose for existence which necessitates the need for freedom, order, and justice (righteousness) is spelt out in these words of St. Paul, “For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen” (Romans 11:36 NLT)

The principle is clear: All humans come from God, exist by his power, and are intended for his glory. All Nigerians are humans, all Nigerians come from God, all Nigerians exist by God’s power and all Nigerians and what they do are intended for God’s glory.

## **The Concept of the Politics of Righteous**

Righteousness is about our ability to relate rightly with our Creator, our fellow humans, and the environment. It is where the idea of being our brother/sister keeper comes from. It is what Jesus means when he asks us to love and treasure God as well as to love and respect our neighbour as ourselves. Thus, Stephen Dawson writes,

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Witness to Justice: An Insider Account of Nigeria’s Truth Commission* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), xxxii.

Righteousness is divine insofar as it affirms the humanity of all involved. Practicing justice and ethical probity means, for example, to judge fairly under the law, to care for the less fortunate, and to accept refugees and others in need. To be righteous means to affirm the humanity of the criminal in the act of judgment, to affirm the humanity of the poor in the act of bestowing charity, and to affirm the humanity of the refugee in the act of welcoming.<sup>21</sup>

It is about human dignity.<sup>22</sup> Thus, we cannot do well in politics when our understanding of politics is not embodying a good grasp of the biblical concept of human dignity. This is why today our politicians treat human beings created in God's image like votes, people to be deceived, to be misled, and to be exploited or taken advantage of. That is the worldview Paul seeks to correct in Romans 13: 1-4. Paul makes it absolutely clear that God has put the governing authorities in place for a purpose. They are to be the ministers of God like the pastors and priests. Thus, the government is not the invention of power-hungry, self-seeking men and women. The principle here is to recognise that all political philosophies and ideologies, whether Christians or non-Christians are God's ideas. There is no authority except that which He allows, and His intention is that it should serve Him and His vision and purpose: nurturing order, justice, and freedom so that human dignity is nurtured, respected, promoted, protected, or defended. Our politicians are supposed to be His representatives in their God-given nations. They are therefore ultimately accountable to Him. For example, David is said to be "a man after God's heart" because he recognised that the throne he occupied, was God's

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Stephen Dawson, "The Politics of Righteousness Zephaniah 3:14-20," no page. Political Theology. Cited 22 January, 2022. Online:

<https://www.politicaltheology.com/the-politics-of-righteousness-zephaniah-314-20/>  
<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ben C. Dunson, "4 Maccabees and Romans 12:1-21: Reasons and the Righteous Life," in *Reading Romans in Context: Paul and Second Temple Judaism* (ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). On the concept of human dignity see, Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1985); Jeff Malpas and Norelle Lickiss (eds), *Perspectives on Human Dignity: A Conversation* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007); George Kateb, *Human Dignity* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

throne. His son, Solomon also realised that the people he was elected and anointed to rule were God's people and he asked God for wisdom and insight to rule them with justice and in righteousness. The descendant of David, Christ Jesus taught us how to live rightly.

From the Old and New Testament narratives of God's calling upon the human race, particularly the leaders of the people, political leaders are expected to be healers. For example, Jesus gave the apostles power and authority over all demons, diseases, to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:1-2). One of Nigeria's political legends, Obafemi Awolowo of blessed memory, has delineated four examples that affirm my assertion.<sup>23</sup> First, he noted that one of the aims of religion is to teach a man [human] to love his neighbour as himself and to do unto others as he would like them to do unto him. Without this perspective carried into the political vision of a nation and its players, the nation will not experience healing. Politics of righteousness is the recognition that God is no respecter of human. All are equal before Him. Thus, Awolowo argues that the recognition of the equality of all men and women before the righteous eyes of God is a fundamental principle and an accepted practice under a good government that all citizens are equal in the eye of the law, enjoying and rendering reciprocal rights and duties. This awareness informs why every citizen is negatively forbidden, under pain of legal sanctions, from so conducting his affairs that he becomes a nuisance or a menace to his neighbours. Positively, under law they must so live their life that they are at peace at all times with their fellow men and women. Second, Awolowo asserts that in all great religions, women are treated on the basis of equality with men. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour modelled this for us. He is the most outstanding exemplar in this respect. Today, politicians that focus on the politics of righteousness who are found all over the civilised world are eloquent in their advocacy for equal treatment for all persons irrespective of sex or gender. In so doing, they are merely reflecting in public life the incomparably great example of our Lord. Third, politics of righteousness is not far-fetched because, as Awolowo rightly pointed out, many of the fundamental human

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<sup>23</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, "Politics and Religion" Being text of a lecture given by the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, to students at the Adventist College of West Africa, Ilishan-Remo, on January 27, 1961, published in *Today's Challenge* Vol. 18 No. 5 May 2022 and continued in Vol. 18. No. 6 June 2022, pp.20-21; 41-42.

rights, particularly the three freedoms of conscience, of association and of speech, are rooted or ingrained in the Judaeo-Christian religions. Many prophets, saints and evangelists have suffered pain or even death because they understood and dared to exercise their freedom of conscience and of expression. For example, in the New Testament, it was for this noble and imperishable cause that John the Baptist was executed, that our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, and Mohammed for a while fled his home in Mecca. In our modern era, it was for this same cause that Martin Luther King Jr, was assassinated, that Nelson Mandela was thrown into prison for decades. Of course, many great names in politics prior to those we have mentioned here, drawing their inspiration from religion also suffered or even died for the same cause. It was for this cause that Socrates was sentenced to drink the hemlock and to death. Finally, Awolowo argues that, the humanly speaking, the best politics which could be said to be close to the politics rooted in righteousness and justice as well as best suited for humankind is democratic socialism. This is because it is founded, among others, on the principles of the well-being of the individual, and brotherhood among all humans irrespective of creed, colour and race (or ethnicity). The four points delineated by Awolowo are clear demonstration of the fact that for politics to be beneficial to the common good of all humans and their environment the workings of its system has to be derive its strength from the tenets and practices of the great revelatory religion, particularly the Christian faith. So, the church is an epitome of the politics of righteousness.

## **The Church as an Epitome of the Politics Righteousness**

The Church is Christ's body. It is instituted on earth to infuse moral and ethical consciousness in the entire society.<sup>24</sup> The Church is where the idea of the kingdom of God, the reign or rule of God, is sown into the consciousness of men and women. It is where men and women are equipped with the ideas of

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, edited by R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



the Kingdom of God to help them know that they are an embodiment of God's will, which should be done on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>25</sup>

So, politics is not outside the inaugural kingdom of God. Rather, it is within the confines of the activities of the Kingdom of God.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Christianity is defined as a system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people interpret and respond to what they feel is sacred and usually supernatural as well. So, there should be a variety of ways in which Christianity is related to the institution of politics. For instance, if one looks at the concept of "theocracy", it means "rule by God". Thus, Christian leaders are seen as ruling the society in God's Name and obviously according to His wishes. When it comes to Christian involvement in politics, our goals should not be to impose our views on everyone else and turn our nation into a theocracy that is going to achieve nothing but hostility.<sup>27</sup> Our goal should be to ensure that biblical principles of love, right living, justice, freedom, order, hard work, faithfulness, truth-telling, honesty, integrity and so on, are adhered to in all spheres of life.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For a detail comprehensive discussion on the kingdom of God from a Christian perspective see the excellent work of George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002). Cf. R. Alan Street, *Heaven on Earth: Experiencing the Kingdom of God Here and Now* (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2013); Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), and especially Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (trans. Margaret Kohl; SCM Press Ltd, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> See, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960); Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2004); David Gooding and John Lennox, *The Definition of Christianity* (Coleraine: The Myrtlefield Trust, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944); Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> For discussion on this subject see, for example, Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman*

## Involvement in Politics is Ingrained in God's Two Commands

Politics is God's idea. God created the world out of love. He is love, just and righteous. So, he created the world out of love with the desire to see righteousness, justice, peace, order, stability, security, development, and so on, thrive. Therefore, the primary aim of governance as instituted by our Creator is for humans to demonstrate how much they know, understand, and appreciate God's love, treasure and respect him, who is the Creator of human dignity. In governance humans are called by their Creator to the awesome task of loving, respecting, promoting, and defending the sanctity of human life, theirs and that of their fellow citizens. Therefore, governance is a command from God.

1. It is a command from God for His People to be involved in acts and lifestyles that reposition and transform nation-states to a humane society. The Word of God commands humans to rule and have dominion over creation under heaven – Genesis 1: 26; Psalm 24.
2. Also, God commands the believers to be involved in The Great Commission, which involves discipling nations to observe all that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28: 19-20). From the above, it is impossible to fulfil these two tasks effectively without being involved in this world. Believers should understand that government is of God. Government exists to serve its citizens by ensuring equitable distributions of God-given resources as well as encourage the realisation of every human potential, and the interests and wishes of the citizens of nation-state. The citizens of any country are looking for government officials who promote, protect, and defend their human dignity by ensuring accountability,

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*Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000); Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004); Richard A Horsley, "By the Finger of God': Jesus and Imperial Violence" in *Violence in the New Testament* (ed. Shelly Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson; New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005).

adequate security, good legal system, equity, probity, offering service to the citizens with integrity, honesty, and transparency.

3. To have a governmental institution that stays afloat above corruption of any form, can only be possible through a godly government that makes the politics of righteous, love, and justice for all a watchword.

## **Contemporary Examples of the Practice of Politics of Righteousness in Nigeria and/or Africa**

Politics is variously defined as the ideas and activities involved in getting power in a country or over a particular area of the world. It is also a belief and attitude about how government should work (Macmillan 2007:1148). It can also be said that politics is the science and art of government, political activities, beliefs or affairs, factional scheming for power (Ceddes and Crosset 2011). However, politics has been observed in human group interactions, including corporate, academic, and religious institutions. It consists of social relations involving authority and power and refers to the regulation of a political unit. It also refers to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy (Anifowose Remi 2005).

Today in Nigeria, most of the politicians are Muslims and traditional worshippers simply because Christians do not think it's their responsibility to partake in politics or involve themselves in things or activities that pertains to governing this country. However, most of them practice politics in their place of work, in their homes, and also in their churches. Nowadays, ministers of God tend to look for churches with the highest paying salaries and work their ways there. They sometimes bribe the people in power just to get to the post and position they want.

But regardless of that, there are Christians who actually practice politics of righteousness in all sense of it. They make laws and rules to govern the church or ministry and carry everyone along. They elect people that will help oversee the different departments and units of the church. They make agreements with the members in order to have a great relationship and not compromise anyone's belief, so that peace can reign.

Often times, when the time for election comes Christians exercise their rights by voting the candidates they have in mind. They understand that it is their God-given right to partake in anything that will move the country forward. They are interested in doing things for the betterment of the country.

Politics of righteousness is the watch word of the present Rwandan President, Paul Kagame. He came into power and refused to allow ethnicity and religion to divide the Rwandans: There is neither Hutsi nor Tutsi, we are all Rwandans, he argued. That is an excellent example of righteousness politics. In Nigeria we can look at the example of our former President, Olusegun Obasanjo. When Obasanjo came into power, he introduced the policy of making sure an environment was created for the private sector to thrive. He selected fifty (50) entrepreneurs and gave them the enabling economic environment that would help them to succeed and become the economic engine of the nation. According to Aliko Dangote, Obasanjo succeeded in getting thirty (30) successful entrepreneurs that are today helping our economy to stabilise, of whom, he, Aliko Dangote, is one of them.

## **Christians' Political Responsibility to Society**

Many people have a wrong perception of politics. They see it as being a dirty game. Consequently, many Christians forget the fact that it is their right to pray and also partake in politics through their lifestyles, commitment to love, integrity, hard work, truth-telling, diligence, honesty, fidelity, and so on, in the public sphere.

With the high percentage of Christians in the public sphere, if they were to consciously carry their moral and ethical vision to the public sphere, a lot of the corruption cases or challenges that confront our country will be minimized. The point is, Christians are knowledgeable about the things acceptable by Christ and the things that are abominable to Him. If only Christians will accept their responsibilities and get themselves involved in the political affairs of this nation, the government will be able to suppress evil, stand against corruption, money laundering, killing, kidnapping, thuggery, and many other moral excesses devastating our nation today. The needy are out there with no hope of a better tomorrow all because some of the leaders we have only care about their selfish desires, interest and not those of their masses. We need Christians

who are willing to cater for the needs of everyone to get involved in politics, business, buying and selling, farming, schooling, entrepreneurship, and all of life.

It is also the responsibility of Christians to raise Godly families. People who would make the society a better place and not become a menace to it. When a leader lives in alignment with God's character, he or she places themselves in a position to be blessed by God, whereas unrighteous leaders are never in a place or position wherein God can extend them His divine favour in as gracious a proportion.

## **Biblical Examples of the Politics of Righteousness**

Often, we think that being right and being righteous are always the same thing. While most of the time there is a difference between being in right standing in the eyes of God and being politically correct. Let's look at three Biblical examples of righteous men who were righteous even though they were not politically correct.

### ***Abraham vs. Lot***

In Genesis 13:7 we see a family feud between the two enterprises of Abraham and Lot: "and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land." As a result of the argument, Abraham and Lot decide to split the land accordingly. Peculiarly, Abraham gives Lot the first pick.

Was Abraham politically right to take the second draft pick? No. The promise of the land was given to him, not Lot. But because Abraham was a righteous man, He chose to value his relationships more than the material possession.

### ***David vs. Saul***

The story of King Saul and the young David is like a political conspiracy theory movie. A corrupt politician sees the threat a young rising leader poses to his rule and tries to kill him. On two occasions David gets the opportunity to kill his enemy but refuses to do so. "I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed," said David (1 Samuel 24:10). Was it the right

thing to do? Not unless you wanted to live another five years running away. But was it the righteous thing to do? We all know it was.

### ***Jesus vs. Humanity***

The most history-shaking decision ever made was for Jesus to decide to die on a cross for the sins of humankind. Was it right to crucify an innocent man? No. Was it right for Jesus to not stand up for His own rights? No. But because He knew the bigger plan and the bigger picture, he chose to be wrongly accused and to be perceived as politically wrong in order that we will all be spiritually and politically right.

Righteousness and being correct aren't always the same thing. When faced with a scenario where you have to choose between the two, which would you go for?

## **The Cultural Lenses through which We Process Politics**

We often process our political ideas through the lenses of culture. We have three cultural lenses that we face as individuals:

### ***a) Our Tribal or Ethnic Culture***

We cannot separate ourselves from our culture. Culture is everything about who we are and what we do. Politics is part and parcel of our culture. For instance, our religion, social life, art and music, agriculture, science, medicine, dance and drama, religion, politics, dressing and clothing style, eating habits, building habits and so on are all ingrained in our cultural world. Everything in our culture is dynamic and changes. But the worst thing that resists change in culture is our religious beliefs. So, the politicisation of religion in Nigeria has corrupted our political principles and way of life to the extent that our ability to recognise human dignity and build our political activities and actions

on that basis has become extremely difficult.<sup>29</sup> We now have a situation whereby we largely have religiosity without morality.

### **b) Our Christian Culture**

Christian history, tradition, worldview, experience and so on are imbedded in the Christian culture. The written revelation of God brings to us the biblical worldview, which the Indian born philosopher, turned biblical theologian, Vishal Mangalwadi (2011) says, "The Bible is the only force known to history that has freed entire nations from corruption while simultaneously giving them political freedom." The Christians culture brings God into the equation when discussing politics, organising the society, and administering it according to the perception of biblical love and justice. Bible helps us to grasp the fact that politics is God's idea, not humans. The writer of Genesis and of the Gospel of John both tell us something significantly important about what politics entails. The Bible says humans do not come from apes, but from God. It says, God is love, just and righteous. God is independent of what he has created. He is independent of time and space. So, we read, "In the beginning God created." He created all there is and out of love He created humans in his image to be like him. He intended all things for his glory. Paul draws our attention to the fact that, "Everything comes from God, everything exists by his power and everything is intended for his glory" (Romans 11:36 NLT). Over and above everything we get from the Christian culture is the fact that we have human dignity because God so loved us and created us in his image to be his image bearers in the world that he has equally created out of love.

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<sup>29</sup> Although not a perfect example, Nigeria can learn from India and how they are navigating around their religious plurality. For a discussion on this subject see, for example, Mithi Mukherjee, "Transcending Identity: Gandhi, Nonviolence, and the Pursuit of a 'Different' Freedom in Modern India," *American Historical Review* 115 (April 2010): 453-473; Pantham, Thomas, "Religious Diversity and National Unity: The Gandhian and Hindutva Visions." In V. R. Mehta and Thomas Pantham, eds., *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 221-237; Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*, Translated by Georgia Albert (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999 [1994]).

Through the temptation that our parents Adam and Eve fell into we sinned, and we got corrupted, depraved to the extent that we have all fallen short of God's glory. We became depraved to the extent that we could not save ourselves. But because God is love, and it was love that made Him choose to create everything there is, He refused to give up on us even after He had judged the human race, the world, and punished it because of its sin. Yet love will not let Him go to sleep and leave us. Consequently, He came down to save us through God the Son, Christ Jesus. Christ's incarnation, as recorded in John 1:1-2, 14, further revealed to humans that by God creating them in His image it means they actually have God-given dignity, which is why He instituted politics in the beginning. He created us so that we will protect each other's dignity and dignity of the environment, the creation. To confirm the hidden treasure, we have—human dignity— because God created us in His image, Jesus took on human flesh; in order to save us from our sins and from the blindness brought about by the sin factor, where we no longer realise our human dignity. This important worldview was kept hidden to the extent that no civilisation—Greek and the Islamic—ever discovered that secret.

However, in God's providence, in the Christian tradition and history, we have it that it was the monks in the Middle Ages, through the careful reading and use of their mental faculty, that they were able to bring together what God's Word wanted us to learn from the creation narrative in Genesis 1:27-28 and the incarnation narrative in John 1:1-2, 14. Prior to this time, Jesus had talked about the fact that we humans are more important than the Sabbath, the birds and the lilies of the fields, etc. But God's people were not able to make sense of that until the Holy Spirit—The Spirit of Truth—guided and led the monks to their epiphany. The monks were using their minds to seek the truth of God. They used faith, reason, and logic in studying the Word of God. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth chose to guide and lead them to the truth in the Middle Ages, they were able to reason and logically conclude that humans have dignity. They also concluded that if God, who is independent used the material things to create humans in his image, it means that humans can equally create things that will promote, protect, and defend their human dignity.



To the monks that means that they do not have to use their muscles to do everything. Rather, God has given them the ability to transfer their thinking ability to create things using the material things. That is, they believe that God has given them the ability to transfer the power of their muscles into material things so that those material things can work for them. It was from the monks' discovered idea of human dignity that humans were ushered into a technological age and eventually into the industrial revolution. That is to say that from then onward everything else humans do, including politics, technology, science, religion and so on are to have one goal: the respect, protection, promotion and the defence of human dignity and the environment where humans live, walk, and have their beings.

### ***c) Our Blended Societal and Global Culture***

Today, Western civilisation and politics have given rise to globalisation of culture.

Our world is interconnected by reason of the digital, internet or electronic media revolution. Today, we are in what is best described as the age of digital economy. We are living in a global village. Today, humans have enhanced technology by harnessing the power of fire and using it to build computers, bridges, internets, transportation, industrialisation, and so on. Our political culture has become sophisticated and complicated. The result is the corruption of everything humans touch, including politics. However, like John Stott would say, humans are still capable of tremendous good and equally capable of tremendous evil (Agang 2016).

## **Conclusion**

Christians should enter into politics and point to God's righteous laws that can bring good benefit for the populace and lasting happiness as well. In the heart of a public servant, there must be regard for the human dignity of others whom you serve as being more important than yourself. God requires that leaders whom He appoints to govern a country, His ordained institution of the state, be a blessing to the people they serve. Ecclesiastes 8:9 specifically speaks to the degree of selflessness a leader must possess in his job: "A man has

exercised authority over another man to his hurt.” This is a powerful way of putting it: *a leader is to be so selfless that it hurts his own interests!* It is only from this biblical theology, the ensuing knowledge of this biblical theology, his understanding of this biblical theology, and his submission to this biblical theology that one can possibly possess the realisation that God has called him or her to office to serve in this way, to this degree; it must cost him or her something; it must mean personal sacrifice of self-interest and the will to lord it over others! Only then can selfish motives possibly be eradicated and replaced by the *righteous* motives of love, justice and selfless service commanded of us in Scripture!

Our pastors need to be reoriented towards looking at their members as people who have all the potential to be in all works of life and equip them for a way of life that makes it possible for them to grasp the public implication of their faith, which includes, among other things, recognising God as the Creator of all there is, recognising our creation in the image of God, and recognising the Fall of humanity, which have both created a situation whereby humans are not only capable of doing tremendous good, but equally capable of doing tremendous evil. And this includes every aspect of human activities. Our churches are supposed to be where men and women are infused with moral consciousness that enable them to stay afloat wherever they find themselves in life, private or public, politics or no politics. So, the assumption we have whenever we read Proverbs 14:38 is that it is talking about the righteousness of the leaders. As such, it becomes apparent that righteousness is only expected when a Christian gets into a political leadership position.

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## **Omi-Ìyè: Exploring the Nuances of the Metaphor of Abundance in John's Gospel and Yorùbá Episteme**

Adewale Adelakun

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria  
jadelakun@oauife.edu.ng

George Olufemi Folarin

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria  
georgefolarin@yahoo.com

Adebolu Olusegun Oladosu

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria  
olusegunoladosu1@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The article examines the intersection of thought between Johannine and African contexts concerning the metaphor of living water. The Johannine context shows the unique usage of the term in the New Testament while the African context reveals how Africans as second-level receivers of the term apply it to their contemporary situations. Misconceptions surrounding the understanding of "the living water" concept in the Fourth Gospel is indicated in the article as well as an alternative interpretation of it is provided in the context of Yorùbá's understanding of *omi-iyè* in western Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Scholars have attempted to trace the background of Johannine usage of "living water" (*omi-iyè* in Yorùbá) motif to the Old Testament. An example of such scholars is Stovell. After an insightful study of the imagery in the Hebrew Bible, Stovell (2013:471) concludes,

[...] with a particular focus on the language of “living water” ... [in] the Old Testament, four major patterns of usage have presented themselves. First, Genesis described the living waters of creation, which in turn informed the apocalyptic usages of living waters in visions of re-creation. Second, Numbers and Leviticus used the literal meaning of fresh, flowing water, often associated with purification. Third, Jeremiah and Psalms provided the depiction of God as the fountain of living waters, demonstrating the Israelite hope of God as sustainer of the physical and the spiritual well-being of his people. Finally, Ezekiel and Zechariah used the language of waters of life to describe their eschatological visions, associating living waters with the renewal of the cosmos and the re-establishment of the ultimate rule of God.

Commenting on the submission above, Porter and Pitts (2013:8) state that Stovell succeeded in tracing the evolution and transformation of the varied meanings of the “living water” metaphor in antiquity, and conclude that John understood living water figure largely in continuity with how the way the Hebrew Scriptures depict it, with hope in God’s coming reign.

Apart from the Old Testament context explored by Stovell, there are other scholars who have studied Johannine and African contexts of the figure (e.g., Folarin, Oladosu and Baba 2012:15-36). The Johannine context shows the unique usage of the term in the New Testament while the African context reveals how Africans as second-level receivers of the term apply it to their contemporary situations.

## **John 4 Passage in Three Languages**

### ***Greek transliteration of John 4:7-14***

<sup>7</sup>Erchetai gunē ek tēs Samareias antlēσαι hudōr legei autē  
ho lēsous Dos moi pein <sup>8</sup> hoi gar mathētai autou  
apelēluthēisan eis tēn polin hina trophas agorasōsin <sup>9</sup>Legei  
oun autō hē gunē hē Samaritis Pōs su loudaios ōn par’  
emou pein aiteis gunaikos Samaritidos ousēs ou gar

sunchrōntai loudaioi. Samaritais <sup>10</sup>Apekrihē lēsous kai eipen autē, Ei ēdeis tēn dōrean tou Theou kai tis estin ho legōn soi, Dos moi pein, su an ētēsas auton kai edōken an soi hudōr zōn <sup>11</sup>Legei autō hē gunē Kurie oute antlēma echeis kai to phrear estin bathu; pothen oun echeis to hudōr to zōn ... <sup>13</sup>Apekrihē lēsous kai eipen autē, Pas ho pinōn ek tou hudatos toutou dipsēsei palin <sup>14</sup>hos d' an piē ek tou hudatos hou egō dōsō autō ou mē dipsēsei eis ton aiōna alla to hudōr ho dōsō autō genēsetai en autō pēgē hudatos hallomenou eis zōēn aiōnion (SBLGNT)

### **English translation of John 4:7-14**

<sup>7</sup> A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." <sup>8</sup> For His disciples had gone away to the city to buy food. <sup>9</sup> So the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, though You are a Jew, are asking me for a drink, though I am a Samaritan woman?" For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. <sup>10</sup> Jesus replied to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." <sup>11</sup> She said to Him, "Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do You get *this* living water?" <sup>12</sup> You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well and drank of it himself, and his sons and his cattle?" <sup>13</sup> Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again; <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life" (NASB).

### **Yorùbá Translation of John 4:7-14**

<sup>7</sup> Obìnrin kan, ará Samaria sì wá láti fà omi: Jesu wí fún un pé še iwọ yóò fún mi ni omi mu. <sup>8</sup> Nítorí àwọn ọmọ-ẹyìn rẹ ti lọ sí ilú láti lọ ra ọúnjẹ. <sup>9</sup> Obìnrin ará Samaria náà sọ fún un pé, "Júù ni iwọ, obìnrin ará Samaria ni èmi. Ètírí tí iwọ n

bèèrè ohun mímu lówó mi?” (Nítórí tí àwọ̀n Júù kì í bá àwọ̀n ará Samaria ẹ̀ pọ̀.)<sup>10</sup> Jesu dáhùn, ó sì wí fún un pé, “Íbá ẹ̀ pé iwọ̀ mọ̀ ẹ̀bùn Olórun, àti ẹ̀ni tí ó wí fún ọ̀ pé, Fún mi ni omi mu, iwọ̀ íbá sì tí bèèrè lówó rẹ̀, òun íbá tí fi omi iyè fún ọ̀.”<sup>11</sup> Obìnrin náà wí fún un pé, “Alàgbà, iwọ̀ kò ní igbá-ìfami tí iwọ̀ ó fi fà omi, bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni kànga náà jì: Níbo ni iwọ̀ ó tí rí omi iyè náà? ...<sup>13</sup> Jesu dáhùn, ó sì wí fún un pé, “Ènikẹ̀ni tí ó bá mu nínú omi yìí, ò̀ngbẹ̀ yòò sì tún gbẹ̀ ẹ̀: <sup>14</sup> Şùgbọ̀n ẹ̀nikẹ̀ni tí ó bá mu nínú omi tí ẹ̀mi ó fi fún un, ò̀ngbẹ̀ kì yòò gbẹ̀ ẹ̀ mọ̀ láá; şùgbọ̀n omi tí ẹ̀mi ó fi fún un yòò di kànga omi nínú rẹ̀, tí yòò máa sun sí iyè à̀nìpẹ̀kun.” (<https://www.bible.com/bible/911/JHN.4.YCB>).

Although two main Johannine passages are discussed in this work, more space is, however, devoted to the John 4 passage.<sup>1</sup>

## Theological Study of *Omi-iyè* Metaphor in John

References to “living water” (*omi-iyè*) are in John 4:10 and 7:39.<sup>2</sup> In John 4:10, Jesus addressed the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. After asking her to give him water to drink, Jesus guided the woman’s thought from natural to spiritual water. It is observable that in the text, Jesus never called himself the living water to the woman. He only said that he *would have given* (*edōken*) her living water. For thorough analysis, the John 4 pericope can be divided into “narration (Jn 4:1-26), exposition (Jn 4:31-38) and demonstration (Jn 4:28-30, 39-40)” (Carson 1991:214). The advantage of this outline is that it holds the

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<sup>1</sup> The John 4 passage is rendered above in three languages to ease comparative study. The Greek text is transliterated since the work is theological and many of the targeted readers of this article may not be proficient in Greek. Again, whenever Greek words are cited in the article, transliterated forms are used. These reasons lead the current writers to present the transliterated form of the Greek passage. Likewise, the passage is rendered in English language to help the readers of the article who are deficient in Greek language to interact intelligently between the text and the article. Finally, the Bible passage is rendered in Yorùbá language to point out the place from where the term *Omi-iyè* used in the discussion below is found.

<sup>2</sup> Folarin, Oladosu and Baba (2012: 22-28) provide a more in-depth and technical exegesis of Johannine “living water” passages for whoever is interested in it.

pericope firmly together. The interpretation that follows below focuses on John 4:1-15 and is captioned “The gift of the living water.”

John 4 is renowned for its “living water” saying expressed in the story of a Samaritan woman. Briefly restated, with the growing popularity of Jesus’ ministry over John’s, and the resultant hatred from “the Pharisees,” Jesus left Judea passing through Samaria on his way to Galilee. It was here in Sychar, a city of Samaria, that he came across a woman at the well with whom he engaged in discussing the “living water” issue. The following observations ensue from the story: the woman was a Samaritan while Jesus was a Jew; the woman wanted the water to quench temporal thirst but Jesus talked to her of the water that has eternal value; the woman misunderstood the water that Jesus talked to her about and Jesus had to correct her; and finally, Jesus revealed himself to the woman unambiguously with the implied conclusion that she experienced the salvation brought by the Messiah (cf. Jn 4:39).

The first three verses of John 4 give the reason why Jesus left Judea for Galilee: his increasing popularity and the hostility that arose from the Pharisees against him as a result of that. John 4:4 states, “He had to go through Samaria.” The compulsion for Jesus to pass through Samaria in John 4:4 was not because it was the shortest route from Judea to Galilee but for the divine engagement awaiting him in Shechem (Brown 1975:169; cf. Carson 1991:214).

Two dialogues are found in John 4:7-15 and the first is in John 4:7-10 with a parenthetical comment that his disciples went to the city to buy food in verse 8. The value of water to life cannot be overestimated. This woman and her neighbors needed it to survive. Of course, it was odd for her to go to the well alone, and at a strange time. Most women in that area used to come out to draw water in group and either early in the morning or when the sun had gone down. But her timing perfectly fits the plot.

Jesus’ partner to the discussion was the “Samaritan woman” (Jn 4:7). The word, “Samaritan(s),” is only used in verses 7, 9, 39, and 40. References in verses 39 and 40 are outside this work. The translation as “Samaritan” in verses 5 and 7 is explanatory but inadequate. The contention here is that not all the inhabitants of Samaria in Jesus’ time were of mixed blood especially if Gaster is right that remnant native Israelites and foreign colonists co-existed in

Samaria, but for “tendentious reasons ... the Jewish version ignores the former; the Samaritan version, the latter” (Gaster 1962:192).

The phrase, “Jews have no association with Samaritans,” in John 4:9 implies a lot. Brindle points out that the problem between the two groups began with the division of the kingdom of Israel, and continued through successive incidents which promoted antagonism, including the importation of foreign colonists into Samaria by Assyria, the rejection of the new Samaritan community by the Jews, the building of a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim, the political and religious opportunism of the Samaritans, and the destruction of both the Samaritan temple and their capital of Shechem by John Hyrcanus during the second century BCE (Brindle 1984:48; Köstenberger 2007:438).

The Samaritans’ acceptance of only the Pentateuch as Scripture further divided the two groups of people. Of course, the Samaritans claimed to be descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, and that their priesthood was through the tribe of Levi. “They prefer to call themselves ‘Shamerim’ - in Hebrew, guardians - for they contend that they have guarded the original Law of Moses, keeping it pure and unadulterated” (Mann 1977:77). They rejected that the Assyrian deportation polluted all of them and that only an insignificant number of their people were deported. It has even been argued that after the deportation, the Samaritans who intermarried and those that did not kept on living side by side (Gaster 1962:191).

The woman that featured in John 4:1-26 was a Samaritan. Samaritans were alleged to be products of mixed marriages between Jews and colonists deported to Samaria by Assyrians. When deported, the foreigners supposedly brought their various gods to Samaria through which they polluted the land by worshipping their gods in the sacred land (Cf. 2 Kings 17:29) and polluted the blood of the Jews they intermarried with in Samaria. This probably explains the initial hostility of the woman at the well to Jesus (Jn 4:8), so the compulsion for Jesus to pass through Samaria was to attend to a divine assignment (Jn 4:4).

Stories of three Samaritans come readily to mind in the Gospels: The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37); the Samaritan Leper (Lk 17:11-17); and the Samaritan Woman at the well (Jn 4:1-42). The first is simply a parable of good neighborliness, the second a receiver of and testifier to the miracle of healing

and the third, a recipient of the promise of “the living water.” The first two are male characters and are found in Luke, the last is a female and is only found in the Gospel of John (Ponessa and Manhardt 2005:39). Common to the three characters is anonymity which suggests that the interest of the stories is not in the persons but the teachings conveyed.

The encounter at the well with Jesus calls for particular attention. Hestenes (1990:4) notes the three liabilities against her to be membership of a minority race, guilt of immorality, and membership of an inferior gender. The cultural relationship between the Jews and Samaritans of Jesus’ time is described as “not ... having association (*ou ... sunchrōntai*) in John 4:9. *Sunchrōntai* is third person plural, present of *sunchraomai*. *Sunchrōntai* means to have social intercourse with, have dealings with, or associate on friendly terms with someone (Arndt and Gingrich 1957:783). The *ou* before it is negative particle, and when it combines with *sunchraomai* as does here, means that there is no cordial relationship. This is the sense of the NIV rendering, “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (Jn 4:9).

By asking the woman for “water ... to drink” Jesus broke certain social norms. Some of the customs of his day that he broke were that as a Jew he discussed with a Samaritan and that as a gentleman he discussed with a woman of questionable character. Again, contrary to the practice of the Jews of Southern Israel, Jesus asked for favor from a Samaritan, and he strangely requested to share water utensil with a Samaritan who was a supposed enemy. Edwin Blum (1983:285) comments on this thus, “A Jewish Rabbi would rather go thirsty than violate these proprieties.” Jesus’ actions were provocative and they reveal how far he went to incorporate the oppressed, the forgotten, and the socially prejudiced into God’s program. The other two positive stories of Samaritans in Luke 10: 25-37; and 17:11-17 could also be interpreted in this light.

This first round of dialogue centers on Jesus’ request for “water to drink” (Jn 4:7). Certainly, Jesus did not need to drink the water for throughout the narrative, he never drank it. Then the Samaritan woman repeated the request out of curiosity (Jn 4:9). John 4:10 links the first (Jn 4:7-10) on the temporal water with the second dialogue on the “living water” (Jn 4:11-26). Some scholars point out that the purpose of the first round of dialogue was to attract

the woman's attention to listen to the discussion that followed: the linking of the drinking water to the promise given to the woman.

The second dialogue in John 4:11-26 focuses on living water. This extends to verse 15. This is a metaphor and it is particularly significant because it only appears in the Fourth Gospel. Joubert (2007:87) observes that metaphor "works through a system of associated implications known from the secondary subject". It is therefore the responsibility of the reader or hearer of a metaphoric statement to select the characteristics of the secondary subject of the metaphor to apply to the primary subject of the metaphor.

The term, "living water," appears in verse 10 without article, and in verse 11 with article ("the living water"). In both verses the Greek phrase, *hudor zōē* (living water) is in accusative singular and the two expressions with or without article basically mean the same thing. This is similar to what the symbol of the "flowing water" that was in the Old Testament, a sign of God's special blessing for a pilgrim people (Is 41:18), a renewal of inner strength (Is 23:2-3), or an eschatological blessing (Zech 14:8-9). Vanhoozer (2002:1,6) is of the view that since the "living water" in Proverbs 13:14 is used for Torah in rabbinic Judaism, then in John 4, it represents the revelation or truth which Jesus gives, and that the Samaritan woman in John 4 received it and found life.

While Tenney (1961:481) suggests that the "living water" symbol in John 4 refers to Jesus, he may not be right because in John 4:10, Jesus speaks of "giving" and not "being" the living water. Joubert (2007:94), on the other hand, agrees that the living water figure in John represents the Holy Spirit. Of course, one cannot easily arrive at that conclusion from John 4 without the help of John 7. By this imagery, Jesus is presented in John as, "the true water-giving rock" (Bray 1996:68; cf. Ex 17:1-7; 1 Cor 10:4) to believers.

John 14:15-31 does not mention "living water" but the text shows that life-giving through teaching/counselling is a major work of the Holy Spirit after the Christ event. If one accedes that the phrase, "living water" in John 4 and 7 contains the same idea as "life giving water" or "water of life" especially in the light of Revelations 2:6 (cf. Keener 1993:272), then the role of the Holy Spirit in John 14 as life enhancing in relation to spiritual growth would be seen as



primary while other nuisances of the figure would be supplementary but important.

It has long been recognised by scholars that the Fourth Gospel contains tensions. One such is eschatological tension, between what has come and what is yet to come. For example, Turner, in working out the implication of this tension found in Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan's woman in John 4:23, on the hour "is coming," and the hour "now is," rejects whatever interpretation restricts Jesus' promise of the living water to the future. Turner's view is that since the promise appeared in the context of realised eschatology, the woman tasted the living water at the time, and one may add that she might not have had the filling of the water till after the resurrection (Turner 1977:10, 31).

Metaphors are supposed to aid understanding, but sometimes it does not illuminate understanding. The story of the Samaritan woman illustrates this problem (cf. Jn 4:11-12). The woman's initial misunderstanding of the metaphor could be excused because she a Samaritan who only held to the Pentateuch as Scripture (cf. Westcott 1908:149). Carson argues, interestingly, that the use of "understanding/misunderstanding" motif is a stylistic device in John (Carson 1982:90). More scholars now agree that John used misunderstanding/understanding literary device (Jn 4:10) to make implicit theological statements in a provocative manner. Phaniel (2008:27) is incisive,

John develops the use of misunderstanding, which he employs in some sentences. Misunderstanding occurs when a double sense or double meaning is derived. In [John] 2:19, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The audience misunderstands Jesus as referring to the Herodian Temple, when he is actually speaking of his body. "You must be born again" (Jn 3:3, 4) is misunderstood by Nicodemus to refer to a literal re-entrance into and re-emergence from his mother's womb. Jesus is speaking of the activity of the Spirit and the passivity of the sinner. In the encounter with the woman at the well of Samaria (Jn. 4:10, 11), Jesus says, "If you knew who it is who asks you, you would have asked and he would

have given you living water.” The adulterous woman replies, “But you have nothing with which to draw.”

We find allusion used whenever a character misunderstands the meaning of Jesus’ words, leading Jesus to communicate fuller and deeper truths about himself. Upon noting that it is a literary device, one must also recognise that it represents a historical reality. The most frequent sequence is an ambiguous statement by Jesus, a misunderstanding by the hearer, then clarification by either Jesus or the narrator. Jesus’ discourses on living water (Jn 4:10), food (Jn 4:32) and bread (Jn 6:33) furnish further excellent examples of these misunderstandings.

There are at least three effects of the misunderstanding/understanding motif upon the readers of John’s Gospel. First, it enlarges the gap between “insiders” and “outsiders.” The narrator makes the reader feel superior to the obviously less intelligent characters in the story. The misunderstandings cast judgmental shadows on those who ignorantly rejected Jesus, and these are the “outsiders.” This, in effect, nudges the reader into the privileged circle of those who understand the implications of Jesus’ words, the “insiders.” Second, this device allows John to clarify and expand theological truth. The final effect is that it teaches one how to read the Gospel by encouraging readers to recognise the two levels of language, and by warning that failure to understand identifies one with those foolish characters who did not rightly interpret Jesus’ words.

The background of Jesus’ reference to *omi iyè* (Gk: *hudōr zōntos*; Eng: “living water”) in John 7:38 was the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles. For seven days, a Priest drew water from the Pool of Siloam and brought it in procession to the Temple with the joyful sounds of trumpets. The water was then poured into a bowl beside the altar. It was probably on the eighth day that Jesus unfolded the significance of the symbolism of the water libation. According to Morris and Marcus, Jesus used the water libation at the Feast to symbolise the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 7:39) which is to be received by faith in Jesus (Jn 7:38; cf. Jn 4:10; 17:37; Morris 1971:421; Marcus 1998:328-329). This

bestowal of the Holy Spirit was dependent on the resurrection of Jesus that was still future at the time Jesus met the Samaritan woman.

The utterance of Jesus, “If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink, whoever believes in me just as the Scripture said, out of his belly will flow rivers of living water” in John 7:37b-38 is perplexing to exegetes. Balfour (1995:369-379), among other New Testament scholars, identifies the problem areas in the passage as the grammar, the quotation source, and the application of the text (cf. Hodges 1979:239-249). The grammatical problem centers on the punctuation of the verses. This is allegedly significant to determining the referent of “his” in the phrase “out of *his* belly.” United Bible Society Greek Bible places a period after “let him drink” and a comma after “in me” to read, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, just as the Scripture says, from within him will flow rivers of living water.” In this traditional or Eastern interpretation, *autou* refers to the believer from whom the living water flows out. It is a common Semitic Greek and is common in John (Burge 1987:88). Another is to place a comma after “to me” and a period after “in me” to read, “If anyone thirsts let him come to me and let him drink who believes in me. Just as the Scripture said, rivers of living water will flow from his belly.” The suggestion that this second punctuation gives rise a type of Hebraic parallelism (Balfour 1995: 369) has been rejected by Zane Hodges (1979:240) on the ground that the parallelism is not so exact. Gary Burge (1987:90) however appears more convincing “that Semitic parallelism does not require verbal exactitude but thematic precision.” The implications of the different readings resulting from the placements of the punctuations will be examined later.

The second problem is the source of the quotation introduced with the phrase, “just as the Scripture said.” Many scholarly discussions have led to the following opinions: that John 7:38 is not a direct quote from any particular Old Testament text (Constable n.d., online); that the ideas in the verse are paralleled in various Old Testament texts; and that Zechariah 14:8 is significant to the discussion (Balfour 1995:271-273). Some of the Old Testament references suggested as the sources for the quotation in 7:38 are Exodus 17:5–6; Numbers 20:7–11; Psalm 78:15–16; Proverbs 5:15; 18:4; Isaiah 12:3; 58:11; Zechariah 13:1; and Ezekiel 47:1-11 (Hodge 1979:243-245). While one may not agree with all the suggestions it is fair to conclude that for John, “the Scripture”

he refers to is a conflation of a whole range of texts and passages or could even be John's personal comment on Old Testament texts.

The third problem is whether the belly from where the rivers of the living water flow is that of Jesus or the Christian believer. The traditional punctuation of John 7:38 allows only for the latter meaning while the Western punctuation allows only for the former meaning. Building extensively on Isaiah 12:3, Marcus (1998:328-330) argues that the source of the rivers of the living water in this text is the belly of Jesus. This is the Christological interpretation. To Constable, the Christian believer is the source of the living water that flows out in the text (Constable n.d., online). Balfour (1995:374) exploits the concept of the presence of "double entendre" in John to conclude that neither of the two ideas is mutually exclusive to this text. Theology sometimes plays a vital role in resolving this issue. If the "rivers of the living water figure" in John 7:38 refers to the Holy Spirit, then nowhere else in John will the Spirit be said to be flowing from the believer to others. Rather, Jesus is the source of bestowing the Spirit to others (Jn 7:37b). If the radical but well-argued view of Gundry (2007:127-128) is correct that the living water flowing out from the belly in John 7:38 is urine then the believer is the source (cf. Ezek 7:17; Is 36:12). Hodges (1979:242-243) proffers two supports for the view that the source of the rivers in John 7:38 is the believer's belly: the traditional reading does not make the believer the source of the living water; it is improbable that Jesus will refer to himself in John 7:37b in the first person, and in John 7:38 in the third. The position of the present study is that Jesus is the bestowal of the living water, the Holy Spirit on the believer (Jn 7:37b), and that the gushing out of water from the belly (urine) of the believer is simply a figure of superabundant life for the believers themselves and not for others (Gundry 2007:128).

This "living water," according to John 7:39, is the Holy Spirit which is received by faith in Jesus (Jn 7:38). The importance of "faith" is brought out in the phrase: "He who believes in him" (Jn 7:37 cf. 4:10). This experience of endowing believers with the Holy Spirit is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus.

## Significance of the Intercultural Interpretation for Yorùbá Community Theology

Building on the commonality of the figure of “Living water” to both the initial recipients of the Gospel of John (Jn 4 and 7) and the Yorùbá community of Nigeria, one finds the figure in the two contexts enriching each other on the importance of the Holy Spirit to the Yorùbá community of faith. Then challenges based on the interpretation are suggested.

Generally, Yorùbá Traditional Religion holds in common with some other religions worldwide that either water possesses the power in itself or only mediates divine power to do the supernatural. For Yorùbá in particular, *iyè* (“living”) connotes dynamism or power. While to some non-Yorùbá, “living water” (*Omi-iyè*) refers to “flowing water,” to the Yorùbá, *omi-iyè* refers to “life giving water” or “the water that improves the quality life.” From this comes the belief that certain types of water have powered to heal, make fruitful, prosper, and protect from the evil one (Folarin, Oladosu and Baba 2012:15-36). For example, the water from Osun River in Nigeria is regarded by its worshippers as divinely empowered. In fact, the motto on the vehicle plate number of Osun State is, “The State of the Living Spring” (or “The State of *Omi-iyè*”). It is believed (rightly or wrongly) that the water of River Osun can make the barren fruitful and can heal the sick. The use of water for healing in Africa is neither limited to Nigeria nor to African Traditional Religion (ATR). Awolalu and Dopamu (1979), Adewale (1986), and Folarin (1995) among others, have demonstrated that indigenous churches in Africa also use *omi-iyè* for healing.

At this point, the observations of Ogungbile and Olupona on water symbolism among the Yorùbá are significant to the current research. While Ogungbile interprets the power attributed to River Osun as not actual but symbolic (Ogungbile 1997:21-38), it is Olupona who clearly re-interprets the power attributed to the water of *Okun* (Ocean) and *Osa* (Lagoon) metaphorically: The power of Ocean symbolises imperialism and mercantilism, and that of the Lagoon is symbolic of fertility (Olupona 2006:276). The people of the south-western part of Nigeria are of the view that symbolic use of *omi-iyè* points to things beyond themselves (Folarin, Oladosu and Baba 2012:19). In that sense, the request in John 4 and the invitation in John 7 are significant to the African Christianity if the use of *omi-iyè* is taken as symbolic.

The use of *omi-iyè* for healing in *Aládùrà* churches began with Sophia Odúnlámi who claimed that God told her to administer sanctified rain water for healing in the midst of an epidemic. Observers affirmed the effectiveness of her healing ministry. Years later, Joseph Babalolá made a similar claim by blessing water in rivers and containers which he allegedly administered effectively for healing on various occasions. These became *omi-iyè* (*omi tí ó ún fún ni ni iyè*: the water that gives one life [where there is deadness]) (Folarin 2017:19). But unlike in Traditional Religion, Indigenous Christian churches hold that the power to heal is only bestowed on the water by invoking Christ on it. That is the reason the water is also called, “blessed water.” By this, they affirm that the water by itself is impotent to do the miraculous. It only becomes *omi-iyè* (Life-giving water) as it becomes a carrier of divine presence. Adherents of indigenous churches do drink the *Omi-iyè*, bath with it, and spray their homes and shops with it to wave off sicknesses, diseases, spiritual attacks, and other forms of misfortune. They hold further that *omi-iyè* mediates other forms of prosperity. The above implies that *omi-iyè* works magically which would be at variance with what *omi-iyè* in the relevant texts in John mean.

*Omi-iyè* thus became characteristic of *Aládùrà* Christianity. When water in river, well, bucket or, bottle is blessed, members of *Aládùrà* churches claim that such becomes *omi-iyè* (“water of life”). *Omi-iyè* is used in the Christ Apostolic Church, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church and the Celestial Church of Christ. It is a popular belief among members of African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria that *omi-iyè* (“water of life”) is a conveyor of divine power/presence, and not a metaphor of the divinity (Folarin, Oladosu and Baba 2012:19-20).

Unlike in the “bread of life” (Jn 6:27) and the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12) sayings, Jesus did not call himself the given water but the giver of the water of life (Jn 4:10; cf. 7:37-39). The concept of the “living water” among the Yorùbá and the African Indigenous Churches in particular is both creative and aggressive: water bears the divine power to destroy the wicked and to redeem bad situations. This role of the Holy Spirit in healing and prosperity, for the African Indigenous Churches members, of course, does not replace its role in the application of the blessing salvation from sin. It presupposes it.

This may be what Jesus meant by the promise of abundant life. Particular context determines the use of “abundance” in the New Testament. The Greek

phrase, *zōēn echōsin kai perisson echōsin* translates, “Having life and having (it) abundantly” (Jn 10:10; cf. Arndt and Gingrich 1957:657). To the Yorùbá, as to other Africans, abundant life is holistic: a healthy life both spiritually and materially. To them the “water of life” is not only the bestowal of eternal life. It also involves the bestowal of other blessings of life.

Many exegetes agree with the writer of John 7:39 that the water promised by Jesus is the Holy Spirit. The main contention is this: In John 4 and 7, is water a symbol or a carrier of the power of God? We subscribe that living water in John symbolises the Holy Spirit. But as African Christians, we do not doubt that blessed water could be a bearer of the power of God. The one fact that is indisputable is that Jesus, being the giver of the living water, is the giver of the Holy Spirit and the power inherent in the Spirit. This power quickens the person that receives it. As sovereign Lord, Christ can dispense the Spirit directly or through the agency of water. “The living water” metaphor is therefore significant in John only as it relates the Holy Spirit with Jesus and the believer.

## **Contributions to knowledge**

This article advanced knowledge on the misconceptions surrounding the understanding of “the living water” concept in the Fourth Gospel and provided an alternative interpretation to it in the context of Yorùbá’s understanding of *omi-ìyè* in western Nigeria. It also shed light on the way the Indigenous Religious’ understanding of “water of life” enhances the appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life.

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## Review

### **The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Barnes, Philip W., Bazil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Mischeck Zulu (eds.), Maiden Publishing House, Lusaka: 2021, ISBN 9789966121448, 308pp.

*Review by Dr Ryan Faber<sup>1</sup>*

Twenty-four authors from eleven African countries representing every region in sub-Saharan Africa contributed to *The Abandoned Gospel*. Eleven of them hold doctoral degrees. All are Baptist; all but one are male. The volume, the inaugural publication of AB316, a task force of the Africa Baptist Theological Education Network ([www.abten.org](http://www.abten.org)) dedicated to protecting the integrity of the Gospel, “represents the beginning of a comprehensive and cooperative strategy to seek to protect the gospel and safeguard the Scriptures from false teachings across Africa” (Barnes et al. 2021:8). It is “the first phase of a multi-phase / multi-year education series that will address the dangers of Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel in Africa” (Barnes et al. 2021:9) - which contributors to this volume consider “poisonous pills” (Barnes et al. 2021:2), “the clearest and most present danger to the evangelical faith in Africa today” (5), “dangerous and damning lies” (Barnes et al. 2021:8), “the number one problem that causes many to stumble in Africa” (Barnes et al. 2021:50), “anti-gospel and anti-truth” (Barnes et al. 2021:285).

The volume’s first three chapters recount the history and development of Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel in Africa. Particular attention is given to the charismatic movements of the 1970s that produced independent churches led by self-styled apostles and prophets, as well as the influence of

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan Faber is a lecturer at Justo Mwale University, Lusaka, Zambia and a research fellow in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

foreign - mostly American - televangelists and faith preachers. In these chapters - and throughout the volume - the terms Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Neo-Pentecostal are often used synonymously. Though the writer acknowledges “classical Pentecostal churches” that were planted by North American Pentecostal missionaries in the 1930s (Barnes et al. 2021:15), prior to the rise of Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel in the 1970s, it is not clear whether these are including among those the volume considers poisonous pills.

The subsequent six chapters offer biblical responses to various aspects of Neo-Pentecostalism and prosperity teaching: spiritual powers; dreams and visions; illnesses, curses, and afflictions; speaking in tongues; prophecy; and miracles of healing and deliverance. Most of these chapters offer appropriate nuance. Can God speak through dreams and visions? Yes. But “God will never give guidance or a fresh revelation that stands in contrast to His eternal and authoritative Word” (Barnes et al. 2021:73). Can God work miracles? Absolutely. Indeed, the cry for miracles is “legitimate and biblically warranted” (Barnes et al. 2021:113). But “the display of God’s power in miracles of healing and deliverance is not normative in the Bible or in the Christian life” (Barnes et al. 2021:111). “What the Scripture offers us is not the promise of miracles but the promise of a Deliverer” (Barnes et al. 2021:112). Its hope is not for this life but for the life to come.

Are their demonic powers? Yes. But are they primarily responsible for human suffering and poverty? No. One contributor wisely notes: “How we understand the source of our illnesses and afflictions will inform the way in which we seek to remove the curses” (Barnes et al. 2021:79). “The problem with our cultural view [reflected in Neo-Pentecostalism] that our illnesses and afflictions are caused more immediately by angered spirits is that it undermines our capacity to seek solutions that are based on knowledge.” (Barnes et al. 2021:82) “Scripture leaves us the responsibility and freedom to address problems with multiple causes in mind” (Barnes et al. 2021:59).

The final fifteen chapters provide positive instructions for the church including, inter alia, engaging in holistic gospel ministry, establishing Scripture as the final authority, insisting on viable hermeneutics, emphasising the Christ of

Scripture, emphasising the sin nature, presenting salvation as reconciliation, instilling an evangelical DNA in the church, and developing balanced leaders.

A consistent theme in these chapters - and the entire volume - is the affinity of Neo-Pentecostalism, the prosperity gospel, and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Contributors claim that the “Neo-Pentecostal movement has opened a significant door at the back of the church and has let in the African traditional religions” (Barnes et al. 2021:45). “Neo-Pentecostalism is a new form of African Traditional Religion” (Barnes et al. 2021:258). The church is partly to blame: Lack of critical contextualisation “the primary factor” that has led to the embrace of Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel (Barnes et al. 2021:153). For too long, “missionaries and pastors have presented a truncated gospel” (Barnes et al. 2021:119). “As a result, Africans have unanswered questions and unmet needs that have readily been answered by Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel” (Barnes et al. 2021:162).

The church needs to embrace a “holistic gospel message,” “the conviction that Jesus Christ not only redeems souls but will also redeem the entire created order.” This is “the spiritual antidote to the Neo-Pentecostal contagion” (Barnes et al. 2021:120). Only holistic ministry - gospel proclamation and gospel demonstration - will “engage a key component of the ATR worldview upon which Neo-Pentecostalism thrives” (Barnes et al. 2021:126). The book’s positive encouragement for gospel ministry is its strength. There is much to appreciate, much from which one can learn, here.

The volume ends with a “historical comparison between pre-Reformation Europe and modern day Africa.” The writers conclude that “these are dark days for the church in Africa” (Barnes et al. 2021:285). “The situation of the church in Africa today requires a reformation” (Barnes et al. 2021:286). To accomplish this, the church must know and stand firm in the gospel, proclaim the gospel faithfully, and live a life worthy of the gospel.

*The Abandoned Gospel* is clearly written for an evangelical audience. Its authors hope that “evangelical theological institutions ... will take heed of the warnings in this book and will seek to prepare their students to confront and reject false teachings” (5). They also “pray that pastors will benefit from this book as they seek to shepherd the men and women God has given them”

(Barnes et al. 2021:6). The book offers clear biblical criticism of Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel teachings. It also provides constructive advice for the church's life and ministry. Its intended audience - the already convinced - will likely find it a helpful.

But the book is not without its weaknesses. It lacks a clear, concise, and consistent definition of Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. Authors fail to distinguish between classical Pentecostal churches and Neo-Pentecostal churches. Some authors appear to be addressing the influence of Neo-Pentecostal doctrine and practice within Baptist churches; for others, Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel seem to be external threats.

Many of its allegations about Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel are unsubstantiated. This lack of evidence and failure to engage directly with Neo-Pentecostal sources suggests that the book is attacking a "straw man." Though they would certainly disagree with the book's conclusions, would Neo-Pentecostals and prosperity preachers think that they are represented fairly in this volume? This reviewer is skeptical.

But perhaps most seriously, the volume does not explain, defend, or justify some of its harshest statements about Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. Nowhere does the volume explain exactly how "Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel ... are deadly to the life of individuals and churches, slanderous to the purity of Christ's bride, and dishonouring to our Creator God and Christ" (Barnes et al. 2021:2), nor how "the prevailing perspectives of Neo-Pentecostalism ... have not only failed the church, but ... have also damaged the image of the church, put to death the church's missional responsibility, destroyed spirituality in the church, and made the church a stench to the perishing world" (Barnes et al. 2021:209).

Such serious allegations should be made neither lightly nor without explanation. The already convinced may appreciate this book. It may strengthen the walls of Zion, but with its harsh tone and condemning statements will it win hearts and change minds. I don't think so. But isn't that what the reformation that this volume seeks requires?

Potgieter A 2022, Review of *Signs, Wonders, and Gifts – divination in the Letters of Paul* by Jennifer Eyl, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 162-164

## Review

### **Signs, Wonders, and Gifts – divination in the Letters of Paul**

Jennifer Eyl, Oxford University Press , Oxford: 2019, ISBN 9780190924652, 272 pp

Review by Dr Annette Potgieter<sup>1</sup>

Our interpretation of Paul is often diluted through the lens of tradition, estranging us from the real Paul. The ancients lived in a world which they believed was filled with powers and forces that have an effect on people and vice versa, a world in which gods speak to humans, a world that modern interpreters often ignore. Modernistic and rational thinking routinely deny such categories as mere impossibilities or at very least highly improbable. However, the importation of such beliefs into Pauline exegesis is highly problematic; reading Paul amidst his original context should be the endeavour of any theologian who would like to work responsibly with the text. It is against this backdrop that Jennifer Eyl makes a monumental contribution in shedding light on divinatory and wonderworking practices in Paul's letters that have been neglected in Pauline studies but are starting to be excavated now by a new generation of scholars.

Without taking anything away from the Paul we have come to know as a prolific proponent of the gospel and proclaiming Christ, Jennifer Eyl invites an alternative perspective on Paul, a perspective that is substantiated with a rich expertise in classical texts and comparisons with practices in the Roman Empire. She explores how Paul was very much operating as another religious figure within the Roman Empire. Again, it should be underscored that in no way does Eyl paint a ridiculous picture of Paul. Paul is no charlatan, swindler or televangelist trying to profit. Rather, Paul is presented within his historical milieu with textual evidence indicating Paul's repackaging of practices which would have been immediately understood by the original intended audiences. Eyl coherently and cogently indicates that these practices were vital to Paul

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<sup>1</sup> Annette Potgieter is a lecturer at Huguenote Kollege, Wellington, South Africa



even if they were not the principal focus of his letters, shedding a much-needed light on Paul as a diviner and wonderworker. Paul is redescribed within the world he lived and Eyl succinctly takes the reader on a journey to rediscover Paul as a product of his world.

Eyl (2019:1) boldly starts with two statements, firstly, that Paul “engaged in numerous forms of divination and claimed to possess divine powers” and secondly that “Paul’s divinatory practices are best understood within a framework of reciprocity that dominated human-divine relations in the ancient Mediterranean.” Throughout the book, she convincingly explains both assumptions by drawing from related ancient literature and examining Pauline literature unpacking assumptions that obstruct us from understanding Paul in a first-century context. She points out how our notion of Paul as unique eschews our understanding of him. Again, the traditions that Luther and Calvin left us are not being denied per se, but rather she provides a sound look at the interpretative problems such categories and modes have caused. She provides an alternative taxonomy, opting to define Paul in his historical milieu.

Paul is situated within the realm of widespread divinatory practices found in the Roman Empire. Her examples of the gods exerting themselves into the human world are compelling. A clear picture is painted of gods taking over the speech of humans, appearing in dreams and effecting internal organs of animals or directing their behaviour (Eyl 2019:84). Moreover, it also becomes clear that for Paul, it is only his God that matters.

Paul introduces himself to his audiences as someone who has divine authority. This is seen in particularly three ways: firstly, he professes having visual encounters (including trips to a third heaven on four occasions), secondly, he describes himself as “called” and “sent” by a god and finally Paul often states that he has access to secrets and mysteries (Eyl 2019:144). Paul does not only use these practices, but he also undertakes to enlighten his followers how to understand their gifts and wonderworking practices. A major contribution occurs in the manner reciprocity is understood. Eyl points out the danger of reductionist understandings of ancient religion (the term is already anachronistic) as well as reciprocity. It is a faux pas to think that pistis as “faith” developed only from a Christian perspective and moreover that reciprocity only entails a tit-for-tat system. Such ideas obscure the nuances and rich

complexity of relationships between humans and gods. To not read Paul's understanding of pneumatic gifts within a context of reciprocity, is to again, extricate Paul from his original milieu and anachronistically cast Paul into a meaning-structure that was not originally intended.

From an African perspective, *Signs, Wonders, and Gifts* – divination in the Letters of Paul is a must read. For the African context, the idea of divinatory practices is not as foreign as perhaps for interpreters in Western countries. However, the book invites serious consideration of Paul's historical milieu, and thus aiding in combatting anachronism and provides a valuable research tool – especially for African scholars wanting to work from a different perspective. The only negative is that the hardcover version is prohibitively expensive for many scholars in the African context; this being said, it is worth the buy and should be in all African libraries.



The African Theological Journal for Church and Society (ATJCS) is a scholarly journal publishing in any applicable theological discipline, focussing on the church and its role in societies within the African context.

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